

HD.25.05
December 9, 2024

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON HONORARY DEGREES
(Final; Action)

HD.25.05 Nomination for Honorary Degree Awards – Burrell, Khan

The Senate Committee on Honorary Degrees is pleased to nominate the following individuals for an honorary degree award to be conferred at the May 2025 Commencement exercises:

- Thomas J. Burrell
- Shahid R. Khan

Information relative to the background and achievements of this nominee 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
Prasanta Kalita, Chair
Meng Chen
Paul Davidson
Patrick Holt
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Laura Wilhelm-Barr, *ex officio*

APPROVED BY SENATE
12/09/2024

Thomas J. Burrell
Founder
Burrell Communications Group

EDUCATION:

B.A, English, Roosevelt University, 1962

Nominated by: Michelle Nelson, Department Head, The Charles H. Sandage Department of Advertising, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

BASIS FOR NOMINATION:

Tom Burrell is the most recognizable African American in the history of the advertising industry. He was born and spent his professional life in Chicago, Illinois – moving from the South Side of Chicago to the heights of the advertising industry. He is the founder of the Burrell Communications Group. Burrell is also legally blind – but despite his significant visual impairment, he not only survived but thrived in the world of advertising.

Burrell has been elected to the American Advertising Federation Hall of Fame, one of the industry's highest honors. He also received the Albert Lasker Award for Lifetime Achievement in Advertising and the Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism. Also, in 2017, he became the first African American creative elected to the One Club Creative Hall of Fame. *Advertising Age* magazine named him to its lists of the "50 Who Made a Difference" and "Top 100 Advertising People." During his retirement he has also continued his community service work as a member of the Board of Directors of the Chicago Urban League and as a member of the Board of Governors for the Chicago Lighthouse for the Blind. Burrell visited the University of Illinois in 2013 where he was the featured MillerComm speaker ("Brainwashed: Challenging the Myth of Black Inferiority") and met with students in advertising.

Tom Burrell is unquestionably a pioneer in the field of advertising. He created an approach to advertising, Positive Realism, that is still utilized today in the field. In doing so he helped to normalize the image of African Americans in advertising. Also, as an entrepreneur and advertising creative he created an agency that provided an entry point into the industry for hundreds of people. Moreover, his ideas and his agency have contributed much to the Chicago advertising and business community."

EXCERPT FROM THE NOMINATION LETTER:

"Burrell's advertising creations stand at the nexus of liberation art, commerce, and race. Advertising is one of our foremost examples of how art can be used to persuade. Certainly, it was persuasion in the pursuit of commerce and consumer activity, but also in the confirmation of images and ideals about people, relationships, influence, and power. Burrell's advertising work was a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the power of advertising. Through his conscious effort, that work became part of the milieu of how, at least in terms of popular perceptions, African Americans developed their understanding of what it meant to be black. Not a celebrity or entertainment figure, but just an average black person living in America who

lacked the money, power, and fame (to say nothing of transracial opportunities) that such a celebrity brought.

The advertising art Burrell produced both sought to express the times in which he lived as an African American and to change them. As an agency, Burrell Advertising helped to humanize African Americans. They presented them to America in one of the key areas of “normal” communication, which is advertising. In that respect, their work is beyond the simple dichotomy of “positive” or “negative” image representation; instead, it exists in the landscape of “human” representation.”

HONORS/AWARDS (NOT INCLUSIVE):

1985	Chicago Advertising Club Ad Person of the Year
1986	Albert Lasker Award for Lifetime Achievement in Advertising
1990	Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism
1995	“50 Who Made a Difference,” <i>Advertising Age</i> in the development of television advertising
1998	Chicago Advertising Federation Silver Medal Award
2000	American Advertising Federation Hall of Fame
2017	One Club Creative Hall of Fame

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

Marcia Chatelain, Penn Presidential Compact Professor, Department of Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania

“Mr. Burrell is one of the most important figures in the history of American advertising. His career epitomizes the critical shifts in strategic communications and marketing in the late 20th century, and his own work marks him as a true innovator in business, especially as it relates to today’s commonplace trends in industry, such as market segmentation, consumer research and culturally competent communication. Today’s business world would look, sound, and feel different without the contributions of Mr. Burrell. Since the late 19th century, African-Americans have been featured in advertising for consumer goods—from laundry detergent to pancake mix—and companies have sought African-American buyers, but the ways in which these marketplace relationships had been forged was characterized by a distinct lack of respect and regard. Images of crude, racist stereotypes, ad copy replete with parodies of Black dialect, and assumptions that Black people were only useful to advertisers when they were portrayed as servants marked American advertising well into the mid-century.”

