

BUFFALO STATE UNIVERSITY

DIRECTORY OF POLICY STATEMENTS

Policy Number: I:22:00

Date: March 2026

Subject: Awarding of Posthumous Degrees

Policy Summary

This policy establishes the criteria and process for awarding degrees posthumously at Buffalo State University. In fall 2023, Governor Hochul signed legislation codifying “Mel’s Law.” Chapter 549 of the Laws of 2023 directs SUNY and CUNY to establish a policy for the awarding of posthumous degrees to enrolled matriculated students whose death occurs prior to graduation. On December 5, 2023, the SUNY Board of Trustees authorized the Chancellor to establish policy and/or procedure governing the awarding of posthumous degrees across SUNY campuses

The guidelines of the policy comply with the guidelines in the *Memorandum to Presidents* of July 18, 2025 (“Policy and Guidance: Posthumous Degrees”).

Policy

Policy Statement

In accordance with SUNY guidelines and NY State Law, Buffalo State has established the following criteria and guidelines for awarding posthumous degrees.

- A family member, survivor, or legal representative of the student must request the award of a posthumous degree. A campus representative may initiate the request, in which case the campus must obtain consent from a family member, survivor, or legal representative.
- The campus will verify the student’s death.
- The student must have been in good academic and conduct standing at the time of their death, with consideration given to any extenuating circumstances related to their passing that may have impacted their standing.
- An undergraduate student should have earned a minimum of 60 credits toward the degree, and a graduate student should have completed at least half of the degree requirements, as determined by the faculty or in collaboration with associate deans.
- No restrictive criteria for consideration to award or process a posthumous degree will be considered, including requiring the request be submitted within a certain time-period.
- Latin honors may be awarded with a posthumous degree.
- The diploma will be issued in the standard format at no charge to the family.
- The transcript will be issued such that the award will not be counted in campus reporting to SUNY or external agencies (e.g., IPEDS), and at no charge to the family.

- The campus President, or Provost as designee, may approve exceptions to cases that do not meet the above criteria

Procedure

To initiate the process, a request from a family member, survivor, or the student's legal representative is forwarded to the deceased student's Academic Department Chairperson. In such circumstances, the Academic Department Chairperson will review the policy guidelines and the request, consult with the appropriate department faculty, and forward a recommendation to the Dean. The Dean will review the policy guidelines and request and establish that the deceased student was in good academic and conduct standing at the time of their death, and will forward a recommendation to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the President for their approval. If approved, Buffalo State University will confer a degree as described below.

After a request for degree is approved, an appropriate person will contact the deceased student's family and confirm their attendance at the commencement ceremony with the student's expected class (if feasible). The commencement program and diploma will note that the degree was awarded posthumously. Special seating at the ceremony will be arranged for the family through the President's Office, and a department representative will escort the family representative to the stage to accept the degree. The President's Office will instruct the Registrar to order the appropriate diploma. The academic record will be marked "Degree conferred posthumously." If requested, a copy of the academic record will be released to an attorney representing the estate of the deceased student or the parents of the student.

Applicability

This policy applies to all posthumous degree requests.

Background

Posthumous degrees are ceremonial and can serve an important symbolic purpose for grieving family members. According to SUNY guidelines, such degrees are not reported in the annual submission to IPEDS, there is no impact on institutional accreditation, the New York State Education Department has no regulation that would govern policy development, and there is no impact on a deceased student's financial aid obligations.

Although the awarding of a posthumous degree is not primarily a matter of academic integrity of the degree, criteria are necessary, in part because posthumous degrees should be awarded only to those for whom there was a significant affiliation with Buffalo State University.

Administrative Responsibility

The President and Vice President of Academic Affairs; the Dean and the Chairperson of the deceased student's academic program.

Development and Review

Buffalo State Senate Instruction and Research Committee
Buffalo State Senate Standards for Students Committee