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This university gave Trump and Bill Cosby honorary degrees. The faculty have deep regrets.

By CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.

On a summer day in 1988, a black helicopter with the word “Trump” on the side touched down on a baseball field at Lehigh University.

Soon after, Donald Trump joined a vaunted fraternity that includes Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, writer William Buckley and poet Maya Angelou — all holders of honorary degrees from the university.

Thirty years later, Lehigh faculty have an overwhelming message for its leaders: Take President Trump’s degree back.

Nearly two-thirds of the university’s faculty members on Tuesday approved a motion to revoke the president’s honorary degree, saying statements he has made are “inconsistent with the character and high standards expected of honorees.”

The motion will be presented to the university’s board of trustees, which has the final say on whether Trump gets to keep the degree, university officials said. It’s unclear when it will take up the issue.

“Though the faculty motion has not yet been formally submitted to the Trustees, Lehigh University affirms the right of community members to express their views, as free inquiry and expression are essential to a thriving academic community,” Lori Friedman, a spokeswoman for the university said in a statement emailed to The Washington Post.

The only other person in recent memory to have an honorary degree stripped by Lehigh is Bill Cosby.

People connected to Lehigh have been trying to get Trump’s honorary degree revoked since 2016.

A few days before Trump was inaugurated, a petition signed by students, staff and alumni called for the university to revoke his degree. And after Trump’s response to the deadly protest involving white supremacists and KKK members in Charlottesville, a recent Lehigh graduate named Kelly McCoy started a Change.org petition, according to the Morning Call, an Allentown, Pa., newspaper. The online petition has garnered more than 31,000 signatures.

Both were denied by the trustees.

But this most recent motion is the first to come from faculty members, professor Douglas Mahony, chair of the faculty steering committee, told The Post.

“This motion is a motion from the faculty, speaking directly to the board of trustees,” he told The Post. “In that sense it provides to the board a very clear picture of how the faculty feel about Donald Trump’s statements in light of our own values in our own community.”

Mahony said the move wasn’t in opposition to Trump’s politics, but that its authors singled out the crass way he has spoken about minorities, Muslims, women and other groups.

“We agree and fully support as a faculty the right to express ideas, but we also agree that we’ll communicate with each other in a way that’s consistent with a set of principles,” Mahony said.

The bulk of the motion is what the authors described as a “non-exhaustive list ... of racist, sexist and disrespectful remarks made by President Trump.”

It includes derogatory comments Trump made about the home countries of Africans and Haitians, crass remarks about how it’s “very hard” for a flat-chested woman “to be a 10” and a recounting of the time Trump visibly mocked a disabled reporter.

If Trump loses his honorary degree from Lehigh, he would become a member of another club.

The university said that conduct described by Bill Cosby in a 2005 affidavit was “antithetical to the values of Lehigh University,” according to the Morning Call. In the affidavit, Cosby, who received his honorary degree a year before Trump, admitted to having extramarital affairs with women — some of whom accused him of sexual assault.

Trump has been awarded a total of five honorary degrees and stripped of one, according to the Denver Post. He has two honorary degrees from Liberty University (2012, 2017) and one from Wagner College (2004).

In 2015, Scotland’s Robert Gordon University stripped Trump of the honorary doctor of business administration degree he had been granted five years earlier, according to Time magazine. The revocation came days after Trump called for a complete ban on Muslims coming into the United States. In a statement, the university said Trump’s statements during the campaign were “incompatible with the ethos and values of the university.”

Trump got his honorary degree from Lehigh on the day he served as commencement speaker. He had been chosen by the student body, according to the Morning Call.

During his speech he spoke of the dangers of the AIDS virus and the threat of foreign competition, according to the Morning Call.

On that day, he encouraged the student body to get angry enough about America’s problems to do something, especially when it came to how the nation deals with its foreign competitors.

“Countrywide, we have serious problems,” Trump said. “So many countries are whipping America ... making billions and stripping the United States of economic dignity. I respect the Japanese, but we have to fight back.”