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Lehigh University may revoke Trump's honorary degree; LU will not

by JOSH MOODY

President Donald Trump used to have five honorary degrees, but that number may shrink to three following Monday's faculty vote at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania to revoke the honorary degree it gave Trump.

Faculty voted this week to request Lehigh's Board of Trustees rescind the degree it awarded Trump in 1988, leaving Trump with two honorary degrees from Liberty University and one from Wagner College in New York.

Another honorary degree bestowed on Trump — from Robert Gordon University in Scotland — was rescinded in 2015, during Trump's presidential campaign.

According to numbers provided by Doug Mahony — a Lehigh professor and chair of the Faculty Steering Committee — 296 out of 472 faculty members voted to revoke Trump's honorary degree.

The vote was conducted online Monday, and the results were revealed Tuesday.

Following the faculty vote for revocation, the decision now is up to Lehigh's board.

"It will be up to them to determine when and how they wish to proceed," Mahony said.

Following the vote, he did not have a date for when the board might consider the motion.

For Lehigh's Board of Trustees, this is the second time it has been asked to rescind Trump's award. In October, the board decided not to act on a petition from alumna Kelly McCoy urging them to revoke Trump's honorary degree.

A faculty motion that led to the vote this week accuses Trump of falling short of Lehigh's personal conduct policies. Included in the motion is a three-page list of statements made by Trump that demean immigrants, women and political protesters and range from his time as a private citizen to a politician.

"In his own words, statements made by President Trump do not meet Lehigh's standards for respectful discourse where differences of opinion exist. If a member of Lehigh's on-campus community made one of these statements, he/she would be subject to disciplinary action; taken in their entirety, he/she would be at risk of dismissal," part of the faculty motion posted online reads.

"They felt there were a number of statements — and they provided some examples of those — where the president did not live up to those principles," Mahony said of the faculty motion.

As chair of the Faculty Steering Committee, Mahony oversees voting on all motions and policy changes. Because of that role, Mahony declined to say how he voted on the proposed revocation.

"Not that I'm not proud of the way I voted, [but] given my role, I need to maintain a neutral stance for the faculty. I don't want to be perceived by anyone on campus as having a particular viewpoint that may cause them concern, whether they want to bring something forward or not," Mahony said.

In 2015, Lehigh revoked an honorary degree awarded to Bill Cosby in 1987. Lehigh was one of more than a dozen schools to revoke awards to Cosby following numerous sexual assault allegations.

While Lehigh may be reconsidering Trump's honorary degree, Liberty University is not.

Trump was awarded an honorary business degree from Liberty in 2012 and an honorary law degree in 2017.

"We're proud to have bestowed those honors," LU President Jerry Falwell Jr. said Tuesday.

Discussing the Lehigh motion, Falwell chided the faculty members for their vote.

"It's so childish, in my opinion, for professors at a university to be so partisan that they would revoke, or ask their board to revoke, a degree the board bestowed in the past," Falwell said.

He added he expects the board to "be the adults in the room" and not give in to "shenanigans."

Falwell also said such a move by Lehigh could prompt backlash from prospective students.

Mahony said while faculty discussed potential backlash, student recruiting was not a concern.

If Lehigh's Board of Trustees does revoke Trump's honorary degree, it won't be the first to do so.

In 2015, while running for president, Trump's honorary degree from Robert Gordon University was rescinded. The Scottish school awarded Trump an honorary degree in 2010 in recognition of his entrepreneurship but stripped the honor due to Trump's campaign trail comments about Muslims.

The decision to bestow an honorary degree on Trump was controversial at the time because of a luxury golf resort development in Scotland Trump was building that locals claimed was destroying the natural habitat.

The resort at the heart of the protest opened in 2012 as Trump International Golf Links Scotland.

Wagner College bestowed an honorary degree on Trump in 2004. Last year, 33 faculty members at the school denounced Trump in an advertisement in the Staten Island Advance. A spokesperson for the college previously told Inside Higher Ed its Board of Trustees considered revoking the degree but did not take action on it. The college did not respond to an inquiry last week for more information.