



Weill Cornell Medical College and Graduate School of Medical Sciences

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Rosemary J. Avery
Weiss Presidential Fellow
Professor and Chairman
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Subject: Weill Cornell Medical College Proposal on Honorary Degrees.

Dear Rosemary and Fred:

We are writing to express our strong support for the implementation of an honorary degree at Cornell University on behalf of its Medical College. Such a *honoris causa ad gradum* would enable us to recognize outstanding intellectual achievements, creative accomplishments, and leadership in education, public service, medical ethics, or other appropriate sectors of society, both nationally and internationally. We view this goal as consonant with the fundamental mission of the University.

An honorary degree would enable Cornell University to recognize excellence and achievement. Judiciously structured, it would provide an opportunity to convey our values to current and prospective students, the academic community, and the general public by honoring those whose exceptional work exemplifies our ideals. This would primarily pertain to physicians and scientists who have made exceptional contributions in education, research, or patient care, reflecting the Medical College's tripartite mission, as well as on a selective basis to a broader constituency who have shown extraordinary support for the biomedical sciences. Each nominee would be subject to the same rigorous selection criteria. The broadly structured

Selection Committee, which is described in detail below, will ensure that the honorary degree is awarded prudently and adheres to the highest standards.

In addition to the many activities that Cornell University undertakes to bring it closer to the local community, awarding honorary degrees would further demonstrate that we are not “perched” on an ivory tower. Bestowing this title on individuals who have made, for example, outstanding achievements in public health or medical ethics would show the public that our University recognizes valuable intellectual and creative achievements outside of academia. The University would derive benefits by association with the person who is awarded an honorary degree, thereby enhancing our ability to build strong ties with eminent scholars and leaders in the field. An honorary degree would also benefit the other colleges of the University by bringing attention to Cornell and its association with individuals who have made remarkable contributions to science. Recipients often establish a bond with the university, return to give lectures, counsel students on careers, and open doors for graduates. The recognition that an honorary degree gives to extraordinary achievements will be an inspiration to our students and faculty alike.

We are mindful of the long-standing tradition at Cornell University to not award any such degrees. The faculty of the Medical College respectfully requests that Cornell University make an exception to its existing policy and establish an honorary degree on behalf of its Medical College unit. Many of our peer institutions do award honorary degrees – the University of Cambridge has awarded honorary degrees for over 500 years – while some others do not: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and Rockefeller University have elected to award honorary degrees; MIT and Stanford University have elected to not do so. This does not imply that this is a good or bad practice, but rather reflects a choice that each institution has to make. Although long-held practices can act as a reference point for such decisions, they should not lead to the automatic exclusion of options, which would be counter to the open-mindedness Cornell University promotes.

We believe an exception to Cornell’s existing policy is warranted for the following reason. The field of biomedical sciences has undergone rapid development and has come to occupy a distinct position in academia and society. Through visionary leadership and individual scientific achievement, this discipline has been propelled forward in recent decades, resulting in great advances in our fundamental understanding of biological function and in novel applications for clinical care. Therefore, biomedicine and its impact on modern society provides a particularly fertile field of significant and notable achievements, worthy of special recognition.

This honorary degree should be awarded on a selective basis. The nominee's specific achievement or contribution to society as it relates to medicine should be the fundamental consideration, and these should be evaluated on current merits or past achievements. The University should be careful that the awarding of a degree not be politically motivated or appear to be so. Specifically, eligibility for selection would depend on meeting all of the three criteria listed below; namely, the candidate should:

- have merited special recognition for extraordinary achievement and distinction in the biomedical sciences;
- have displayed eminence in the course of a career in a field of scholarship, public service, or other appropriate endeavors; and,
- have made extraordinary achievements that are aligned with the mission of the Medical College.

Additional selection criteria we propose are the following:

- Elected or appointed officials in the State of New York shall not be eligible during their terms of office.
- Faculty, staff, or administrators currently in service of Cornell University shall not be eligible.
- Former staff of Cornell University shall be subject to the same nomination procedures and selection criteria as other nominees.
- Honorary degrees shall not be awarded posthumously.
- Except under special circumstances, the number of awardees per year shall be limited to three (3).

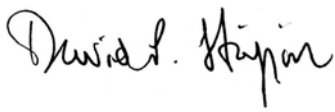
Strong assurances are needed to guarantee the integrity of the selection process. Therefore, we propose that the following procedures are followed:

- Candidates can be nominated to a Selection Committee, comprising the following members:
 - The President of Cornell University.
 - The Dean of Weill Cornell Medical College (chair).
 - The Executive Vice Provost of the Medical College.
 - Five (5) tenured full professors of the Medical College.
 - Two (2) tenured full professors on the Ithaca campus.
 - One (1) alumnus of the Medical College.
 - One (1) member of the Board of Overseers of the Medical College.
 - The medical student representative to the Board of Overseers of the Medical College.
- Cornell University's Nominations and Elections Committee will select the Ithaca faculty members to serve on the Selection Committee; the Medical College's Executive Faculty Council will select the Medical College faculty to serve on the Selection Committee; and, the NewYork Weill Cornell Medical Center Alumni Council will select the alumnus to serve on the Selection Committee.
- The faculty and members of the Boards of Trustees and Overseers are authorized to nominate candidates. Nominations will be made to the chair of the Selection Committee.
- A simple majority vote is required to confirm or reject a nominee.
- The honorary degree will be awarded during the Medical College's convocation and graduation ceremonies.
- There will be no fees or honoraria associated with the honorary degree.
- As a condition for receiving the honorary degree, awardees must be present at the award ceremonies.

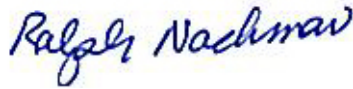
Like the two thousand year old Hippocratic Oath, Cornell University is steeped in tradition, which we fully understand; however, as the Hippocratic Oath has been modified to reflect new challenges in modern healthcare, we believe that the awarding of an honorary degree is a logical progression in the changing, dynamic world of the biomedical sciences.

In essence, to be able to present to our diverse constituencies venerable models worthy of recognition and emulation, the faculty of the Medical College recommends that Cornell University award an honorary doctorate of medical sciences. In light of the considerations presented here, we hope that you agree that an honorary degree would be beneficial to Cornell University and its Medical College, and that it merits the consideration of the Cornell Faculty Senate.

Sincerely,



David P. Hajjar, Ph.D.
Executive Vice Provost
and Dean



Ralph L. Nachman, M.D.
University Professor



Jack D. Barchas, M.D.
Chair, Dept. of Psychiatry

cc. Antonio M. Gotto, Jr., M.D.
Charles Walcott, Ph.D.