

BOARD OF REGENTS BRIEFING PAPER

1. **AGENDA ITEM TITLE:** UNR Request for Honorary Doctorate to Ralph Burns

MEETING DATE: March 6 – 7, 2025

2. BACKGROUND & POLICY CONTEXT OF ISSUE:

The University of Nevada, Reno is pleased to nominate Ralph Burns for the Honorary Doctorate in proud recognition of his significant contributions to the State of Nevada and the Numu people.

Please see the Honorary Degree Nomination Form for more details (Exhibit 1).

3. SPECIFIC ACTIONS BEING RECOMMENDED OR REQUESTED:

Brian Sandoval, President of the University of Nevada, Reno requests approval to present Ralph Burns with an Honorary Doctorate.

4. IMPETUS (WHY NOW?):

Numu Elder Ralph Burns has had an impactful life, educating thousands of indigenous and Nevada people. After six years of teaching at the University of Nevada, the impression Mr. Burns has made on the Wolf Pack Family cannot be overstated and we would be honored to give him this recognition.

5. CHECK THE NSHE STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL THAT IS SUPPORTED BY THIS REQUEST:

- Access (Increase access to higher education)
- Success (Improve student success)
- Close Institutional Performance Gaps
- Workforce (Meet workforce needs in Nevada)
- Research (Increase solutions-focused research)
- Coordination, Accountability, and Transparency (Ensure system coordination, accountability, and transparency)
- Not Applicable to NSHE Strategic Plan Goals

6. INDICATE HOW THE PROPOSAL SUPPORTS THE SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

N/A

7. BULLET POINTS TO SUPPORT REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

- Numu Elder Ralph Burns has played a pivotal role in ensuring that the language, culture and traditions of the Numu (Northern Paiute) people is passed on through future generations to both Native American and non-Native American individuals.
- Mr. Burns has mastered the art of storytelling and is able to use this skill to educate audiences throughout Nevada on the history of the Paiute people.
- After serving in the Vietnam War, Ralph returned to Pyramid Lake where he perfected the powwow dances of his people and has been leading them throughout the State since. Also in Pyramid Lake, Mr. Burns serves as the Cultural Resource Specialist for the Pyramid Lake Paiute Museum and Cultural Center.
- At the University, Mr. Burns has given many indigenous blessings at major events such as Commencement, Opening Ceremony, and the State of the University. He has become a cornerstone of the university experience, enriching the time each student, staff, faculty, alumni and community members who attend a University event.
- Also on campus, Mr. Burns is a beloved Paiute Language teacher, instructing in the Department of World Languages and Literatures. He began teaching the Northern Paiute I

course at the University in 2019 and has expanded his curriculum and coursework significantly since. Additionally, he teaches Paiute Language courses at the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony.

- In 2011, Mr. Burns received the Nevada Heritage Award for his work advancing the culture of the Northern Paiute people. He has also been asked to provide blessings at many state and federal events, including the 2011 Nevada Governor's Inauguration and the Sarah Winnemucca statue dedication in Washington, DC.

8. POTENTIAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE REQUEST/RECOMMENDATION:

None have been noted.

9. ALTERNATIVE(S) TO WHAT IS BEING REQUESTED/RECOMMENDED:

N/A

10. RECOMMENDATION FROM THE CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE:

The Chancellor's Office recommends approval.

11. COMPLIANCE WITH BOARD POLICY:

- Consistent With Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Amends Current Board Policy: Title # _____ Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Amends Current Procedures & Guidelines Manual: Chapter # _____ Section # _____
- Other: _____
- Fiscal Impact: Yes _____ No _____
Explain: _____



Honorary Degree Nomination Form

1. Degree to be Awarded:

Honorary Doctorate
 Honorary Baccalaureate

Honorary Masters
 Honorary Associate

2. Please state the name and address of your nominee for an Honorary Degree.

Numu Elder Ralph Burns - ralphb@unr.edu

3. Honorary degrees shall be awarded to persons who have made significant contributions to the improvement of the quality of academic programs and academic life at one of the NSHE's institutions. Persons currently holding public elected office are not eligible for the degree except in extraordinary circumstances.

What are your reasons for nominating this person? (Attach additional pages, if necessary.)

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traditions of the Numu (Northern Paiute) people is passed on through future generations to both
Native American and non-Native American individuals. Mr. Burns has mastered the art of
storytelling and is able to use this skill to educate audiences throughout Nevada on the history of
the Paiute people. (Continued on next page)


President

1.22.25
Date

University of Nevada, Reno
Institution

(B/R 3/03; Added 6/05; A. 3/24)



Honorary Degree Nomination – **Ralph Burns**

Reasons for nomination:

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After serving in the Vietnam War, Ralph returned to Pyramid Lake where he perfected the powwow dances of his people and has been leading them throughout the State since. Also in Pyramid Lake, Mr. Burns serves as the Cultural Resource Specialist for the Pyramid Lake Paiute Museum and Cultural Center.

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In 2011, Mr. Burns received the Nevada Heritage Award for his work advancing the culture of the Northern Paiute people. He has also been asked to provide blessings at many state and federal events, including the 2011 Nevada Governor's Inauguration and the Sarah Winnemucca statue dedication in Washington, DC.

I humbly request your favorable consideration for this nomination of Mr. Ralph Burns for this honorary degree. His contributions to the University and to the people of this region will be felt for decades after he is gone.

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