

**Agendum
Oakland University
Board of Trustees Formal Session
June 28, 2024**

**APPROVAL OF HONORARY DEGREE FOR AUSTIN CHANNING BROWN
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.

Austin Channing Brown was nominated by a group of ten faculty. Austin Channing Brown is an internationally renowned author, speaker, and thought leader. The magnitude of Brown's work cannot be overstated. Her memoir, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* has gained international recognition as a #1 New York Times Bestseller, while also being highlighted as part of Reese Witherspoon's book club selection. Brown has also made her mark as a prominent speaker, hosted by the following organizations: Stanford University, Penn State University, DePauw University, National Anti Racist Book Festival, Wells Fargo, and The National Cathedral among others. Kirsten Powers of USA Today, noted, "Austin is one of the most important voices in America." Brown brings honor to our state and region through her important work on racial equity. Her recognition would be an opportunity to acknowledge one of our own, as Brown is a Michigander and a former Metro Detroit resident.

An excerpt of the nomination letter below highlights the committee's thoughts: "As a committee that is focused on not just awareness, but action in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can't help but think about a section of Brown's book in which she wrote of a fellow student who was learning about racism who said, "Doing nothing is no longer an option for me" (p.58). This is a feeling we can all relate to, especially recently. While we are not always sure what to do, doing nothing is also no longer an option for us as a committee, nor should it be for anyone at Oakland University. This idea of doing nothing no longer being an option, but grappling with what the right thing to do is, brought us to another passage in Brown's book where she wrote: When we win the award, I feel something. When we get the promotion, I feel something. When we break barriers, I feel something (Brown, 2018, p. 122). She goes on to write of her book and advocacy efforts:

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It is working in the dark, not knowing if anything I do will ever make a difference. It is speaking anyway, writing anyway, loving anyway. It is enduring disappointment and then getting back to work. It is knowing that this book may only be read by my Momma, and writing it anyway (p. 181). Let us meet her as she rests in "the shadow of hope" (p.180) for a time, where all Black Americans can rest in a world of equality and safety."

Brown has shown bravery in telling her story and has contributed to a national discussion around race. She has chosen to engage others in an educational discourse creating notable growth and discussion. The recognition would be for the emotional work she leads us through by educating all of us on her experiences and the broader topic of racism in America. We recommend that Austin be awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa from the School of Education and Human Services at the 2:00 PM ceremony on Friday, December 13, 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).

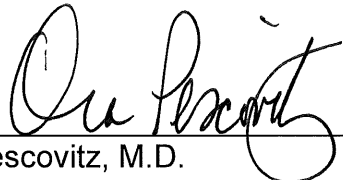
3. **Previous Board Action:** The Board of Trustees periodically awards honorary degrees at its Formal Sessions.
4. **Budget Implications:** None.
5. **Educational Implications:** The awarding of honorary degrees is an established tradition in academe, by which the University reaffirms its scholarly, 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 Humane Letter *Honoris Causa* to Austin Channing Brown.

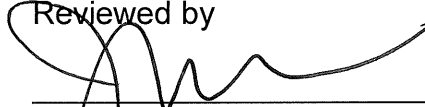
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9. Attachments: None.

Recommended on 6/21, 2024
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