Karen Whitehill King, Emeritus Professor of Advertising, Department of Advertising and Public Relations, University of Georgia

“Mr. Burrell is a man of integrity who led his firm, and indeed the advertising industry, both creatively and ethically. His understanding of consumer psychology and persuasive communication provided him with a deep understanding of the connection between specific target audiences and his clients’ products. He was a man ahead of his time. It is fair to say that his work in the advertising industry played an important role in changing the depictions of African-Americans in advertising and the media. As he famously stated, “black people are not

just black-skinned white people.” He knew that if advertisers didn’t understand this, they were missing the mark with this target group. His work treated the target audience with the respect they deserved.

Mr. Burrell is a trailblazer, a mentor to many, a visionary and an icon in the field of advertising and marketing. He has received countless honors for his contributions to the field including the Albert Lasker Lifetime Achievement Award and the One Club Creative Hall of Fame. In what is considered one of the highest honors in the advertising industry, he was inducted into the American Advertising Federation Hall of Fame. As a gifted copywriter, the work he did for the Coca-Cola company can be found in The Library of Congress. His work was selected as it is deemed by historians, scholars and industry leaders to have had a significant cultural impact.”

Katherine Parkin, Professor of History and Jules Plangere, Jr., Endowed Chair in American Social History, Monmouth University

“Burrell contended with the larger institutional racism that pervaded the twentieth century in both his personal life and his advertising work. Moreover, while he was afflicted by compromised eyesight, he turned this seeming limitation into an asset, accentuating his connection to color and sound, and developing a distinctive leadership style. Through it all, he was able to attract both local and national advertising accounts and build his namesake agency. As an example of his hidden-in-plain-sight pioneering role, Burrell created the beverage Sprite’s brand identity by marrying it with hip hop music, thereby shaping advertising and society at large. Burrell consistently embraced racial pride and prioritized the significant role that advertising played in shaping broader society’s perceptions of black life. He knew that advertising informed an understanding of the human experience, and in the words of his biographer, he used “advertising to help rehabilitate the image of African Americans” and did so at the intersection of liberation art, commerce, and race.”

Jason Chambers, Professor, The Charles H. Sandage Department of Advertising, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

“Burrell developed, applied, and honed his application of the approach he called “Positive Realism.” Positive Realism was the use of realistic images of African Americans as consumers of the nation’s products. Burrell said, “Black people rarely saw themselves portrayed in a realistic, positive way. We were accustomed to seeing ourselves in the mass media as either exaggerated, acceptable exceptions to the rule or as welfare recipients, criminals, and the downtrodden. The mass media was missing the whole group of blacks who lived normal lives and had emotional, poignant kinds of events happening to them.” Through careful research analysis and strategizing, Burrell convinced major corporations like McDonald’s and Coca-Cola to develop advertising campaigns targeting African American consumers. With the opportunity to feature blacks in these advertisements, Burrell delivered a new image. Black people, noncelebrities or superstars, using cleaning products, driving cars, brushing their teeth, or eating hamburgers filled Burrell’s advertisements.

Moreover, advertisements gave Burrell a canvas to present a different image of African Americans that countered the negative stereotypes in other areas of the nation’s media. Images of

black families, loving husbands, wives, black families, fathers, mothers, extended families, and in roles worthy of admiration became a hallmark of the Burrell style. In presenting this image, Burrell made the essential contribution of enhancing his clients' profits while helping to challenge and change the perceptions of African Americans. Thus, Burrell's advertising creations served an economic and social purpose. He increased his client's profits while at the same time presenting a positive vision of African American life and culture.

Burrell's contribution to the larger advertising industry was evidenced by the impact of his agency on black professionals in Chicago. Eventually, Burrell Advertising became the largest Black-owned agency in the nation. Burrell's agency provided advertising, public relations, promotional services, direct marketing services, and digital communications to some of the largest advertisers in the world, such as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Toyota, and Procter and Gamble. Along the way, Burrell provided opportunities for black copywriters, artists, designers, musicians, producers, directors, digital professionals, and others to grow in advertising. Because of the racially restrictive nature of the advertising industry, these were people who, without Burrell, may not have ever had the opportunity to work in the industry. Further, several African American entrepreneurs and leaders in advertising spent their formative years at Burrell Advertising. They used the lessons learned at the agency as the foundation for their contributions to the advertising industry and enabled Burrell's influence to be broadly felt."

