

VII. STANDING COMMITTEES

A. Academic and Student Affairs Committee

Honorary Degree – Virginia BeavertRECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is the recommendation of the administration and the Academic and Student Affairs Committee that the Board of Regents approve the granting of an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree to Virginia Rosalyn Beavert, a Yakama Tribal elder who has played a seminal role in the preservation and documentation of the Sahaptin language and its legends, the ancestral language of native peoples of central Washington and Oregon.

BACKGROUND:

RCW 28B.20.130(3) grants to the Board of Regents, upon recommendation of the faculty, the authority to confer honorary degrees upon persons other than graduates “in recognition of their learning or devotion to literature, arts, or sciences.” The Faculty Council on University Relations is responsible for recommending candidates for honorary degrees. On April 17, 2009, the Council recommended to President Emmert that Ms. Beavert be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at the University’s June commencement ceremony. President Emmert concurs with the recommendation and brings it to the Board of Regents on behalf of the faculty.

Ms. Beavert’s work and scholarship over the past thirty years have almost single-handedly preserved a significant indigenous language spoken by people who inhabited one-third of Washington State until 160 years ago. This remarkable feat is of inestimable historical, linguistic and cultural value. Her work on the documentation, development, and revitalization of the Sahaptin language is recognized throughout North America and increasingly throughout the world. While the most direct beneficiaries of her language revitalization and teaching efforts are the Yakama and other Sahaptin tribes, her work represents for other indigenous peoples experiencing a vanishing language a way to preserve and restore it and the culture it represents. Communities around the world—Aboriginal Australians, South and Southeast Asian forest communities, African minority communities, Siberian native communities, the Maori of New Zealand and others—understand what a loss of language means to a surviving culture. There is a growing world-wide movement in support of preservation and revitalization of marginalized languages. Ms. Beavert stands as a beacon to those who would undertake such daunting tasks.

She has received numerous awards recognizing and honoring her life’s work, including a National Endowment for the Humanities Faculty Research

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Award (2004), a State of Washington Governor's Heritage Award in 2005, the 2008 Ken Hale Prize from the Society for the Study of Indigenous Languages of the Americas, and a Distinguished Service award from the University of Oregon, also in 2008.

Ms. Beavert earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Anthropology from Central Washington University in 1986, which also named her Distinguished Alumna of the year in 2007, and a Master of Education in Bilingual/Bicultural Education from the University of Arizona in 2000. She has taught Sahaptin for more than a quarter century at various colleges and universities in the northwest, including Central Washington University, Yakima Valley Community College, Heritage University, and the University of Oregon. She is the author and co-author of numerous scholarly articles on Sahaptin, and this year, the University of Washington Press and Heritage University will jointly publish the first comprehensive dictionary of the Sahaptin language, her life's work.

For her unique and extraordinary work in preserving the language and culture of indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest, and for the legacy she is passing on to future generations of Sahaptin-speaking tribes, it would be an honor to confer upon Virginia Rosalyn Beavert an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at the June commencement.