Honorary Degree Recipients

The first honorary degree was conferred in 1877. Following is a list of those receiving honorary degrees, starting with the year they received the degree, followed by their name and the honorary degree they received. In some cases a notation is included about the individual if that information is available.

1877: Isaac R. Roberts, Master of Agriculture. Farm Superintendent at Iowa State University.


1879: James L. Geddes, Master of Philosophy. Distinguished career in the British and Union Armies; first professor of military tactics at Iowa State.

1887: A. A. Bennett, Master of Science.

1887: Luther Foster, Master of Agriculture. B.S., 1872, Iowa State.

1887: M. Stalker, Master of Science. B.S., 1879, Iowa State; bridge engineer which was the first advanced degree from Iowa State.

1887: Luther Foster, Master of Science. B.S., 1872, Iowa State; first editor Aurora, the student newspaper; developed the curriculum in Veterinary Science.

1887: E. W. Stanton, Master of Science. B.S., 1872, Iowa State in the first graduating class; Acting President of Iowa State four times.

1890: Charles Keffer, Master of Agriculture. Received another honorary degree in 1914. Only two people in Iowa State history have received two honorary degrees.

1895: Mattie Locke Macomber, Master of Philosophy. B.S., 1872, Iowa State in the first graduating class.

1897: James W. Wilson, Master of Agriculture. B.S., 1896, Iowa State; became U.S. Secretary of Agriculture; was the first of four Iowa State graduates to serve as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture.

1903: Robert B. Armstrong, Master of Philosophy.

1903: W. T. Homaday, Master of Philosophy. World-famed naturalist and zoologist.

1907: J. C. Blair, Master of Agriculture.

1907: I. B. Schreckengast, Master of Philosophy.

1908: Virginia Corbett, Master of Philosophy. B.S., 1893, Iowa State; Dean of Women at Colorado State at Fort Collins.


1909: James W. Robertson, Doctor of Science.

1914: Charles Keffner, Doctor of Science.

1914: George L. McKay, Doctor of Science. Recognized for his work in dairying.

1914: James Wilson, Doctor of Science.

1915: Marion Dorset, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

1915: LaVerne Noyes, Doctor of Engineering. B.S., 1872, Iowa State in the first graduating class.


1916: Herbert Osborn, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1879, Iowa State; helped organize the Iowa Academy of Science.

1916: Willis Whited, Doctor of Engineering. B.S., 1879, Iowa State; bridge engineer in Pennsylvania with the State Highway Department.

1920: Arthur P. Davis, Doctor of Agriculture. President of the American Society of Civil Engineers.


1920: L. S. Klinek, Doctor of Science. President of the University of British Columbia.


1920: Wilmot Newell, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1897, Iowa State; responsible for the eradication of the citrus canker in the U.S.


1921: Carrie Chapman Catt, Doctor of Laws. B.S., 1880, Iowa State; distinguished champion of the suffragist and peace movement and organizer of the League of Women Voters.


1925: George I. Christie, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1903, Iowa State; Under Secretary of Agriculture, U.S.D.A.


1926: Matt Luckiesh, Doctor of Science.

1928: George R. Chatburn, Doctor of Engineering. B.S., 1884, Iowa State; head of the Department of Civil Engineering at the University of Nebraska.


1929: Clifford P. Fitch, Doctor of Science.

1929: Thomas H. MacDonald, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1904, Iowa State; first Secretary and Highway Engineer for the Iowa Highway Commission.

1932: John Hamndon, Doctor of Science.


1934: Henry Agard Wallace, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1910, M.S., 1920, Iowa State; U.S. Secretary of Agriculture; was Vice President under Franklin D. Roosevelt; DAC recipient in 1964.*


1936: Raymond Mollyneaux Hughes, Doctor of Laws; president of Iowa State from 1927 to 1936; his Handbook for College Trustees was well regarded.

1940: Maria M. Roberts, Doctor of Laws. B.S., 1890, Iowa State; professor of mathematics and dean of the Junior College at Iowa State.


1944: Rush B. Lincoln, Doctor of Science.


1945: Thomas Ray Stanton, Doctor of Agriculture.

1947: Mabel V. Campbell, Doctor of Science; honorary degree conferred at the convocation celebrating 75 years of home economics at Iowa State. B.S., 1905, Iowa State.