FAILED BY SENATE

12/09/2024

Shahid R. Khan
Owner and CEO, Flex-N-Gate
Owner, Jacksonville Jaguars (NFL)
Owner, Premier League Fulham Football Club (EFL)
Co-Owner, All Elite Wrestling (AEW)

EDUCATION:

B.S, Industrial Engineering, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1971

Nominated by: Rashid Bashir, Dean, The Grainger College of Engineering, Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, Dean, College of Applied Health Sciences, Brooke Elliott, Dean, Gies College of Business, and Peter Constable, Dean, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

BASIS FOR NOMINATION:

Mr. Khan is owner and CEO of Flex-N-Gate, the leading manufacturer of metal and plastic components for most of the automakers around the world, a company with an \$8B annual revenue and 26,000 employees around the world. As an engineer, his design of a one-piece truck bumper helped lay the foundation for his success. He is also the owner of the NFL Jacksonville Jaguars franchise, the Premier League Fulham Football Club, and co-owner of the AEW Wrestling Federation. His extraordinary professional achievements across the industries, his unwavering commitment to public service, his impactful philanthropy, and his inspirational journey as an immigrant student turned entrepreneur turned industry giant, make him an exemplary candidate for this distinguished recognition.

EXCERPT FROM THE NOMINATION LETTER:

“Mr. Khan is the owner and CEO of Flex-N-Gate, a manufacturer of metal and plastic original equipment components and mechanical assemblies for an extensive list of automakers. The company, headquartered in Urbana, has 76 manufacturing facilities spanning the globe in the US, China, Argentina, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, India, and Canada. The company holds more than 850 patents, employs more than 27,000 people, and had annual revenues of nearly \$8 billion in 2023. Mr. Khan further expanded his business activities by purchasing the NFL Jacksonville Jaguars franchise in 2012 and Premier League Fulham Football Club in 2013.

This extraordinary career, fundamentally built on engineering innovation, leadership, hard work, and persistence found its beginnings at the University of Illinois. Mr. Khan came to the United States from Pakistan at the age of 16 to attend the University of Illinois and received a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering in 1971. As a student, he began working at Flex-N-Gate, an Urbana-based company that manufactured flexible roll-up gates for pickup trucks. By 1975, he was chief engineer for the company, a position he held until 1978. Mr. Khan then left Flex-N-Gate to start his own firm, Bumper Works, a company that developed and produced

a highly innovative and paradigm shifting, one-piece metal bumper design for trucks, eliminating welds that had the tendency to rust. This innovative bumper became the part of choice for major auto manufacturers across the globe with an exponential uptake and adoption. It is now considered the industry standard in parts that simplify manufacturing, lower costs, lower weight, increase reliability, and improve safety, not only of the automobiles and their drivers, but during the manufacturing process itself. Two years later after he started Bumper Works, thanks to his new company's success, Mr. Khan purchased Flex-N-Gate and, over multiple decades of further innovation and business leadership, built it into the global billion-dollar automotive enterprise it is today.

In summary, I believe his professional achievements, revolutionary innovations to his field, his commitment to service to society, and his personal integrity exemplify the level of distinction embodied in this recognition. In every aspect of his endeavors, he demonstrates the moral fiber, fundamental work ethic, and land-grant mission upon which this university was founded."

HONORS/AWARDS (NOT INCLUSIVE):

2005	Distinguished Service Alumni Award
2007	Minority Business Leadership Award
2011	Inducted as a Lincoln Laureate
2020	Inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame

EXCERPTS FROM THE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

Mark Denzler, President and CEO, Illinois Manufacturers' Association

"Shad's story is the quintessential American dream and is well-known in Illinois where he has received the state's highest honor – The Order of Lincoln – from the Governor and Lincoln Academy of Illinois. Shad immigrated from Pakistan at the age of 16 and attended the University of Illinois. Studying industrial engineering. He worked at Flex-N-Gate and later utilized a loan to start a new business creating an innovative bumper system. Starting as a one-person operation (Bumper Works), Shad later purchased Flex-N-Gate and has grown it into a global corporation employing more than 25,000 employees spread across more than 60 facilities, including five in Illinois, who produce products that are in 90 percent of pickup trucks and SUVs.

