May 2025 Commencement
Recommended Honorary Degree Recipients

Name	Honorary Degree	Ceremony
Rodney A. Butler*	Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*	College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Sciences May 10, 2025
Manasse Mbonye*	Doctor of Science	The Graduate School – Masters May 12, 2025
Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan	Doctor of Science	The Graduate School – Doctoral May 12, 2025
Dr. Joan Y. Reede	Doctor of Science	School of Nursing May 10, 2025
Dr. JoAnn Trejo	Doctor of Science	School of Pharmacy – Doctoral May 11, 2025

**denotes UConn alum*

Rodney A. Butler is the Chairman of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) since January 2010. Butler's service on Tribal Council began in 2004, and after one year, he was appointed Tribal Council Treasurer; a position he held through 2009. During his tenure, Butler chaired the Tribe's Finance, Housing, and Judicial Committees, the MPTN Utility Authority, and served as an Interim CEO for Foxwoods Resort Casino.

Butler earned his Bachelor's Degree in Finance from the University of Connecticut where he played Defensive Back for the UConn Huskies' football team. Prior to Tribal Council, Butler worked in the finance department at Foxwoods Resort Casino. He later became Chairman of the Tribal Business Advisory Board; an executive body responsible for overseeing the Tribe's non-gaming businesses and commercial properties. Butler was actively involved in multiple resort expansions at Foxwoods, as well as community development initiatives on the Reservation, the establishment of the Mashantucket (Western) Pequot Tribe Endowment Trust, and the legalization of Sports Betting and iGaming in the state of Connecticut. He was also a participant in Harvard Business School's program "Leading People and Investing to Build Sustainable Communities." He is a regular speaker on national panels related to Native American issues.

Butler presently serves on the Board of Directors for Mashantucket Pequot Interactive and is on the board of Foxwoods El San Juan Casino. He also serves as the President of Native American Finance Officers Association (NAFOA), as Alternate Vice President for the National Congress of American Indians, and on the boards for the United South and Eastern Tribes, Indian Gaming Association, American Gaming Association, the Mystic Aquarium, and the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut. He is the 2019 recipient of the Citizen of the Year award from the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, and the National Indian Gaming Association's John Kieffer Sovereignty Award. In 2018, he received the St. Edmund's Medal of Honor Award from the Enders Island Retreat Center. In 2017, Butler was appointed "Tribal Leader of the Year" by the NAFOA.

As Chairman, Butler's primary focus is to ensure long-term stability for the Tribe's citizens, government, and business enterprises.

Manasse Mbonye is an astrophysicist by training. He is currently President of the Rwanda Academy of Sciences (RAS). He is also the Research Group Leader of the Rwanda Astrophysics Space and Climate Sciences Research Group (RASCSRG), at the University of Rwanda (UR), where he also does research in the field of Cosmology and supervises students. He is widely published in Cosmology and black hole astrophysics. Manasse has made some known contributions in theoretical physics, including the Mbonye-Kazanas model of non-singular black holes, Formation of supermassive black holes, cosmology with interacting dark energy for example. Manasse has recently put forward and widely discussed a new model of cosmic dynamics: Self-Regulating Cosmology (SRC), which he continues to work on. In regard to public service, mentioned below, Prof. Mbonye has served in Rwanda at national level in several areas of science, technology and their applications. These achievements, both in science and in public service were preceded by a challenging childhood and serve as a testament that success can result from endurance and resilience.

Most people recall the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. However, social instabilities of a colonial origin, were already manifest in Rwanda by 1959, leading to social violence and human displacement to neighboring countries. Manasse and his family fled to neighboring Uganda in 1961, where he grew up in the refugee camp. His parents who were educators instilled in him early the importance of education. By the late sixties when Manasse was preparing to join high school, he was aware of his interest in mathematics (which he treated like classical music without words). He was also philosophically inquisitive about the nature of things. A friend of his who had gone to high school before revealed to him that one could use mathematics to understand nature ('put words in the music') in a discipline called physics. It was then that Manasse decided he would become a physicist, long before high school and before any courses in the subject. In the 1970s Uganda, under Idi Amin, was going through serious social-political instabilities of its own. And like a lot of other people, Manasse fled for his life again, this time to Kenya. Invariably these instabilities disrupted his education. He had to wait for 10 years for an opportunity to continue his education in the US in 1986.
Four years later, in 1990 Manasse met UConn's Prof. Ron Mallett at a physics conference in Baton Rouge LA. Ron's talk on black holes impressed him so much that that September Manasse moved from Michigan to study under Ron, specializing in astrophysics. Manasse was doing his Physics PhD here at UConn when the Rwandan genocide of 1994 took place. Later that year he visited Rwanda and when he came back to US set up and registered a non-profit organization, the Rwanda Education Reconstruction Effort (RERE). With the support of the UConn Physics Department he coordinated the collection and shipment of books and computers to Rwanda in the aftermath. He also had previously involved the help of the then UConn President Harry Hartley and CT Senator Chris Dodd, to intervene against illegal solicitations by a pre-genocide Rwandan diplomat, in 1993.