1947: Hazel Steibling, Doctor of Science; honorary degree conferred at the convocation celebrating 75 years of home economics at Iowa State. Chief of the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, U.S.D.A.


1948: Louis Bevier Spinney, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1892; B.S., 1893, Iowa State; taught physics and electrical engineering in the Beardshear administration; later became head of the Department of Physics.


1951: Harry C. Murphy, Doctor of Engineering; president of the Burlington Railroad System.


1952: Roscoe C. Pollock, Doctor of Agriculture. B.S., 1913; M.S., 1921, Iowa State.

1952: Ruth Buxton Sayre, Doctor of Laws. Outstanding woman in Iowa agriculture; helped found Associated Country Women of the World; appointed by President Eisenhower to the Agricultural Advisory Committee in 1950; held posts in local, state and national Farm Bureau women's organizations.


1953: Fred T. Whiting, Doctor of Engineering. B.S., 1913, Iowa State; vice president for Westinghouse Company in charge of the Northwest district.

1954: Thomas Roy Truax, Doctor of Agriculture. B.S., 1912, Iowa State; head of the Forest Products Division of the U.S.D.A. at Madison, Wisconsin; honorary degree conferred at the 50th anniversary of the Department of Forestry.

1955: Almon H. Fuller, Doctor of Engineering. Head of the Department of Civil Engineering at Iowa State.


1956: John Foster Dulles, Doctor of Laws. U.S. Secretary of State.


1958: Ralph Kenneth Bliss, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1905, Iowa State; director of Agriculture and Home Economics Extension at Iowa State.


1958: Robert Earle Buchanan, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1904, Iowa State; dean of industrial science, head of the Department of Bacteriology; Dean of the Graduate College; and director of the Agricultural Experiment Station at Iowa State.


1958: Edward Bertram Evans, Doctor of Science. D.V.M., 1918, Iowa State; the centennial program carried the following, “Veterinarian, Agricultural Educator.” DAC recipient in 1968.*


1958: Allan Blair Kline, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1938, Iowa State; president of the American Farm Bureau.

1958: Beth Baily McLean, Doctor of Science. M.S., 1933, Iowa State; the centennial program carried the following, “Home Economist, Business Woman.”

1958: James Lewis Morrill, Doctor of Laws. President of the University of Minnesota.


* Distinguished Achievement Citation, the highest award granted to university alumni.


1993: Charles Concordia, Doctor of Science. One of the most distinguished power systems engineers in the world.


1994: Hugh S. Sidey, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S., 1950, Iowa State; staff member and columnist for Time magazine for more than 30 years; first recipient of James W. Schwartz Award for "Distinguished Service to Journalism and Mass Communication; DAC recipient in 1972. *


1997: Simon Estes, Doctor of Humane Letters. studied voice at the University of Iowa from 1956-1963; from 1964 to 1965 studied at the Julliard School of Music; distinguished faculty member at Julliard since 1986; recognized for extraordinary achievements in operatic music, philanthropy, and generosity to disadvantaged children; named Honorary Alumnus in 2007.


1998: Federico Mayor, Doctor of Science. Recognized for his extraordinary achievements as a biochemist and for promoting peace in the Middle East and throughout the world.

2000: John Vincent Atanasoff, Doctor of Science. M.S., 1926, Iowa State; with the help of graduate student Clifford Berry, designed, assembled and demonstrated the first electronic digital computer, the Atanasoff-Berry Computer, in the basement of Iowa State University's Physics Building; he remains an inspiration to generations of Iowa Staters with his legacy of inquiry and excellence in the physical sciences and engineering; DAC recipient in 1984.*


2000: Jean Marie Dubois, Doctor of Science. One of the world’s leading researchers in the area of quasicrystals; credited with fostering and guiding collaborative research on useful applications for quasicrystals, including a project involving scientists at Iowa State University and the Ames Laboratory.

2001: Keith R. Yamamoto, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1968, Iowa State; internationally known research scientist and a leader in national science policy; known for his breakthrough work on steroid hormone receptors; DAC recipient in 1997.*

2001: John Ruan, Doctor of Humane Letters. Chairman and CEO of The Ruan Companies, Des Moines; recognized for his generosity to the city of Des Moines, his home state of Iowa and the international community; founder and ongoing supporter of the World Food Prize Foundation, publicizes the challenges of feeding the world and recognize significant advances in our capacity to produce, improve and distribute food.

