

VII. STANDING COMMITTEE

A. Academic and Student Affairs Committee

Honorary Degree—Melinda French GatesRECOMMENDED 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 Melinda French Gates, co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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 “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. In February 2007, the Council recommended to President Emmert that Ms. Gates be awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree. Ms. Gates was unable to attend the University’s June commencement ceremonies, but the occasion of this fall’s Freshman Convocation ceremony provides an opportunity for the Regents to award the degree. President Emmert concurs with the recommendation and brings it to the Board of Regents on behalf of the faculty.

Ms. Gates’ influence has shaped the priorities and direction of the Foundation that bears her name. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is the largest philanthropic foundation on earth, and it is changing and improving people’s lives worldwide. Its fundamental belief that all lives, no matter where they are lived, have equal value and deserve equal opportunity at health and prosperity, drives its vision to use its substantial resources to improve the health and well-being of people in less fortunate circumstances, whether on the continent of Africa or in rural or urban America. The work of the Gates Foundation indelibly bears the mark of its founders—it is their intellect, vision, philosophy and deep engagement that empower the Foundation to accomplish its work. The Foundation has committed more than \$6 billion in global health grants to organizations worldwide. Specific targets have included malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, nutrition and maternal health, newborn and child health, and the bold \$448 million Grand Challenges in Global Health initiative, which identified a set of scientific problems that, if solved, could lead to advances against multiple diseases. The program supports 44 innovative projects by some of the very best scientists in the world. The Foundation is also active in global development (agricultural development, financial services for the poor, and global libraries), as well as education and library support programs in the U.S.

For her far-reaching and visionary efforts through philanthropy to improve the lives of people throughout the world struggling with poverty, disease, hunger, and lack of education, it would be an honor to confer upon Melinda French Gates an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree.