

## THE CEREMONY

### The Academic Degrees

The academic degree is a title conferred on an individual by a university as recognition of the completion of a course of study or for a certain attainment. In Canada the three stages in higher education are represented by the degrees of bachelor, master and doctor. Wilfrid Laurier University is given the authority to grant degrees by the Wilfrid Laurier University Act.

Historically, the master's degree was the only degree offered. In the Middle Ages it was awarded to those scholars who, after a series of examinations, were found intellectually and morally fit to teach. Although we are accustomed to thinking of the bachelor's degree as the original degree, it was initially used to designate master's students progressing toward their final degree. They were thus novices or 'bachelor's,' who were given permission to teach beginning students. The bachelor's degree was subsequently established as a first degree, a position it had when Oxford University in England was founded in the 12th century. The degree of doctor, which comes from the Latin word for 'teacher,' was first awarded by the University of Bologna and the University of Paris in the 12th century.

The bachelor's degree is awarded at the honours and general level. An honours degree program emphasizes the acquisition of a broad and deep knowledge of the student's chosen honours subject, including both skill at applying the subject and appreciation of its relation to general knowledge and society. A general degree program emphasizes a balance between an in-depth understanding of the student's major subject and a knowledge and appreciation of other fields. Completion of an honours degree normally takes four years and a general degree, three years.

The master's degree is the second degree in higher education. Students complete concentrated and specialized work at a more advanced level in an academic discipline or professional area. Most course work is within the field of specialization and a research project or thesis is normally required. Some master's degrees provide professional qualifications. The master's degree usually requires one or two years of study after a bachelor's degree.

The doctoral degree is the highest academic degree granted by a university. Candidates for the degree spend several years in the advanced study of a specialized field of knowledge. The capstone of the degree is the doctoral dissertation, an extended work based upon independent research. The dissertation demonstrates the candidate's command of both the subject matter and the exacting methods of scholarship, and makes an original contribution to knowledge.

WILFRID LAURIER