Shad and Flex-N-Gate are committed to excellence across the enterprise and have earned multiple awards recognizing their commitment to their employees and their customers that include some of the largest corporations in the world. In 2024, Flex-N-Gate was named as one of "America's Greatest Workplaces" by Newsweek for their ability to provide a safe workplace with opportunity for employee growth. Companies including General Motors, Toyota, Nissan, Ford and Stellantis have all bestowed prestigious "Supplier of the Year" awards to Shad and Flex-N-Gate. Globally, they have been recognized in France and Spain for their sustainability practices by EcoVadis. Sustainable operations include 100 percent scrap reclamation along with monitoring and reporting all supply chain greenhouse gas emissions.

The IMA has seen Shad's commitment to his employees and community first-hand. For many years, the IMA and company have partnered on workforce training programs for Flex-N-

Gate employees where they receive valuable skills allowing them to compete in modern manufacturing, which is diverse, sustainable, and high-tech. Building and developing a talent pool in Illinois has been a major key to their success locally.”

K. Venkatesh Prasad, Senior Vice President of Research and Chief Innovation Officer, Center for Automotive Research

“As drivers or passengers of everyday cars, we have no reason to look behind the proverbial screen to see the complex nature of the industry that supports the design, engineering, manufacturing, distribution, sales and servicing of these products. Mr. Shahid Khan has assembled a juggernaut of an operation that touches almost every passenger vehicle each of us experience during our daily routine transits. As I researched the data we have at CAR, I noted close to 70 distinct categories of physical automobile part or system offered by Mr. Khan’s enterprises. In a material sense these metal products, composite (plastic) products, and lighting products are many that we can touch, feel and see in our daily automobile experiences.

Tacit in enterprises that Mr. Shahid Khan has created is the tireless commitment to developing people. In Mr. Kha’s case he has been an inspiration to many. Mr. Khan’s professional drive and direct and indirect economic contributions to society span decades – something that remarkable when set within an industry that has seen some of its biggest firms declare bankruptcy. As a practitioner in the field, this is a sign of distinctive resilience – powered by a drive to serve customers and the local community in the midst of industrial turnovers and economic uncertainty.”

Robert Easter, President Emeritus, Dean Emeritus, Professor Emeritus of Animal Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

“A native of Pakistan, he came to the United States at the age of sixteen and enrolled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was literally on his own to manage his life and discover his future. As an undergraduate in Industrial Engineering with limited resources, he found part-time employment with Flex-N-Gate, a small, family-owned business in Urbana and after completing his bachelor's degree continued with the company until 1978. Then, with the support of a SBA loan, he started a business in Danville, Illinois based on his unique design of a lightweight, seamless vehicle bumper that was superior to anything in the market at that time.

That technology changed an auto industry paradigm and continued innovation coupled with Khan’s work ethic and enterprising spirit allowed him to purchase Flex-N-Gate and build it into the global company that he leads today. Today, Flex-N-Gate products are found in automobiles ranging from Jeep to Rolls-Royce and provide economic opportunity through employment to more than 27,000 people in the US and beyond.

I believe that Khan exemplifies the vision of those who led the effort to gain Congressional passage of the Morrill Act of 1862. That Act and subsequent Acts expending the mandate to disadvantaged populations in our country was transformative and lead to the establishment of the University of Illinois and a nationwide system of universities dedicated to public higher education. As a young man, he seized the opportunity that education provided to build a major international company, and in the process increased the efficiency with which automobiles can be manufactured.”

Roger Goodell, Commissioner, National Football League

“Shad stands as a distinguished and transformative figure in the NFL, not only as the owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars, but also as a key voice in shaping the future of our league. His leadership extends across several critical ownership committees governing the NFL, including the Finance, Compensation, and Business Ventures Committees, where he plays an integral role in developing the financial strategies and partnerships that bolster the NFL’s long-term success. Additionally, Shad serves as an essential voice on our Social Justice Committee, working collaboratively with players to enhance the NFL’s impact on diversity, social justice, and community development. His contributions to these committees have been invaluable, driving forward initiatives that have has a lasting, positive effect on the NFL.

Most notably, Shad has been a pioneer in the NFL’s efforts to expand internationally, which is a key priority for us and critical to our future growth.”