2002: Dr. M. Daniel Lane, Doctor of Humane Letters. Contributions to research in the fields of biochemistry and nutrition; international leader in understanding the development and mechanisms underlying obesity; contributed to development of appetite-controlling drug; ground-breaking work in insulin signaling and in mechanisms underlying diabetes.

2003: Roy Whistler, Doctor of Science. Ph.D., 1938, Iowa State; an internationally recognized leader in carbohydrate research for more than half a century; DAC recipient in 1999.*

2003: Joanne Eicher, Doctor of Humane Letters. Played a key role in developing an understanding of and respect for African textiles in this country.

2006: Vance Coffman, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1967, Iowa State; widely respected by the nation’s military and civilian leaders, often sought for advice on national security goals; DAC recipient in 1999.*

2006: Graham B. Spanier, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S., 1969, M.S., 1971, Iowa State; president of the Pennsylvania State University; known as one of the nation’s premier leaders in higher education issues and helping universities meet the changing needs of the society and world; recipient of Distinguished Alumni Award in 2004.

2006: Monkbom Sambasivan Swaminathan, Doctor of Humane Letters. Ph.D. in plant genetics from Cambridge University; acclaimed by TIME magazine as one of the 20 most influential Asians of the 20th century and one of three from India, the others being Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore; considered a world leader in sustainable food security.

2006: Robert D. Ray, Doctor of Humane Letters. An attorney in Des Moines for 14 years; he served an unprecedented five terms as Governor of Iowa, from 1969-1983, served as a U.S. representative to the United Nations; named “Most Influential Iowan” at the turn of the century and holds honorary degrees from 17 colleges and universities.

2007: Robert Byron Bird, Doctor of Science. B.S., University of Illinois; Ph.D., Wisconsin, Vilas Professor Emeritus of chemical and biological engineering at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; known for five decades of books and research in chemical engineering and thermal science; Fullbright Lecturer and Guggenheim Fellow at Technische Universiteit, Delft, The Netherlands; Fullbright Professor at Kyoto University and Nagoya University, Japan; Fullbright Lecturer at the University of Sarajevo, Bosnia; and a visiting professor at universities in the United States, China and Belgium.
2007: John Pappajohn, Doctor of Humane Letters. Founder and president of Equity Dynamics, Inc., and Pappajohn Capital Resources, a venture capital firm; director on more than 40 public and private boards; launched the Pappajohn Centers for Entrepreneurship at several Iowa colleges; Iowa Philanthropist of the Year Award in 1998, and Honorary Alumnus of Iowa State University in 2005.

2008: Michael M. Crow, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S., 1977, Iowa State; Ph.D., 1985, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University; president, Arizona State University; faculty member: University of Kentucky, Columbia University; Iowa State (1985-1991). Helped establish more than 15 applied research centers and technology transfer organizational structures and mechanisms. Involved with Institute for Physical Research and Technology (IPRT) and Center for Crops Utilization Research (CCUR). Served as senior adviser to U.S. Departments of State and Commerce on science and technology policy related to intelligence and national security; a Fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration; and member, Council on Foreign Relations.

2008: Kenneth M. Quinn, Doctor of Humane Letters. Graduate of Wabash High School and Loras College; former U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia; president, World Food Prize Foundation; member, American Foreign Service; member, Henry Kissinger’s National Security Council; Special Assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke; Narcotics Counselor at U.S. mission to the United Nations in Vienna; humanitarian efforts on behalf of refugees; Chairman of the Inter-agency Task Force on POW/MIA; and member of the U.S.-Russia POW/MIA Commission.

2009: J. Dwayne McAninch, Doctor of Science. Founder, McAninch Corporation; adviser to the board of Caterpillar/Trimble Control Technologies, LLC; provided leadership for applying GPS technology to construction methods.

2009: Chan Koo Park, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1976, Iowa State; Chairman and CEO of chemical operations, Kumho Asiana Group; leader and innovator in the petrochemical industry; helped establish Asiana Airline, Kumho Express and Kumho Telecomm divisions; awards include: Gold Tower Industry Honor, Korea’s highest corporate CEO award, Korea’s Environment-Friendly Award, and several awards from the Office of the Korean President for contributions to the national economy, industry safety standards, labor relations, the environment and social responsibility.