For his academic and societal accomplishments Manasse was named the Outstanding UConn PhD graduate of 1996 (*Hartford Courant 19 May 1996*).

After graduating from UConn, Manasse held research fellowships at the University of Michigan and stayed as a visiting Assistant Professor. Later he became a National Research Council (NRC) Senior Associate Researcher at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland. He also held a faculty position at Rochester Institute of Technology.

In 2011 he became the RIT-NUR Research Professor just before returning to Rwanda to lead the reconstruction effort of the National University of Rwanda (NUR) and of the scientific education and research sectors in Rwanda. During all this time Manasse continues to be research active, and widely published, in cosmology and black hole astrophysics. He has been and continues to be one of the most frequent UConn alumni visiting the Department of Physics to talk about and share his research work.

In 2011 Manasse went to serve in Rwanda as Vice Rector for Academics (Provost), and later Acting Rector (President) of the National University of Rwanda (NUR) 2011-2013. He was appointed NUR Professor in 2013. During his administrative tenure NUR received over 55 million dollars in grants, in part from SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency), and NUR established academic relations with several international universities. Professor Mbonye was the last NUR Rector before the 2013 merger that initiated the new University of Rwanda. He was a member of the Task Force for establishing the University of Rwanda, by merging NUR with other public educational and research institutions.

Professor Mbonye was, thereafter, in 2013 appointed to lead the new University of Rwanda College of Science and Technology (CST) as its first Principal. Under his tenure the College competed for (across East and Southern Africa) and won establishment of three World Bank sponsored African Centers of Excellence (ACE). These included the African Center of Excellence in Energy for Sustainable Development, the African Center of Excellence in Internet of Things, and the African Center of Excellence for Transportation. Prof. Mbonye was also instrumental in establishing the ICTP-East African Institute for Fundamental Research (ICTP-EAIFR), a Rwandan hub of the famous International Center for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste (Italy), a UNESCO-funded research institute founded by the late Abdus Salam, the 1979 Nobel Laureate in Physics.

In 2017 Prof Mbonye was appointed by the Rwanda Government to head Rwanda's National Council for Science and Technology, as its Executive Secretary. Here he set up the National Research and Innovation Agenda (NRIA), and the National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF) framework. NRIF was later launched by the Government in June 2018. Prof. Mbonye served on the Board for East African Science and Technology Council (EASTECO), up to September 2018 as its Rapporteur. During this period EASTECO established its Science policy. Prof. Mbonye also served (2015-2018) as the Board Chair of Rwanda Energy Group (REG), Rwanda's sole electric power provider.

The Honorable **Sethuraman Panchanathan** is a computer scientist and engineer and the 15th director of the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). Panchanathan was nominated to this position by the President of the United States in 2019, and subsequently, unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate on June 18, 2020. NSF is a $9.06 billion independent federal agency and the only government agency charged with advancing all fields of scientific discovery, technological innovation and STEM education.

Panchanathan is a leader in science, engineering and education with more than three decades of experience. He has a distinguished career in both higher education and government, where he has designed and built knowledge enterprises, which advance research innovation, strategic partnerships, entrepreneurship, global development and economic growth.

As director, Panchanathan maintains leadership roles on several key interagency councils and committees, including as co-chair of the National Advisory Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship and is a member of the White House CHIPS Implementation Steering Council and the White House Gender Policy Council. He is also chair of the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee and co-vice chair of the Council for Inclusive Innovation.

Panchanathan previously served as the executive vice president of the Arizona State University (ASU) Knowledge Enterprise, where he was also chief research and innovation officer. He was also the founder and director of the Center for Cognitive Ubiquitous Computing at ASU. Under his leadership, ASU increased research performance fivefold, earning recognition as the fastest growing and most innovative research university in the U.S.

Prior to joining NSF, Panchanathan was appointed by the President to serve on the National Science Board where he was a chair of the Committee on Strategy and a member of the External Engagement and National Science and Engineering Policy committees. Additionally, he was chair of the Council on Research of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and co-chair of the Extreme Innovation Taskforce of the Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils. Arizona's governor appointed Panchanathan as senior advisor for science and technology in 2018. He was the editor-in-chief of the IEEE *Multimedia Magazine* and editor and associate editor of several international journals.

Panchanathan's scientific contributions have advanced the areas of human-centered multimedia computing, haptic user interfaces and ubiquitous computing technologies for enhancing the quality of life for individuals with different abilities; machine learning for multimedia applications; and media processor designs. He has published close to 500 articles in refereed journals and conference proceedings, and has mentored more than 150 graduate students, postdocs, research engineers and research scientists, many who now occupy leading positions in academia and industry.

