PRINCETON UNIVERSITY


Princeton University awarded six honorary degrees at the 2025 Commencement ceremony.
From left: Omar M. Yaghi, Daniel Chee Tsui, Nancy Weiss Malkiel, Princeton University President Christopher L. Eisgruber, Joshua Boger, Sherrilyn Ifill.
Not pictured: Lex Frieden, whose honorary degree was awarded in absentia.
Photo by Denise Applewhite, Office of Communications

# Princeton awards six honorary degrees

*By* the Office of Communications on May 27, 2025, 12:51 p.m.

Princeton University awarded honorary degrees to the following recipients during the 2025 Commencement ceremony on Tuesday, May 27.

# Joshua Boger

## Doctor of Science

Joshua Boger is a globally recognized leader in biotechnology and the founder of Vertex Pharmaceuticals Incorporated, which discovered and developed the first effective treatments for cystic fibrosis and co-developed the first approved gene-therapy drug using CRISPR technology, to treat sickle cell anemia. He is currently chair of the board of directors at Alkeus Pharmaceuticals and chair of the board at CervoMed. At Vertex, his roles included chief executive officer, board chairman, president, and chief scientific officer. Prior to founding Vertex in 1989, Boger was senior director of basic chemistry at Merck Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories, where he was a pioneer in what is known as rational drug design, applying computer modeling techniques to the chemistry of drug discovery and development. He is the author of more than 50 scientific publications and holds 32 patents. He was named one of 40 “technology pioneers” worldwide at the 2003 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He is a member of the Biotech Hall of Fame and a recipient of the Biotechnology Heritage Award. His other honors include the Othmer Gold Medal from the Science History Institute and the Heroes in Health Award from the Visiting Nurse Association of Boston. He has chaired the Harvard Medical School board of fellows and the Wesleyan University board of trustees. He has also served on the boards for the Museum of Science - Boston, the Hastings Center for Bioethics, the Whitehead Institute, the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, and the ACLU Foundation of Massachusetts, and he has served as a Harvard Overseer.

Wesleyan University (B.A., 1973)

Harvard University (A.M., 1975, Ph.D., 1979)

*A visionary scientist, entrepreneur, and philanthropist, his leadership in the field of biotechnology has transformed the lives of countless individuals suffering from chronic illnesses. From his early work with Merck Sharp and Dohme Research Laboratories to his founding of Vertex Pharmaceuticals, he has used his training as a chemist to develop groundbreaking treatments for medical conditions once deemed incurable. His life’s work is a testament to the transformative power of scientific innovation.*

*As a recognized leader in the nonprofit sector, his unwavering commitment to improving the welfare of others extends beyond the lab to his philanthropic work in support of higher education and the arts. May his extraordinary achievements and outstanding contributions to humanity continue to inspire the next generation of medical innovators.*

# Lex Frieden

## Doctor of Humane Letters *(awarded in absentia)*

Lex Frieden

*Photo by Scott Dalton*

Lex Frieden was a driving force for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and is a leader in the independent living movement. He is a professor of biomedical informatics and professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. Frieden, a quadriplegic due to a spinal cord injury while in college, has spent his career working for equal access and opportunities for people with disabilities. He was executive director of the National Council on Disability from 1984 to 1988, where he helped conceive and draft the landmark ADA. He later served as chair of the council from 2002 to 2006. He was chairman of the American Association of People with Disabilities, a longtime member of the United Nations Panel of Experts on the Standard Rules for Disability, and president of Rehabilitation International. He currently is also an adjunct professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Baylor College of Medicine and director of the Independent Living Research Utilization program at TIRR Memorial Hermann in Houston.

Frieden's various honors include the Henry Viscardi Achievement Award, which recognizes the accomplishments of people with disabilities on a global basis, the Henry B. Betts Award, which honors individuals who have led efforts to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, and the Fries Prize for Improving Health. He has also helped organize the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities, the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities, and the Houston Coalition for Barrier Free Living.

