



Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa

Citation

Virginia Beavert, you have dedicated your life to the study and preservation of the Yakama Sahaptin language and the culture and history it represents. From the glowing embers of an ancient tongue you have breathed life and spirit into the culture of your people, and lit a beacon of hope for indigenous peoples across America.

From humble origins in a time and place where English was rarely spoken, you grew up to see your own native language almost vanish. Your life's work to keep it alive shows strength and perseverance, the determination to prevail and reach your destination.

When your stepfather died you took up the work to which he had devoted the final years of his life: recording the Sahaptin language. After earning your bachelor's degree in anthropology at Central Washington University, you sought out anthropologists and linguists who would help you document the language of the Yakama people.

Your efforts have culminated in a Yakama Sahaptin dictionary that is breathtaking in its scale, a priceless legacy whose importance will continue to grow for generations to come. Language is the life force of a culture, its heart, its mind, its memory, its truth – in a word, its song – and your dictionary has given new life to the heritage of the Yakama people.

Your linguistic skill and extensive cultural knowledge have inspired others to follow your path. At colleges and universities throughout the Northwest, you have been a tireless teacher and mentor to others seeking to preserve the languages and culture of America's indigenous peoples.

You have given voice to your ancestors, and there is great wisdom and a purifying simplicity in their words. They teach us what it means to be human, and by keeping their words alive you have made the people of all nations richer in ways that transcend language itself.

For your vision and commitment, for your exceptional achievements in the field of linguistics, for the courage and integrity of your scholarship, and for sharing your gift of knowledge with others, the University of Washington is proud to confer upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig W. Cole".

CRAIG W. COLE
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF REGENTS

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Emmert".

MARK A. EMMERT
PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY

JUNE 13, 2009