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Office of the President
June 22, 2018

Members, Board of Trustees:

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENTS

Recommendation: that the Board of Trustees approve awarding an Honorary Doctor of Humanities to Virginia G. Carter, as approved and recommended by the University Faculty.

Background: Pursuant to the Conditions of Merit for Honorary Degrees, the University Joint Committee on Honorary Degrees recommended to the elected Faculty Senators that the specified honorary degree be awarded to Virginia G. Carter. The elected Faculty Senators have approved the recommendation.

Biographical sketch of the recipient is attached.

Action taken: Approved Disapproved Other _____

Virginia G. Carter
Honorary Doctor of Humanities

Virginia Carter was born on August 6, 1947, the third of Francis and Roberta Grady's three children. With her brother George and sister Kathleen, she grew up in Lexington and developed a deep appreciation for nature, the great outdoors, and adventure at an early age.

As a teenager, Carter was working as a carhop at a drive-in restaurant, earning money to pay for a summer educational experience at Harvard University. Yet, as Sarah Vos wrote in a 2011 article about Carter, her few months at the prestigious school helped Virginia realize the knowledge and culture she desired was all here in Kentucky – she just had to find it.

Several years later, armed with a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Louisiana State University, Carter enrolled in the master's degree program in art history at the University of Kentucky. In 1972, she joined the faculty of the University of Northern Iowa and taught art history there for four years. Her unquenchable thirst for learning and an opportunity to teach at UK brought her back to Kentucky in the late 1970s. Carter added a master's degree in anthropology and eventually her doctorate in the discipline from UK.

In 1988, Carter joined the staff of the Kentucky Humanities Council as Assistant Director and Grants Officer. One year later the opportunity of a lifetime presented itself, and she was named the Council's Executive Director. The Council, funded in large part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, flourished and expanded under Carter's leadership. Each year, its programs touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of Kentuckians.

In 1992, Carter developed Kentucky Chautauqua and Chautauqua in the Schools. Through more than 70 Chautauqua characters, the programs have presented some 7,000 living-history performances and discussions. Carter also was pivotal in developing the council's Speakers Bureau, a traveling scholars program providing communities around Kentucky with expert speakers on literature, history, folklore, culture, civics, and science. She also solidified the partnership between the Kentucky Humanities Council and the Kentucky Department of Library and Archives. That partnership brought to Kentucky the federally funded program Prime Time, which has promoted literacy and family reading time in communities throughout the state.

Kentucky Chautauqua took center stage in the Commonwealth in 2008 and again nationally in 2009 at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., as Carter authored, organized and co-produced "Our Lincoln: Kentucky's Gift to the Nation." A cast of more than 350 performers received standing ovations for their delivery of musical, theatrical, and historical tributes to Kentucky-born President Abraham Lincoln. Not even a severe ice storm could prevent Carter from delivering a magical performance to the nation's capital on behalf of her beloved home state.

Carter was a daring, creative, and innovative leader of the Kentucky Humanities Council for nearly 25 years and has devoted her life to making the arts and humanities more accessible to everyone.

Virginia G. Carter is recommended for an honorary Doctor of Humanities from the University of Kentucky.