



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF COLBY COLLEGE  
POLICY ON RESCISSION OF HONORARY DEGREES

In light of the Board of Trustees' action in May 2018 to rescind the degree granted to Bill Cosby in 1992, the President, at the request of the Board, convened a working group made up of Colby community members to develop a set of guidelines for use by the Board in any future consideration of rescinding an honorary degree.

The working group determined that the Board should rescind an honorary degree only in rare cases based on extraordinary circumstances. To assist the Board in interpreting this overarching principle, the Board should consider the following guidelines:

- Because honorary degrees should be rescinded only in rare cases based on extraordinary circumstances, there must be *clear, demonstrated* evidence of serious actions, misconduct or behavior that directly and unacceptably contravenes the College's core mission, values and institutional commitments. In the instance of criminal conduct, *clear, demonstrated* evidence typically means a criminal conviction. In the instance of misconduct that is not criminal in nature, an example of *clear, demonstrated evidence* is the objective validation by a generally-recognized independent agency, commission, licensing or other body (with quasi-judicial authority) that the honoree committed the offensive actions, misconduct or behavior.
- Moreover, it is not enough that the honoree's actions, misconduct or behavior was negligent - there must be a determination that the action, misconduct or behavior was deliberate/intentional; that is, committed with actual knowledge of such wrongdoing.
- The principle that there must be an independent, objective validation that the honoree committed the offensive actions, misconduct or behavior is critically important, without which an honorary degree should not be rescinded.
- Additionally, Colby awards its honorary degrees for an honoree's specific achievements, and not based on an honoree's lifetime of experiences and general background.

- The case for rescission is stronger when there is a clear and direct relationship between the specific achievements for which the honoree was recognized and the actions, misconduct or behavior giving rise to consideration of degree rescission.
- The Board should not consider rescinding an honorary degree due to the political views of an honoree or an honoree's support of controversial policy matters or positions.