2009: M. Patricia Quinlisk, Doctor of Science. B.S. University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point; Master of Public Health from Johns Hopkins University; and M.D. from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Epidemiologist and Medical Director of the Iowa Department of Public Health for the state of Iowa.

2010: Harold L. Brock, Doctor of Science. Apprenticed with Henry Ford at the Ford Trade and Apprentice School at age 15 and became Henry Ford’s personal engineer; founding member of the board of directors of Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo; the Brock Student Center at Hawkeye Community College named in his honor; Director of Tractor Research and later Manager of Product Engineering at the John Deere Waterloo Tractor Works; designed the Deere 4020 tractor and brought it into production in 1963; founding member and president of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), Mississippi Valley Section; recipient of the Cyrus Hall McCormick-Jerome Increase Case Gold Medal from the ASABE.

2010: Jonathan D. Rich, Doctor of Science. B.S. Iowa State; Ph.D. University of Wisconsin; over 20 years of experience in the silicones industry, starting as a research chemist and progressing to CEO of the second-largest producer of silicones and silicone derivatives in the world; director of Momentive Performance Materials Inc. in June 2007; joined Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in 2000, serving as director of chemical R&D, president of Goodyear Chemical, and in 2002 was named president, North American Tire, and Chairman of the Board, Goodyear Dunlop Tires NA; serves on Iowa State University’s Institute for Physical Research and Technology (IPRT) Industrial Advisory Board.

2011: Harold Scheraga, Doctor of Science. B.S., 1941, City College of New York; A.M., 1942 and Ph.D., 1946 Duke University; one of the world’s leading physical chemists working on macromolecules, primarily proteins and nucleic acids, member of the National Academy of Science and American Academy of Arts and Science, and a Fellow of the American Chemical Society, Biophysical society, and American Association for the Advancement of Science, six-time Fogarty Scholar of the National Institutes of Health. Four of his papers have been designated as “citation classics” by the journal Current Contents, and in the March 1982 issue, he was listed as the most frequently cited physical chemist in the world. In a 2009 ranking of the 2,000 most notable living chemists, he was ranked 11th.

2011: Robert N. Shelton, Doctor of Science. B.S., Stanford University; M.S. and Ph.D., University of California; 19th president of the University of Arizona, affiliated with the Ames Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Energy at ISU, in 1987, he joined the faculty at the University of California, Davis, as professor and chair of the Department of Physics, was appointed Vice Chancellor for Research in 1990, and Vice Provost for Research of the University of California system in 1996, in 2001, he joined the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, Dr. Shelton’s research has focused on collective electron effects in novel materials, and he made many significant contributions to the advancement of superconductivity and superconductive materials.

2011: Benjamin J. Allen, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S., Indiana University; M.S. and Ph.D., University of Illinois; president of the University of Northern Iowa since 2006; former professor, dean, vice president and provost at Iowa State University from 1979 to 2006; and a member of the Washington State University faculty from 1974 to 1979, including a year as a Brookings Economic Policy Fellow in the U.S. Department of Transportation; nationally known researcher and educator in transportation and logistics, appointed by Iowa Governor Branstad to co-chair, the Iowa STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Advisory Council.

2012: George P. Belitsos, Doctor of Humane Letters. Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Youth and Shelter Services, Inc. (YSS). Headquartered in Ames, YSS is dedicated to helping communities prepare young people for the challenges of life by providing information services and tools to create healthier opportunities and outcomes for troubled youth.

2012: Daniel Gianola, Doctor of Science. B.S. 1970, Universidad de la Republica, M.S 1973, Ph.D. 1975 University of Wisconsin – Madison. Sewall Wright Professor of Animal Breeding and Genetics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Dr. Gianola’s research involves theory and applications of quantitative genetics to animal breeding, and it has had a profound impact on the analysis of animal breeding data.

2012: James L. Barnard, Doctor of Science. B.S. University of Stellenbosch and University of Pretoria; M.S. University of Texas; Ph.D. Vanderbilt University. Global Practice and Technology Leader for Black and Veatch, an international engineering, consulting and construction company in energy, water, telecommunications, and management consulting projects with more than 100 offices worldwide; one of the world’s leading environmental engineers.
2013: Peggy A. Whitson, Doctor of Science. B.S. Iowa Wesleyan College; Ph.D. Rice University. National Research Council Resident Research Associate at NASA's Johnson Space Center. She joined NASA as a research biochemist in 1989. Later became a NASA astronaut, space mission commander and chief of the NASA Astronaut Corps; included two extended periods in space aboard the International Space Station (ISS), serving as NASA's first Science Officer on her first mission and as commander of the second mission. The first mission (2002), lasted 185 days and included a nearly four and one-half hour spacewalk to install and check equipment. Her second space mission (2007), lasted 192 days.


