

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

**REQUEST TO AWARD AN HONORARY DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS DEGREE AT  
THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA**

**Action Requested:** Consider approval of the request by the University of Iowa to award an honorary doctor of humane letters degree to Robert Hass at Spring 2009 Commencement.

**Executive Summary:** The University of Iowa wishes to recognize Dr. Hass for his exceptional contributions to poetry and his distinguished service to the University of Iowa and the nation. As a poet, teacher, and champion of literacy and ecological awareness, Dr. Hass has influenced and inspired countless writers, readers, students, and educators.

**Details on Dr. Hass's Accomplishments:**

- ◇ Dr. Hass is one of the most distinguished poets in America today. He has received the highest possible honors for his excellence as a poet throughout his career.
  - 📖 In 1973, his first collection of poems, *Field Guide*, was selected by Stanley Kunitz for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award.
  - 📖 In 1979, his second collection, *Praise*, received the William Carlos Williams Award from the Poetry Society of America.
  - 📖 In 1984, his book of criticism, *Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Poetry*, won the National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism and the *Belles Lettres* Award from the Bay Area Book Reviewers Association.
  - 📖 In 1989, his collection of poems, *Human Wishes*, was published to wide acclaim.
  - 📖 In 1995, he was named Poet Laureate of the United States, a position he held until 1997.
  - 📖 In 1996, his collection, *Sun Under Wood*, received the National Book Critics Circle Award.
  - 📖 In 2008, his collection, *Time and Materials*, won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award.
  
- ◇ As U.S. Poet Laureate, Dr. Hass placed an emphasis on literacy and ecological awareness. He helped promote and organize "Watershed," a weeklong gathering of writers and environmentalists designed to teach inner-city children about the nation's tradition of nature writing. In 1995, his commitment to environmental issues led him to establish the "River of Words" poetry contest, which integrates environmental and arts education. Through River of Words, thousands of school children have developed their creative voices. In 1997, he was named Educator of the Year by the North American Association on Environmental Education.

- ◆ Dr. Hass was honored with a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1980, Award of Merit from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1984, and a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant in 1984. He served as an elected Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2001-2007 and was selected to edit the anthology “Best American Poetry of 2001.”
- ◆ As a champion of literacy, Dr. Hass put into action his belief that “imagination makes communities.” He has played a significant role as an international force for poetry. He was a U. S. - Great Britain Bicentennial Exchange Fellow in the Arts in 1976-77. His work as a translator demonstrates his belief in the universality of poetry and the power of an international community of letters. His work with Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz garnered two PEN/BABRA Translation Awards. He is the editor of Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer’s *Selected Poems: 1954-1986* and of *The Essential Haiku: Versions of Basho, Buson, and Issa*.
- ◆ As an undergraduate, Dr. Hass attended St. Mary’s College in Moraga, California. His Master’s and Ph.D. degrees are from Stanford University.
- ◆ Dr. Hass is a Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, where he has taught since 1989. His teaching and research interests, in addition to poetry, include modern American literature, environmental history, and environmental literature.
- ◆ Dr. Hass is a much-anticipated visitor at the Writers’ Workshop where his presence brings enormous inspiration to students, faculty, and the University community. In 2006, his public lecture, “Study War No More: Violence and the Literary Imagination,” delivered as part of the Writers’ Workshop Faculty Lecture series, was attended by hundreds of listeners. His public readings on the University campus bring in enthusiastic audiences, and his courses in the Writers’ Workshop affect the creative work of dozens of young poets.

Dr. Hass is a gracious and engaged member of the creative community who has given much to the nation, his profession, and the University of Iowa.