For his scientific contributions, Panchanathan has received numerous awards, including Honorary Doctorates from prestigious universities, Distinguished Alumnus Awards, the Governor’s Innovator of the Year for

Academia Award, the Washington Academy of Sciences Distinguished Career Award and the IEEE-USA Public Service Award.

Panchanathan is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors, where he also served as vice president for strategic initiatives. He is also a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Canadian Academy of Engineering, the Association for Computing Machinery, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers and the Society of Optical Engineering.

Dr. Joan Y. Reede, appointed as Harvard Medical School's (HMS) first Dean for Diversity and Community Partnership in January of 2002, has been responsible for promoting inclusive excellence in health, biomedical, behavioral, and STEM fields, as well as growing individual and institutional capacity to foster innovation and impact, build on a foundation of excellence, and advance health equity.

Dr. Reede is a graduate of Brown University and Mount Sinai School of Medicine. She completed a pediatric residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, and a fellowship in child psychiatry at Boston Children's Hospital. She holds an MPH, an MS in Health Policy Management from Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, and an MBA from Boston University. Dr. Reede is a member of the National Academy of Medicine (2011) and a fellow of American Association for the Advancement of Science (2019). She serves as a member of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) on their Board of Directors and previously as the chair of AAMC Group on Diversity and Inclusion (GDI). She is the recipient of honorary Doctor of Science degrees from the New York Institute of Technology and Georgetown University. In July of 2024, Dr. Reede was recognized by the W. Montague Cobb/National Medical Association Health Institute (The Cobb Institute) by receiving the W. Montague Cobb Lifetime Achievement Award.

In 1989, Dr. Reede served as the medical director of a community health center in Boston and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. She worked as a pediatrician in the community, serving populations in academic health centers, public schools, and juvenile prisons. In 1990, Dr. Reede founded the HMS Minority Faculty Development Program and currently serves as faculty director of the Community Engagement programs. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Medical Society and the New England Board of Higher Education, Dr. Reede founded the Biomedical Careers Program (BSCP) in 1991. A collaborative, community-based organization, BSCP's scope of involvement includes academia, private industry, medical centers, public education, and professional societies. BSCP's goal is to identify, inform, support, and provide mentoring for academically outstanding students, fellows, and early career professionals in the biomedical and health sciences.

Dr. Reede created and developed more than 20 programs at HMS that address pathways for those who are interested in careers in medicine, academic and scientific research, and the healthcare professions. Supported by a dedicated staff, she has developed mentoring programs for students from middle school through the graduate and medical school levels. She has also designed a training program for middle and high school teachers, developed science curricula for public schools, implemented research and exchange clerkship programs at HMS, and designed and implemented innovative fellowships in health policy for physicians, dentists, and doctoral-level mental health professionals.

At a national level, Dr. Reede's advice and expertise is highly sought after amongst several committees and councils, such as her appointments to the Health and Human Services Advisory Committee on Minority Health, the Board of Governors for the Warren Grant Magnuson Clinical Center, the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce, the Advisory Committee to the Director for National Institutes of Health, and the Advisory Committee on Genetics, Health, and Society for the National Institute of Health.

JoAnn Trejo, PhD, MBA is professor of pharmacology and senior assistant Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences Faculty Affairs at the University of California (UC) San Diego. She completed her undergraduate degree at UC Davis, earned her PhD and MBA at UC San Diego and completed postdoctoral training at UC San Francisco. Dr. Trejo is a basic science researcher with expertise in cell signaling in the context of vascular inflammation and cancer. Her research has been published in >100 peer-reviewed articles and continuously funded by the NIH and she is a recipient of a NIH R35 Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA) and the American Heart Association Established Investigator Award. Dr. Trejo is an outstanding educator, mentor and a leader actively engaged in initiatives aimed at enhancing excellence in science and pharmacology. She is the director of five NIH-supported training programs including the UC San Diego IRACDA Postdoctoral Scholars Program, FIRST Program and three early career faculty development programs. Dr. Trejo served as an elected member of the leadership Council for the ASCB and the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and is a current member of the scientific advisory boards for Septerna and Versiti. She has also served on multiple NIH Study Sections, the NCI Board of Scientific Counselors for Basic Sciences, and Blavatnik, HHMI and Chan Zuckerberg foundation review panels. Dr. Trejo is a current member of the NIGMS Advisory Council. She is the Associate Editor for Molecular Biology of the Cell and is an editorial board member for Proceedings National Academy of Sciences Nexus, Journal of Biological Chemistry and Molecular Pharmacology. She has received numerous awards for her leadership and service in the scientific community at large. Dr. Trejo is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine, American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB) Fellow and 100 Inspiring Hispanic / Latinx Scientists and was recently elected honorary fellow of the British Pharmacological Society.