2015: Dame DeAnne Julius, Ph.D., Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S. Iowa State University; M.A. and Ph.D. University of California, Davis. International economist, served as economic analyst for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency and project economist for the World Food Bank. Named by Queen Elizabeth, II to Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for national civilian service; and Dame Commander in the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George. Serves as chair of the Governing Council of the University College London.

2015: Eugene G. Sukup, Doctor of Science. Founder of Sukup Manufacturing Co., largest family-owned, full-line grain drying and storage equipment manufacturer. Entrepreneur and civic-minded philanthropist with more than 80 U.S. patents. Innovative inventor dedicated to solving food grain production problems and also helping to feed and clothe people around the globe.

2016: Ernest Moniz, Doctor of Science. B.S. Boston College; Ph.D. Stanford University; and honorary degrees from the University of Athens, the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Michigan State University and Universidad Pontificia de Comillas. As U.S. Secretary of Energy, he was tasked with implementing critical Department of Energy missions in support of President Obama’s goals of growing the economy, enhancing security and protecting the environment. Prior to his appointment, he served as Under Secretary of the Department of Energy and was the Cecil and Ida Green Professor of Physics and Engineering Systems at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), where he was a faculty member since 1973.

2017: Dennis A. Muilenburg, Doctor of Science. B.S. Iowa State University; M.S. University of Washington. Chairman of the board, president and chief executive officer of The Boeing Company. Fellow of the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA) and the Royal Aeronautical Society. He oversees the strategic direction of the Chicago-based, $94.6 billion aerospace company. With more than 150,000 employees across the U.S. and in more than 65 countries.

2018: Dwight Ink, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S. Iowa State University. Ink, a native Iowan and the first Iowa State student to earn a degree in government, is an accomplished civil servant with extraordinary and outstanding contributions to numerous federal agencies, as well as the author of two books on governing, and has been a trusted advisor to seven U.S. presidents.

2018: Jon Kinzenbaw, Doctor of Science. Kinzenbaw, chief executive officer and chairman of the board for Kinze Manufacturing Inc. in Williamsburg, Iowa, is an accomplished Iowa farmer, inventor, manufacturer, and entrepreneur. Kinzenbaw has produced a stream of successful innovations to agricultural mechanization, resulting in 37 patents and numerous award and honors for his achievements.

2018: Theaster Gates, Doctor of Humane Letters. B.S. and M.S. Iowa State University; M.F.A. University of Cape Town in South Africa. Gates, is an acclaimed artist and innovator in urban revitalization and planning. As an artist, he creates work that focuses on space theory and land development, sculpture, and performance. Drawing on his interest and training in urban planning and preservation, he redeems spaces that have been left behind, bringing the conversation of space to the forefront of contemporary art practice to bridge the gap between art and life. Known for his recirculation of art-world capital, Gates’ work explores the possibility of “life within things.”

2019: Robert A. Easter, Doctor of Science. B.S. and M.S. Texas A&M University; Ph.D. University of Illinois. Easter is President Emeritus of the University of Illinois, having served the institution for 42 years. In addition to his work on campus, Easter also served his country and his community. He was a member of the U.S. Army Reserves for 20 years. President George W. Bush appointed him to Chair the Board on International Food and Agricultural Development. He also served on the Chicago Council on Global Affairs committee assigned to develop recommendations for the U.S. Farm Bill in 2002 and 2008. Easter chaired the Task Force on Antibiotic Resistance. He has advised two USAID international agricultural development projects.

2021: H. Allen Myers, Doctor of Science. B.S. and M.S. University of Illinois. President and founder of Ag Leader Technology, Inc. in Ames, Iowa, the largest privately-owned supplier of precision farming technology, produces more than two-thirds of the grain yield measuring sensors made in the world with a catalog of seven product lines of equipment and services. Innovative inventor, product developer, entrepreneur and holder of 16 U.S. patents and two foreign patents.

* Distinguished Achievement Citation, the highest award granted to university alumni