

14 colleges to grant Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy honorary degrees



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A growing group of colleges and universities will jointly award honorary degrees to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this spring in recognition of his leadership during the war with Russia, they announced this week.

Most of the 14 colleges that have signed on so far are in upstate New York, home to a large concentration of people of Ukrainian origin. They include Rochester Institute of Technology, Canisius College, Le Moyne College and Bard College. Others are in Michigan, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"In my mind, President Zelenskyy is not just effectively leading his country and fighting a war, but he's really fighting for human values," RIT President David Munson said. "And it goes beyond just democracy – it's about freedom and the right of humans to make their own decisions. In that realm, at this point in time, for us anyway – he's at the top of the list."



Zelenskyy, 44, has been president of Ukraine since 2019. His international profile has increased dramatically since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24.

He has refused offers to be evacuated from the country, instead remaining and giving regular video updates wearing his trademark olive green T-shirt. He is credited for helping rally Ukrainian civilians to assist the military in turning back the Russian campaign.

"We're looking for role models for our students and he is the quintessential example in our times of heroic leadership," Le Moyne President Linda LeMura said. "He's remarkably courageous, he has a moral compass and he's inspired people's hearts and souls around the world."



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The effort has come together in a rush over the last two weeks, and more schools are expected to sign on. The college presidents who organized the effort, including Mark Zupan of Alfred University, said they're not aware of another instance where honorary degrees were jointly awarded in this manner.

Zupan said he wrote to the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, D.C., to ask whether Zelenskyy might be available via video to receive the honors and received a fast response: No. Too busy fighting a war.



Here is the full list of schools that had decided as of March 30 to grant Zelenskyy an honorary degree this spring:

- Adrian College
- Alfred University
- Alvernia University
- Bard College
- Canisius College
- Hilbert College
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges
- Keuka College
- Le Moyne College
- Lenoir-Rhyne University
- Manor College

- Rochester Institute of Technology
- Shenandoah University
- Virginia Wesleyan University

Several of the colleges have taken other steps to show support for Ukraine, including organizing medical supply donations and hosting speakers on campus. Some are anticipating having Ukrainian refugee students on campus in the fall and will offer free tuition.



Colleges typically grant honorary degrees for years or decades of accomplishments. Zelenskyy, though, has been a war-time leader for less than two months, and the conflict is far from over.

What if he orders the bombing of hospitals in Russia, or eventually abandons his democratic principles?

"That would be unfortunate," Hobart and William Smith Colleges President Joyce Jacobsen said.

But she and the others said the honor is for Zelenskyy's leadership up until the present.