



# The Daily Free Press

The Independent Student Newspaper at Boston University

 MENU



## CAMPUS, NEWS

# Boston University instates policy to issue degrees to students after death, starting this Fall

August 12, 2020 12:48 pm

by [Angela Yang](#)

**Boston University**

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## Award of Posthumous Degrees by Boston University

*Effective Fall 2020*

Students who die while attending Boston University will be able to undergo an official process to obtain a posthumous degree, starting this Fall. The University released the [policy](#) June 12, but did not make an announcement or notify the BU community otherwise.

BU spokesperson Colin Riley said the release of these guidelines is not related to the pandemic.

Meetings regarding creation of the policy extend back to January of this year, according to Riley. The University has issued

posthumous degrees before, but did not institute an official policy until this summer.

“There were proposals to formalize this, sadly, when a student passes away, particularly if they’ve been here years,” Riley said. “It’s unfortunate timing. People may misconstrue.”

While the discussion has been ongoing since before the coronavirus upended campus life, the process was lengthy and deliberative until it produced an official result in June. This specific policy for posthumous degrees was proposed in 2013, Riley said.

To be eligible for a degree after death, a student must have been in good academic standing and within one semester of completing their coursework. The criteria also states students must have been “likely” to pass their courses with “acceptable” grades, as well as been likely to have fulfilled any other non-academic requirements within one more term.

Graduate students must have completed all academic requirements other than their thesis or dissertation, which, however, must be “near completion.”

“The student’s committee must have determined the scholarship to be substantial work and worthy of the degree,” the policy stated. The same goes for creative products required for a degree from a graduate program.

For students who die before their final semester at BU, or do not meet the other criteria for a posthumous degree, a Certificate of Academic Achievement may be issued instead as long as the student “made some progress” toward a degree or “achieved particular distinction” during their time at the University.

The student’s academic program will initiate requests for all posthumous degrees and Certificates of Academic Achievement, and the dean of that student’s school should support the request.

The provost of the University is the final administrator to approve the request for a Certificate, but for a posthumous degree, approval must also be granted by the president.

The request will then be passed it on to the University Registrar, who will ultimately produce the certificate or degree. Requests for either must be made within two calendar years of the student’s death.

Associate linguistics professor Charles Chang is on the Faculty Council that discussed the policy. He said its creation and approval was motivated partly by the death of BU student **Erin Edwards** and partly by the implementation of similar policies at other universities.

Edwards, who died a rising junior, does not qualify for a posthumous degree under the policy because she was not in her last semester of coursework. But Chang said he believes her example provided reasoning to the Council that such a policy was useful.

“I don’t think that that case was being discussed as the target of a posthumous degree,” Chang said. “I basically think that that

was being brought up as a way of making it real for the people in the room that this was a policy that might actually be used.”

At the time of the discussions in March, after the first draft of the policy was sent to the Faculty Council, Chang said the group did not anticipate the policy playing into the effects of COVID-19. He said the pandemic — which was just beginning to pick up in the U.S. that month — did not factor into its approval.

“There was a lot of media coverage about basically, it’s only older people who are really dying,” Chang said, “or younger people were maybe getting sick but not dying, and then that all changed as time went on.”

He said the timing of its finalization, however, was “very unfortunate,” and that he suspects this to be a possible reason the University did not announce the policy upon release.

“This is just me speculating,” Chang said, “but maybe that is because they were worried about what it would look like.”



**Author: Angela Yang**

## 6 Comments



**Jacob Perry**

August 12, 2020 at 1:28 pm

This policy has been in effect since June, you knew what you were doing when you wrote this article so I will say it bluntly. STOP. FEARMONGERING. This has NOTHING to do with the pandemic but because you put up this article you’re making people put on their tin foil hats.



**Daily Free Press Admin**

August 12, 2020 at 2:12 pm

Hi Jacob,

We understand where the fearmongering concerns are coming from. Our article provides all the context we know for

sure and will continue to be updated, so please be assured the purpose of our reporting is not to induce fear. Our original tweet, however, was sent at a time when we did not know the information we have now, and the lack of context there enabled students to make assumptions. We regret not having provided more nuance in that tweet, and have since clarified the information on Twitter.

Best,

Angela Yang

Editor-in-Chief



**Bob Lighter**

August 12, 2020 at 3:40 pm

This is straight-up bad journalism. Pure sensationalism. Your goal: web traffic/retweets > Telling the full story.



**Anna**

August 13, 2020 at 6:49 pm

If readers can't make it past a headline and consequently misconstrue the story, the blame is entirely theirs. A headline isn't meant to provide context. Getting that context is the reader's job, and in this case, one need only make it to the third sentence.

As for the timing, BU only released this information recently. It is a journalist's responsibility to report the news while it is still NEWS, and not when the timing is better from a PR perspective.



**chris**

August 12, 2020 at 3:53 pm

More value from "higher" education. Does the saying "worth more dead than alive" ring more or less true?

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**Karen Hart**

August 12, 2020 at 9:32 pm

This is fearmongering, probably CIA prompted, against Boston University for daring to continue teaching. Director Haspel does not approve.

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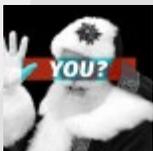
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