

Trump could lose honorary law degree after Charlottesville remarks

- Lehigh University considers rescinding president's doctor of laws status
- Robert Gordon University took back Trump's honorary business degree in 2015

by ADAM GABBATT

One of the three universities to give Donald Trump an honorary doctorate is considering whether to revoke it in the wake of his controversial comments about the violence in Charlottesville last weekend.

The board of trustees at Lehigh University – based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania – will decide whether to rescind the president's doctor of laws status when it next convenes in October.

If Trump is stripped of his degree it would be the second time controversial remarks have cost him an honorary academic qualification. Robert Gordon University, in Aberdeen, revoked Trump's honorary doctorate in 2015.

The move by Lehigh comes after Kelly McCoy, a former student, launched a petition urging the university to revoke Trump's doctorate.

McCoy started the petition after Trump refused to denounce the white supremacists and neo-Nazis who took part in a "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville on Saturday. Heather Heyer, an anti-fascist protester, was killed amid widespread violence.

Trump went on to read a statement saying "racism is evil" as the furore built, but then reverted to his original position at a press conference on Tuesday, drawing a moral equivalence between the far right and the counter-demonstrators, and claiming some of the neo-Nazi protesters were "fine people."

McCoy wrote: "[Trump's] rejection of diversity and his lack of respect for the differences of others around him stands in direct opposition to the principles laid out here. He does not reflect Lehigh University's values. Therefore, he does not deserve to bear the distinction of an honorary degree from Lehigh."

A spokeswoman for Lehigh confirmed the board of trustees will weigh the matter at its next meeting on 25 October.

Trump is currently the holder of four honorary doctorates. He was made honorary doctor of laws by Lehigh in 1988, honorary doctor of humane letters by Wagner College, in Staten Island, in 2004, and he holds two honorary doctorates from Liberty University, in Lynchburg, Virginia.

In February, 33 academics at Wagner College co-signed a letter condemning Trump's actions since he took office. The letter, published in the Staten Island Advance, said Trump's travel ban, stance on climate change, and stance on LGBTQ rights represented "a threat to our democracy, our economy, our American values, our international alliances."

Asked if Wagner College is considering revoking Trump's honorary doctorate, spokesman Lee Manchester said: "We have no comment on this story."

A spokesman for Liberty, which claims to be the "world's largest Christian university", said it was unlikely to revoke Trump's two doctorates. The university gave Trump his second doctorate, in law, in May of this year.

Robert Gordon University made Trump an honorary doctor of business administration in 2010, but revoked the doctorate in 2015 after Trump “made a number of statements that are wholly incompatible with the ethos and values of the university.”

Trump has been abandoned by a number of key figures since he equated white supremacists and neo-Nazis to the people in Charlottesville to protest them.

Three White House business panels have been disbanded this week after CEOs of some of the country’s largest companies withdrew their support.

On Friday, 16 members of Trump’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities sent the president a letter of resignation, citing his “hateful rhetoric.” The letter featured an acrostic which spelt out “resist.” The members were appointed by Barack Obama.