

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE**

Committee on Honorary Degrees  
(Final; Action)

HD.18.01 Nominations for Honorary Degrees

The Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees is pleased to nominate the following individuals for an honorary degree to be conferred at the May 2018 Commencement exercises:

- Sheila Crump Johnson
- Robert S. Langer

Information relative to the background and achievements of these nominees is attached. Based on the criteria approved by the Senate, the Committee has selected these individuals for Senate consideration.

The Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation to all who participated in the process, particularly those who spent considerable amounts of time and effort in preparing documentation for these nominees.

COMMITTEE ON HONORARY DEGREES  
Matthew Wheeler, Chair  
Elvira Demejia  
Pradeep Dhillon  
Harry Hilton  
Mari Latham  
Thomas Nevins  
Raphael Stern



Sheila Crump Johnson  
CEO, Salamander Hotels and Resorts  
Vice Chair, Monumental Sports & Entertainment

EDUCATION:

B.S., Music Education, with Honors, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1970

*Nominated by: Jeffrey Magee, Professor and Director, School of Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

BASIS FOR NOMINATION:

Sheila Johnson stands among the most successful and accomplished UI alumni to have graduated in the past fifty years. Her career trajectory has taken her from being a music teacher to become an extraordinarily gifted and forward-thinking entrepreneur and philanthropist in media, sports, hospitality, leadership, and higher education. She also brings a strong social justice sensibility to all that she does. In the fall of 2016, the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics honored her with an Achievement Award in recognition of her success and of her distinction for being the first African American cheerleader in Illini history. At the awards ceremony she reaffirmed the importance of the School of Music and the University in her life and work. Indeed, she credits her violin and music education studies here as the foundation for all of her achievements

EXCERPT FROM THE NOMINATION LETTER:

“An accomplished violinist, she taught music at Sidwell Friends School and developed a robust private studio of violin students. In 1975, she founded Young Strings in Action, a group of aspiring musicians whom she took on an international tour. In 1979, Johnson co-founded Black Entertainment Television, the first network to focus on the needs, interests, and culture of African Americans when it first aired in January 1980. In addition to initiating successful programming for adult audiences, Johnson created “Teen Summit,” a weekly program that allowed teenagers to speak candidly about critical issues in their lives. In 2005, as founder and CEO she launched Salamander Hotels and Resorts, now with three locations in Middleburg, VA; Destin, FL; and New Orleans, LA. That same year, she became President and Managing Partner of the Washington Mystics of the Women’s National Basketball Association. She has expanded her leadership role in athletics to become Vice Chair of Monumental Sports & Entertainment with ownership in three professional sports franchises: Washington Capitals (NHL), Washington Wizards (NBA), as well as the Mystics. In 2006, she was appointed the Global Ambassador for CARE, a humanitarian agency fighting global poverty, and raised \$8 million by the following year. In 2010, Barack Obama appointed her to the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities.”

## EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

### *Derwin Dubose, Director of Development, Alabama School of Mathematics and Science*

"I will always cherish my conversations with Sheila because she openly shares how she converted obstacles into success. She is proud of her father's work as a neurosurgeon, but she will also share that the discrimination her family endured fueled her stellar academics and extra-curricular work at the University of Illinois. She is proud of her work to found BET, but she will also share that sexism there fueled her business success in areas where women were absent. She is proud of The Salamander Resort, the crown gem in her hospitality empire, but she will also share that initial opposition fueled her to create the nation's best case study on economic and community development in under-served communities. These conversations with Sheila taught me how to define my own leadership practice within a fractured world.

Thanks to Sheila, I have dedicated my life to the service of our nation and its most vulnerable people, and I am one of countless people she has inspired. There are more than 25 Sheila C. Johnson fellows at the Harvard Kennedy School. Hundreds of students have learned from your Daniel J. Perrino Chair of Jazz Studies and the Susan Starrett Chair in Violin. More than 80 million people have received life-saving help through CARE. That doesn't include her investments in the New School, University of Virginia, and hundreds of other institutions that build the capacity for future leadership. I believe that history will remember Sheila Crump Johnson as poignantly as we remember Madame C.J. Walker and Mary McLeod Bethune, pioneers in securing business and educational opportunities for others. Sheila has set an example for a new generation of leaders who will convert the nation's challenges into success."

