



July 7, 2021

Dr. Ben Givens, Secretary  
University Senate  
119 Independence Hall  
1923 Neil Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43210

Dear Ben,

Please accept this communication as the 2020-2021 Senate's Committee on Honorary Degrees report. This past year the committee was composed of the following members: James Cogdell (2023); Jennifer Crocker (2022); Christopher Hill (2022); William Marras (2021); Richard Pogge (2022); Lorraine Wallace (2022); and Caroline Wagner (2023, Chair). William Marras completes his service this spring. Joseph Heremans will join the committee in the fall. Caroline Wagner was voted to continue as Chair for the coming year.

Due to the pandemic, we were unable to meet in person, but we continued to operate effectively online.

Thank you for updating the list of Awardees on the Senate page up to 2020.

The Committee received three nominations this year. We processed four nominations that carried over from the previous year. The committee approved four nominations, which were presented to and approved by the Senate.

- One approved nomination still needs to go to the Board of Trustees (Claude Steele).
- One additional nomination is approved by the committee and it will be presented to the Senate in the 2021-22 academic year (Wayne Newton).
- One nomination arrived late in the academic year and we have requested additional letters for the dossier (Freeman Hrabowski); the Committee will vote on this one in the Fall.
- One nomination has not moved forward, but it awaits feedback from the Office of Academic Affairs (Dave Malkoff).

The status of our grantees/nominees is as follows: The committee approved the following nominations:

- Robert Bilott
- Richard Langer (conferred)
- David Awschalom.

The Senate approved these nominations and they were approved by the Board of Trustees. Dr. Langer's award has been conferred.

The pandemic year has created a backlog for the awarding of the Honor, and, at this time, and the following awardees have been approved by the Board of Trustees, but they have not been scheduled to receive their award:

- Robert Bilott
- Grace Wahba
- Kathryn Sullivan
- David Awschalom
- Robert Bilott

I have asked President Johnson's office to clarify when these awardees will receive their award.

Following a Rules change in 2018-2019, the Committee put into practice a more flexible process in its rules regarding the number of supporting letters required for nominees (up to six at the discretion of the committee, plus a supporting letter from the Dean of the relevant College). The committee also decided that nominators, rather than the committee chair, should collect supporting documents and submit them as a package to streamline the process. This process worked well this past year.

In March, the Committee responded to the Senate Ad Hoc Committee request to comment on survey results. The response noted that the Committee processes are working well at this time. In addition, we told the Ad Hoc Committee that we continued the past practice of having an email go to the entire faculty asking for nominations for the honorary degree. This often produces inquiries, some of which evolve into awards, however, the process was very quiet this year.

We further noted to the Senate Ad Hoc Committee that President Johnson has the ability to choose up to eight awardees, as she did with three this Spring. President Johnson awarded honorary degrees to Joyce Beatty, Ellen Ochoa, and Jamie Dimon, without consulting the Committee. The nominees who come through the Senate process represent the faculty and the Senate's deliberative decision to award a degree, independent of the President's office. Therefore, we told the Ad Hoc Committee that we did not support the idea of joint appointments with the President's office.

The committee has observed that the University confers a number of awards beyond the honorary degree, and it might be worth considering having the Committee be informed of nominations in consideration by other committees to eliminate duplication, and vice versa, to give the Honorary Degrees Committee the option of offering alternative opportunities for notable people who might not be qualified for an honorary degree. It would also enable discussions about diversity and inclusion.

The Committee will be presenting its activities for this past year to President Johnson in a Senate meeting on May 24, 2021, where the items noted in this letter will be discussed.

If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Warmest regards,

*Caroline S. Wagner*

Caroline S. Wagner  
Milton & Roslyn Wolf Chair in International Affairs  
John Glenn College of Public Affairs