

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 Marilyn Robinson at Spring 2017 Commencement.

**Executive Summary:** The University of Iowa wishes to recognize Dr. Robinson for her outstanding contributions to literary fiction and non-fiction, and for her extraordinary commitment to the humanities and to teaching.

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

- ◇ Dr. Robinson was born and grew up in Sandpoint, Idaho. Her brother is the art historian, David Summers, who dedicated his book, *Vision, Reflection, and Desire in Western Painting*, to her. She did her undergraduate work at Pembroke College, receiving her B.A. magna cum laude in 1966, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Washington in 1977.
- ◇ Dr. Robinson is an American novelist and essayist best known for her novels *Housekeeping* (1980), *Gilead* (2004), *Home* (2008), and *Lila* (2014). *Housekeeping*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, was recognized by *The Guardian* as one of the 100 best novels ever written in the English Language. *Gilead* won the Pulitzer Prize, as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award. *Home* won the Los Angeles Times Book Award and the Orange Prize. *Lila* won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a National Book Award finalist.
- ◇ Her collection of essays, which been translated into many languages and reviewed and praised in major publications by writers and scholars, have also earned international acclaim. The subjects of her essays have spanned numerous topics, including the relationship between religion and science, nuclear pollution, John Calvin, and contemporary American politics.
- ◇ Dr. Robinson was a faculty member in the Writers' Workshop and in the Department of English at the University of Iowa for 25 years, until her retirement in June 2016. In 2005, she was named the F. Wendell Miller Professor of English and Creative Writing. Throughout her career at the University of Iowa, Dr. Robinson demonstrated her deep commitment to the humanities and to teaching. She was an influential leader in her profession, taught and mentored some of the best-known writers at work today, and brought unparalleled distinction to the University of Iowa.
- ◇ President Barack Obama has frequently mentioned *Gilead* as one of his favorite books, and he has personally honored her twice: once in 2012, at the White House ceremony where she received the National Humanities Medal, the highest honor in the humanities that the U.S. Government offers; and again in Fall 2015, when he requested the opportunity to interview her for what became a two-part piece in the *New York Review of Books* covering topics in American history and the role of faith in society.

- ◇ In 2016, she was awarded the Library of Congress Prize for American Fiction. Time named her to its list of 100 most influential people. In 2010, she was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She was also elected a fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford University.
  
- ◇ The University of Iowa wishes to recognize Dr. Robinson's extraordinary achievements.