

VII. STANDING COMMITTEES

A. Academic and Student Affairs Committee

Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters Degree to His Holiness the 14th Dalai LamaRECOMMENDED 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 His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama at a special Convocation in His honor at Hec Edmundson Pavilion on April 14, 2008.

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 February 8, 2008, the Council recommended to President Emmert that His Holiness the Dalai Lama be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree at a special convocation in honor of the Dalai Lama’s visit to the University of Washington on April 14, 2008, as part of his “Seeds of Compassion” initiative. President Emmert concurs with the recommendation and brings it to the Board of Regents on behalf of the faculty.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is both the head of state of the government-in-exile and the spiritual leader of Tibet. Born to a Tibetan peasant family, he was recognized at the age of two, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of his predecessor the 13th Dalai Lama. In 1950, at age 16, His Holiness assumed full political power as head of State and Government in Tibet. After multiple attempts at reaching accord with China, His Holiness escaped to India in 1959. While in exile, he has continued proposing peaceful resolution of issues with China. He urges non-violence and compassion among his followers. In India, His Holiness established educational, cultural, and religious institutions to preserve Tibetan identity and heritage and serve the thousands of Tibetan exiles living in India.

His international reputation as a scholar and man of peace has grown steadily. In 1989, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his distinguished leadership in service to freedom and peace, and for his ecological concerns. In 2006, he was granted honorary citizenship by Canada, and in 2007, he received the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal.

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In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, he said, “I believe suffering is caused by ignorance. People inflict pain on others in the selfish pursuit of their happiness or satisfaction. Yet true happiness comes from a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. We need to cultivate a universal responsibility for one another and the planet we share. Although I have found my own Buddhist religion helpful in generating love and compassion, even for those we consider our enemies, I am convinced that everyone can develop a good heart and a sense of universal responsibility with or without religion.”

For his advocacy of non-violence and his promotion of compassion, responsibility, and understanding, it would be fitting for the University to honor this world leader by conferring an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree when he visits the University in April.