The Honorary Degree Committee serves as a screening and review panel for possible recipients of honorary degrees. It provides the President and the Trustees with consultation and advice on faculty perspectives, but does not have actionable power. Final decisions rest with the Board of Trustees. Faculty committee members this year were: Lester Caudill, Linda Hobgood, Daniel Murphy, Angel Otero-Blanco, Carol Parish, and Jonathan Wight (chair). In addition, Ann Lloyd Breeden (Secretary to the Board) participated in discussions and Shay Moore (Office of the President) provided support.

The Committee invited nominations of candidates from the University Community via Spiderbytes in early September, with a deadline of September 16. Categories of potential honorary awards are: Doctor of Laws, Doctor of Science, Doctor of Commercial Science, Doctor of Letters, Doctor of Fine Arts, Doctor of Humanities, Doctor of Leadership, Doctor of Social Science, and Doctor of Divinity. Nominees are to be “stellar representatives of the University's core values, who have distinguished themselves through professional, civic or humanitarian achievements.”

Nominations and supporting materials were received electronically. The Committee considered 39 nominations, some of which were new nominations and others were held over from last year. All of the nominees were exceptional individuals. The criteria used to evaluate candidates were (not in order): (1) the candidate’s accomplishments within his/her field; (2) the candidate’s length of career service; (3) the strength of the candidate’s relationship with the University of Richmond; (4) potential student interest and/or connection.

Of the 39 nominations considered, 5 candidates’ names were forwarded to the President and the Board of Trustees as being exceptionally worthy and ready for recognition. In addition, a number of candidates that received the Committee’s endorsement in previous years (but were not granted honorary awards in those years) were also kept active and put forward again for the Board’s consideration. For May graduation 2009 the Board decided not to award any honorary degrees. This year of abeyance invites us to consider with the Provost and the President the practice of Honorary Degrees—their purpose, their application, and their possible meaning to the community.

The Committee also took action this year to provide greater consistency in how nominations are considered and a more transparent review of past and current applicants. Applications for Honorary Degrees for 2010 will be accepted during the summer and into mid September. Interested faculty with questions should consult the chair or another committee member.

Respectfully submitted,
Jonathan B. Wight, Chair
April 23, 2009