University of Tulsa (B.S., 1971)

University of Houston (M.A., 1979)

*An architect of the Americans with Disabilities Act and a pioneer of the independent living movement, he has helped advance the global movement for disability rights. After suffering a traumatic injury that left him paralyzed, he was forced to navigate a world that was unaccommodating to individuals living with disabilities. Undeterred and inspired to overcome these barriers, he dedicated his life to making the world more inclusive for all. As a scholar, educator, and policy expert, he has worked tirelessly to ensure that everyone, regardless of ability, is empowered to participate fully in society. Recognized by multiple U.S. presidents for his accomplishments, he was praised by Ronald Reagan for his "lasting impact in helping us reach our national goals of freeing disabled Americans from unnecessary dependency and removing obstacles to the development of their full potential."*

# Sherrilyn Ifill

## Doctor of Laws

Attorney Sherrilyn Ifill has been heralded as a "visionary and transformational" leader in civil rights law. She is the inaugural Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., Esq. Endowed Chair in Civil Rights and founding director of the 14th Amendment Center for Law and Democracy at Howard University School of Law. Ifill served as the president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund from 2013 to 2022, and as an assistant counsel for the fund before that. She is now president and director-counsel emeritus. She also served on the faculty at the University of Maryland School of Law in Baltimore for 20 years. More recently, she was a Ford Foundation senior fellow and the Klinsky Visiting Professor for Leadership and Progress at Harvard Law School. Her legal career began as a fellow at the American Civil Liberties Union. Her books include "On the Courthouse Lawn: Confronting the Legacy of Lynching in the 21st Century" and the forthcoming "Is This America?" She was named Attorney of the Year by The American Lawyer in 2020 and was named to TIME Magazine's 2021 list of the "100 Most Influential People in the World." Her other honors include the Radcliffe Medal, the Brandeis Medal, the Thurgood Marshall Award from the American Bar Association, the 2021 Spirit of Excellence Award from the American Bar Association, and the Gold Medal from the New York State Bar Association. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Vassar College (A.B., 1984)

New York University School of Law (J.D., 1987)

*A leader of the modern civil rights movement, she has helped shape national conversations about social justice and racial equality. Upon taking the helm of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in 2013, she proudly carried forward the legacy of legendary jurist Thurgood Marshall, leading the organization through a transformative period of unrest and uncertainty as the nation grappled*

*with the dual crises of a pandemic and a racial reckoning. In 2021, she was named one of TIME Magazine's 100 Most Influential People for her steadfast defense of democracy. Now, as founding director of the 14th Amendment Center for Law and Democracy at Howard University School of Law, she is training the next generation of "drum majors for justice."*

# Nancy Weiss Malkiel

## Doctor of Humane Letters

Nancy Weiss Malkiel is professor of history, emeritus, and former dean of the college at Princeton University. Malkiel was among the first women appointed to the Princeton faculty, coming to campus in 1969 as the University launched undergraduate coeducation. She is a noted scholar in 20th century American history whose best-known book, "Keep the Damned Women Out," traces how American and British colleges and universities moved to coeducation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her most recent book, "Changing the Game," is a biography of Princeton president William G. Bowen.  Malkiel was dean of the college from 1987 to 2011, serving as the senior University official responsible for the undergraduate academic program. During her tenure as dean, the University implemented its transformative no-loan financial aid policy, strengthened the residential college system, expanded international teaching and learning programs, established the McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, and significantly expanded educational opportunities and resources for first-year students. From 1982 to 1986, Malkiel was the founding head of Mathey College. Beyond Princeton, Malkiel served for more than 40 years as a trustee, and chaired the board for a decade, of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, now the Institute for Citizens and Scholars. She has also served as a commissioner of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and as chair of the assembly and a member of the board of the Consortium on Financing Higher Education. She is a former trustee of Smith College, Princeton Day School, and McCarter Theatre Center. She was the 2018 recipient of the Phi Beta Kappa Society's Sidney Hook Memorial Award, which recognizes national distinction in scholarship, undergraduate teaching, and leadership in the cause of undergraduate education. In 2025 she received the Smith College Medal, which recognizes alumnae who "exemplify in their lives and work 'the true purpose' of a liberal arts education."

