

**Agendum  
Oakland University  
Board of Trustees Formal Session  
September 11, 2023**

**APPROVAL OF HONORARY DEGREE FOR ERIC HEMENWAY  
A Recommendation**

- 1. Division and Department:** Academic Affairs, Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost.
- 2. Introduction:** In accordance with Article IX of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees, honorary degrees may be awarded by the Board of Trustees in recognition of distinguished accomplishment and service within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences, professions, and public service as recognized and supported by the University. The awarding of honorary degrees reaffirms Oakland University's scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and ties the University to the community at large.

Eric Hemenway, Director of Repatriation, Archives, and Records for the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa (LTBBO), was nominated by three faculty members. Mr. Hemenway has a distinguished record as a Native American scholar and leader. He has been a tireless advocate for the return of cultural objects and, more importantly, the bodies of deceased American Indians held by museums and other institutions to twenty-first-century Native Nations.

In his role as the Director, he has been responsible for the return of artworks, tools, and other spiritually charged goods not only to his own federally recognized tribe, but he has also laid the groundwork for literally dozens of other tribal governments to regain possession of sacred objects and human remains. He has overseen an average of ten repatriations per year on behalf of the LTBBO. The national average for tribes is three per year, so it's not an overstatement to describe Mr. Hemenway's commitment to this kind of recovery work as profoundly and productively impactful on the LTBBO's cultural memory, preservation, and future.

Most tribes don't have a full archives department or resources, but Mr. Hemenway's tireless commitment has stewarded a whole department and a staff of three. In his own words, the archives are the "DNA" of tribal government—the very makeup of how tribes are able to document and identify who they are and what their histories are to the US government. Mr. Hemenway's most recent advocacy has resulted in a grant that will expand storage of the archives and an expanded reading room—Mr. Hemenway's literally growing spaces where Indigenous stories can be protected and perpetuated, thereby ensuring cultural recovery and preservation.

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As part of his efforts to bring Native American history and culture to the forefront, he has amassed an enviable publication record. His publication, "Finding Our Way Home: A Handbook for Tribes, Universities, Museums and Individuals Working Toward Reparation Under NAGPRA," is one of the leading guides for Native American communities.

Mr. Hemenway has not limited himself to tribal service. Educational outreach is a priority of his mission. He's a prolific and active public humanist and scholar, consulting internationally with museums and universities on their collections and teaching curators how to handle and make public (or not) culturally sensitive materials. He has brought to the general public an awareness of the expansive past and dynamic present of Native Americans in the Great Lakes region.

Mr. Hemenway consistently provides focused yet accessible presentations to visitors at local, state and national facilities throughout the Upper Midwest. His dedication to public history and the breadth of his reach are exemplified by the Native American Museum at the Biddle House on Mackinac Island, where he played a major role in the installation of the museum's permanent collection. He consults regularly with secondary education teachers on how to revise educational content around Native histories and topics. Moreover, his work has resulted in important, widespread advocacy for the truth about Native experiences in the U.S.; his feature on NBC Nightly News to discuss the legacy of boarding schools on Indigenous communities is an important example of his commitment to public education and public scholarship. His work ensures that Indigenous peoples are able to tell their own histories and stories on their own terms, a radical decolonizing action that puts agency back into the hands of Michigan's tribes.

Mr. Hemenway has engaged and supported OU since he appeared at our Land Acknowledgement Ceremony. He has continued that relationship through his partnership with the Native American Advisory Committee, his participation in Native American Heritage Month events in 2022, and his class visits to Professor Andrea Knutson's ENG 3530 Introduction to Indigenous Literature of North America. This important and evolving relationship with Mr. Hemenway, rooted in his professional work and identity as an Indigenous member of Michigan's inter-tribal community, has already impacted Oakland University's students and campus culture beyond measure.

Mr. Hemenway's work as a tribal historian and archivist is defining what the transformative power of education can do. In his capacity as Director of Repatriation and Archives for the LTBBBO, he is changing the conversations that we, in this nation, are having about Indigenous topics and people from the inside out. His impact has

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reached the National Park Service, museums and historical organizations, land conservation organizations across the United States, in addition to the classrooms in our schools and universities. Mr. Hemenway's multi-faceted roles in his position as director and his commitment to education align with and fulfill what Oakland University states as its own mission and vision: to "impact Michigan and the world through education, research, scholarship, and creative activity" and to "leave a lasting impact on the world through the transformative power of education and research."

It is our suggestion, with your approval, that Eric Hemenway be awarded a Doctor of Arts *honoris causa* from the College of Arts and Sciences at the CAS ceremony on the tentative date of April 26, 2024. Should you determine that a more appropriate (different) degree be awarded, or at a different ceremony, the Honorary Degree Committee supports your recommendation (without further review).

3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board of Trustees periodically awards honorary degrees at its Formal Sessions.
4. **Budget Implications:** None.
5. **Educational Implications:** The awarding of honorary degrees is an established tradition in academe, by which the University reaffirms its scholarly, creative, and humanitarian values and its ties to the wider community.
6. **Personnel Implications:** None.
7. **University Reviews/Approvals:** The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost has recommended approval of the recipient to receive an Honorary Degree.
8. **Recommendation:**

RESOLVED, that the Board of Trustees awards the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities *Honoris Causa* to Eric Hemenway.

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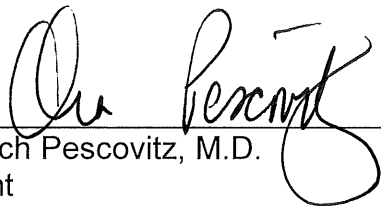
9. Attachments: None.

Submitted to the President  
on 9/8, 2023 by



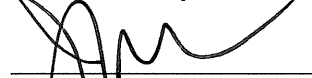
Britt Rios-Ellis, M.S., Ph.D.  
Executive Vice President for  
Academic Affairs and Provost

Recommended on 9/8, 2023  
to the Board for Approval by



Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.  
President

Reviewed by



Joshua D. Merchant, Ph.D.  
Chief of Staff and  
Secretary to the Board of Trustees