### *Susan Starrett, Music Educator*

"Having known Sheila since she was a 16-year old high school Orchestra student of mine, and continued our close friendship ever since, I have watched her amazing entrepreneur spirit play out as she worked in the field of Music, Music Editing, Philanthropic work in the US and beyond benefitting Women, Children, and future leaders of our country. She successfully co-founded and programmed BET (Black Entertainment TV before she and husband sold BET to Viacom). She has produced films and today runs a prominent Film Festival at her Salamander Resort and Spa in Middleburg, VA."

### *Daniel McDonough, Assistant Clinical Professor, School of Music, College of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

"Even this cursory summation of her life's work reveals the most significant aspect of Ms. Johnson's philanthropic and business ventures: nearly all of them seek to improve the lives of historically underserved and marginalized populations. The impact she has had on women, and particularly those of color, cannot be overstated. Because of this impact she was chosen in 2010 by Barack Obama to serve on the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities."

Robert S. Langer  
David H. Koch Institute Professor  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)

EDUCATION:

B.S., with distinction, Chemical Engineering, Cornell University, 1970

Sc.D., Chemical Engineering, MIT, 1974

*Nominated by: Kenneth S. Suslick Schmidt Professor Emeritus, Department of Chemistry, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

*Paul J.A. Kenis, Head, Department of Chemical & Biomolecular Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

*Jianjun Cheng, Hans Thurnauer Professor of Materials Science and Engineering, Department of Materials Science & Engineering, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

BASIS FOR NOMINATION:

Professor Langer is arguably the most important and recognized engineer alive. He practically invented biotechnology and biomedicine. He is considered a pioneer of many new technologies, including controlled release systems and transdermal delivery systems, which allow the administration of drugs or extraction of analytes from the body through the skin without needles or other invasive methods. Langer is also regarded as the founder of tissue engineering in regenerative medicine. He and the researchers in his lab have made advances in tissue engineering, such as the creation of engineered blood vessels and vascularized engineered muscle tissue. Bioengineered synthetic polymers provide a scaffolding on which new skin, muscle, bone, and entire organs can be grown.

Dr. Langer has written nearly 1,380 articles. He also has over 1,130 issued and pending patents worldwide. Dr. Langer's patents have been licensed or sublicensed to over 300 pharmaceutical, chemical, biotechnology and medical device companies. He is the most cited engineer in history and according to Google Scholar, one of the 10 most cited individuals in history (cited more than 229,000 times with an h-index of 239; Google Scholar, 7/25/2017). Dr. Langer has received over 220 major awards. He is one of only four living individuals to have received both the University Statues National Medal of Science (2006) and the United States National Medal of Technology and Innovation (2011). He also received the 2002 Charles Stark Draper Prize, considered the equivalent of the Nobel Prize for engineers, the 2008 Millennium Prize, the world largest technology prize, the 2012 Priestley Medal, the highest award of the American Chemical Society, the 2013 Wolf Prize in Chemistry, the 2014 Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences and the 2014 Kyoto Prize. In 2015, Langer was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering, arguable the most influential prize in the world for engineering.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

*Ali Khademhosseini, Professor of Medicine and Health Sciences and Technology, Wyss Institute, Harvard Medical School*

“When he won the Millenium Prize, the world’s largest technology prize, the committee estimated that 100 million people each year directly benefit from his discoveries and inventions. As he received the Queen Elizabeth Prize in Engineering, the world’s largest engineering award, the committee wrote “hundreds of millions of people a year across the world benefit from the technologies that rest on the work of Robert Langer.” The Chemical Heritage Foundation recently noted that the number of people that will use technologies invented in his lab will exceed 2 billion people.”

*Jason Burdick, Professor, Department of Engineering, University of Pennsylvania*

“Bob is an amazing inventor, with over 1200 issued patents. He has translated this technology into numerous companies and products that are making an impact on patient lives. These range from products related to inhalation based drug delivery (AIR), to spinal cord implants (InVivo Therapeutics), to tissue adhesives (Gecko Biomedical).”

*Kristi Anseth, Distinguished Professor, Department of Chemical & Biological Engineering, University of Colorado Boulder*

“Bob has been an unequivocal leader in the biomedical research community for decades. His research contributions, especially those related to drug delivery and tissue engineering, are unparalleled in their depth and creativity. Bob is also a dedicated mentor and has trained several of the most influential leaders (industrial and academic) at the interface of bioengineering and health sciences. Further, his service to the community has been tireless, forging new links between biomedical engineers and biomaterials scientists, materials researchers, pharmaceutical scientists, biologists, clinical scientists, and chemists. I can think of no one who has had such a broad impact on the biomedical research community, and over the last 40 years, Bob has emerged as *the* internationally recognized figure known for his brilliant intellect and unending creativity and energy.”