Smith College (B.A., 1965)

Harvard University (M.A., 1966, Ph.D., 1970)

*A pathbreaking historian and higher education administrator, her outstanding leadership of the undergraduate college enriched the lives of generations of Princetonians. She joined the University at a time when some still sought to "Keep the Damned Women Out," and blazed trails as the first*

*woman faculty member in the department of history. A distinguished scholar of civil rights, race relations, and higher education, her signature course, the "United States since 1940," was a favorite among students. In 1987, she became Princeton's dean of the college, overseeing the undergraduate academic experience at the institution she fondly described as "a world-class research university with the heart and soul of a liberal arts college." For a record-breaking twenty-four years, she worked tirelessly to advance the University's highest priorities, leaving an enduring legacy of excellence and service.*

# Daniel Chee Tsui

## Doctor of Science

Nobel laureate Daniel Chee Tsui is Princeton's Arthur Legrand Doty Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Emeritus. Tsui is internationally known for his scientific discoveries in experimental condensed matter physics. He received the 1998 Nobel Prize in Physics, along with Horst Störmer and Robert Laughlin, for the "discovery of a new form of quantum fluid with fractionally charged excitations," known as the fractional quantum Hall effect. Tsui was born in 1939 in Henan Province, China, and began his formal schooling in Hong Kong. He attended Augustana College in Illinois on a full scholarship, inspired by University of Chicago alumni Nobel Prize laureates C.N. Yang and T.D. Lee. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago and worked as a postdoc there for a year before joining Bell Laboratories, where he conducted the innovative research on the physics of two-dimensional electrons that led to the Nobel Prize. Tsui joined the Princeton faculty in 1982 after 14 years at Bell Laboratories; he transferred to emeritus status in 2010. He is the recipient of the Oliver E. Buckley Condensed Matter Physics Prize from the American Physical Society and the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Physics. He is a member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering, as well as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Physical Society, Academia Sinica Taipei, and Foreign Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing.

Augustana College (B.A., 1961)

University of Chicago (Ph.D., 1967)

*One of the nation's "Great Immigrants," he is renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to modern physics. His discovery of the fractional quantum Hall effect revolutionized our thinking about the building blocks of matter and sparked technological innovations that have benefited humanity. A Nobel laureate with a distinguished career as a scientist and professor, his "Joy of the Search for Knowledge" has inspired us all. For twenty-eight years, he served on the Princeton faculty as a*

*dedicated scholar, teacher, and mentor. When asked why he chose to leave Bell Laboratories and join the University, he remarked, "[p]erhaps it was the Confucius in me, the faint voice I often heard when I was alone, that the only meaningful life is a life of learning. What better way is there to learn than through teaching!"*

# Omar M. Yaghi

## Doctor of Science

Omar M. Yaghi is a pioneering chemist who created the field of reticular chemistry and molecular weaving, and designed several extensive classes of new materials such as metal-organic frameworks and covalent organic frameworks with unprecedented surface areas. Applications of his work include capturing gases like methane and carbon dioxide and "harvesting" water from desert air. Yaghi is the James and Neeltje Tretter Chair Professor of Chemistry at the University of California, Berkeley and the founding director of the Berkeley Global Science Institute. He is also co-director of the Kavli Energy NanoSciences Institute, the BASF corporation's California Research Alliance, and the Bakar Institute of Digital Materials for the Planet. He is an elected member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina. His numerous awards include the Wolf Prize in Chemistry, the Tang Prize, the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award, the Albert Einstein World Award of Science, the Gregori Aminoff Prize presented by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, the American Chemical Society Award in the Chemistry of Materials, the Royal Society of Chemistry Centenary Prize, the Balzan Prize, the Wilhelm Exner Medal, and the Sacconi Medal of the Italian Chemical Society. He has published more than 300 scientific articles and is among the most widely cited scholars in his discipline. He was a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellow at Harvard and previously served on the faculties of UCLA, the University of Michigan, and Arizona State University.

State University of New York-Albany (B.S., 1985)

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Ph.D., 1990)

*One of the world's most cited chemists, he is a pioneer in the field of materials science. His development of reticular chemistry helped advance our understanding of molecular design, redefining how scientists approach complex environmental challenges. From energy storage to water purification, his discoveries set the foundation for a multitude of breakthroughs in our quest for a cleaner future. Inspired by his family's struggle with water scarcity during his early years in Jordan, his*

*latest venture involves harnessing the power of the sun to pull moisture from dry air. When asked what advice he would give the next generation of scientists, he said, "Be fearless. … The most rewarding discoveries often lie beyond the boundaries of what seems possible."*