TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: President Sabah Randhawa

DATE: June 15, 2018

SUBJECT: Awarding of Honorary Degree

PURPOSE: Action Item

Purpose of Submittal:

Pursuant to RCW 28B.35.205, the Board of Trustees, upon recommendation of the Faculty Senate, may authorize the awarding of honorary bachelor’s, master’s, or doctorate level degrees to individuals “in recognition of their learning or devotion to education, literature, art, or science.”

Western Washington University Board of Trustees Rules of Operation, Section 2.3 Authority Reserved by the Board, authorizes the awarding of honorary degrees [Section 2.3(f)]. The Faculty Senate Executive Council is responsible for reviewing nominations and recommending to me candidates for honorary degrees. The President then selects from among the nominees and, prior to sharing the possibility of such an award with the potential recipient, consults with the Chair of the Board of Trustees. These steps have been completed with regard to the recommended action I am now very pleased to bring before you.

I recommend that the Board approve awarding an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters for Catharine R. Stimpson. The degree will be conferred by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences as a part of the Spring Commencement.

Catharine R. Stimpson  
University Professor of English and Dean Emerita, Graduate School of Arts and Science  
New York University  
2018 Distinguished Alumna, Campus School  

One of seven Stimpson siblings—all of whom attended the Campus School—Catharine R. Stimpson began her professional life of academic accomplishment and critical inquiry in the John Dewey-influenced classroom of the Campus School. For Stimpson, the Campus School, along with her family, was the perfect foundation for her education. The quality teaching, the nurturing atmosphere, the experiential learning, and the love of learning the Campus School embodied gave Stimpson confidence and an intellectual curiosity that propelled her into academia.

“What I carried with me—and also from my undergraduate experience—was to make the classroom fun,” she says, “a place where you anticipate the joy of education, where there is a combination of intellectual rigor and deep kindness.”

Stimpson attended Bryn Mawr College, Cambridge University, and Columbia University. A pioneer in the study of women and gender, she founded Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society in 1974, where she remained editor until 1980. She published a novel called “Class
Notes” in 1980 and edited a book series for the University of Chicago Press. She was the first director of the Women’s Center at Barnard College. From 1994 to 1997, she was the director of the MacArthur Foundation in Chicago, home of the MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship Awards. Armed with her unconventional progressive education from the Campus School, quick wit, and fierce intellect, Stimpson published eight books, more than 150 monographs, essays, and stories, and served as co-editor of the two-volume Library of America edition of the works of Gertrude Stein.

Stimpson’s substantial contributions to the world of literary criticism and community service do not end there. She chaired the New York State Council for the Humanities, the National Council for Research on Women, and served as president of the Modern Language Association. She also served as a board member of PBS. She chaired the Ms. Magazine Board of Scholars and served as a member of the editorial group of Change magazine from 1992 to 1994. She currently chairs the board of Scholars at Risk, which provides assistance to threatened scholars worldwide. She teaches, among other things, Law and the Imagination at NYU Abu Dhabi. Though she travels the world and resides in New York, Stimpson celebrates her roots at The Campus School and in Bellingham in her professional life every day.

Proposed Motion:

MOVED, that the Board of Trustees of Western Washington University, upon recommendation by the President, award the degrees Doctorate of Humane Letters, Honoris Causa to Catharine R. Stimpson.