TO: Alex Cartwright, Chancellor  
FROM: Ben Trachtenberg, Committee Chair  
DATE: May 29, 2018  

RE: Annual Report of the Committee for Honorary Degrees

Please accept this annual report for the 2017-2018 academic year, which I submit on behalf of the Committee for Honorary degrees. The charge of the Committee is “to recommend to the Board of Curators, through the Faculty Council, the names of individuals to be considered for honorary degrees at commencement.”

During the academic year now coming to a close, the Committee met in person four times, once each in September, November, February, and April. A fifth and final meeting is scheduled for June. Our membership included:

Faculty:

Chris Daniggelis, Dan Edidin, Toshihiko Ezashi, Rebecca Johnson (past chair), Susan McKarns, Laura Schopp (appointed late in the year to a vacant seat), Don Sievert (retiree member), Wendy Sims, Ben Trachtenberg (chair), Yong Volz, and Tim Vos

Ex Officio:

Marty Oetting and Jim Spain

The Committee received valuable support from Michelle Marsden (Provost’s Office), as well as from Janet Sapp (Chancellor’s Office).

During 2017-2018, MU conferred three honorary degrees: William Baker (December), Ann Covington (May), and Richard Orin (May). This is in keeping with the usual number of honorary degrees conferred each year (three to four). These candidates had been proposed by the Committee in prior years, and their nominations had worked their way through the approval process set forth in Section 220.030 of the UM Collected Rules and Regulations.

This year, the Committee recommended additional candidates for consideration by Faculty Council (and then, if approved by Council, by the Chancellor, President, and Curators). Those names are confidential, as are those of candidates recommended in prior years to whom degrees have not yet been conferred. It is our hope that we have recommended a sufficient number of appropriate candidates that MU can confer the usual number of honorary degrees in the coming years.
In addition, the Committee worked with staff in the Chancellor’s Office (and counterparts in the President’s Office) to follow up on recommendations made by the Committee and Faculty Council in prior years. The Committee enjoyed a good relationship with Jesse Hall and University Hall. As the (relatively) new administrative leaders gain more familiarity with the University’s honorary degree processes, it may be useful for the Chancellor (or, perhaps, his Chief of Staff) to suggest any ways in which the Committee’s work could be more helpful to the Chancellor’s Office. Feedback from the Office of the President might be useful too. From the perspective of the Committee, the status quo seems pretty good, but the Committee would of course welcome constructive suggestions for improvement.

Beyond its usual work of considering possible degree candidates, the Committee considered how to better publicize degrees already conferred (for example, a better web presence). In particular, the Committee suggested to the Office of the Chancellor that the University should recognize the upcoming 150th anniversary of honorary degrees at MU, which will occur in 2019. Although the Committee stands ready to assist, the planning and execution of such a celebration is likely better delegated to University Events or other experts.

Please let me know if you would like any further information about the Committee’s work.

Cc: Anna Ball, Faculty Fellow for Faculty Development
    Michelle Marsden, Office of the Provost