



Recommendation of  
Dennis Eck for  
Honorary Doctorate



September 27, 2021

Seth Bodnar, President  
University of Montana  
32 Campus Drive  
Missoula, MT 59

President Bodnar,

I hereby nominate Dennis Eck to receive an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Montana at the 2022 Commencement Ceremony.

Mr. Eck formed a professional legacy of leadership and innovation in the retail industry. As his biography details, he held executive positions with American Stores, The Vons Companies, and Coles Myer, one of Australia's largest retailers. Most recently, he served as CEO and non-executive Chairman of the Board of Ulta Beauty Inc., the largest beauty retailer in the U.S. Mr. Eck is recognized as a retail industry leader who developed emerging technologies related to e-commerce, loyalty programs using electronic data, automated bookkeeping systems, web-based training tools, and virtual warehousing. His professional contributions make him an excellent candidate for an Honorary Doctorate of Business degree.

Mr. Eck is a native of Wolf Point, Montana, and grew up on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. A graduate of the University of Montana, he earned a bachelor's degree in history and political science in 1967.

In addition to his professional achievements, Mr. Eck is a generous philanthropist, who has long advocated for women's access to healthcare and for women's leadership in business and politics. Together, Mr. Eck and his wife Gretchen have contributed more than \$10 million in support of the University of Montana. Their numerous gifts have primarily funded renovation of Dennis and Gretchen Eck Hall, bringing to life a vision to shape some of UM's most highly trafficked auditoriums, classrooms, and student service offices into modern, technologically enhanced settings; launched the S.E.A. Change Initiative for UM Students, which prepares students to be change-drivers and next-generation leaders who champion gender equality; and created the Dennis and Gretchen Eck Native American Scholarship Fund.

I am immensely grateful for the philanthropic contributions Mr. and Mrs. Eck have made that will prepare our students for an increasingly complex and interconnected world for years to come.

Sincerely,

Cindy Williams, President and CEO  
University of Montana Foundation

The University of Montana Foundation inspires philanthropic support  
to enhance excellence and opportunity at the University of Montana.



July 25, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

We write to express our full support of the proposal to award Dennis Eck an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Montana.

Dennis Eck has generously invested in students, infrastructure, and programming that support equitable access to education at the University of Montana. This generosity is just one demonstration of his long-standing commitment to advancing equitable access for all to pursue better lives. In both his professional and personal life, Dennis has consistently focused on technology as a potential equalizer and on programs that recognize the contributions and talents of women.

In his impressive business career as an executive at home and abroad, Dennis has had a dramatic impact on many lives. Through the development of programs like his community outreach program for high school dropouts to help open doors to employment pathways, he has been an other-focused leader. In both his business endeavors and in his philanthropic efforts, he has successfully leveraged technology and education as ways to empower people. This deep care for the social and economic conditions of others has been a predominant thread throughout his career and life.

This care and impact extend to the students at the University of Montana. His generous support of the Eck Building and the S.E.A. Change Initiative, as well as his support for scholarships for Native American students all evidence Dennis's commitment to building opportunity for others.

Dennis Eck has been an excellent role model for all kinds of people – through his professional career, his volunteer work, and his philanthropic gifts. We and many others greatly admire his unwavering advocacy for the common good and for those whose life circumstance have not afforded them certain privileges.

Denise has proven himself to be more than worthy of this high honor.

Sincerely,

Kelly Webster  
Chief of Staff

Twila Old Coyote  
Director, S.E.A. Change Initiative

Office of the President



October 11, 2021

Dear President Bodnar:

I am delighted to support the nomination of Dennis Eck to receive the degree of Honorary Doctorate from the University of Montana. As an enthusiastic supporter of UM for over 45 years, Dennis Eck established the Dennis and Gretchen Eck Native American Scholarship Fund, the NEW Leadership Program, and most recently, the wonderful renovations to the Liberal Arts Building. As a faculty member who spends numerous hours in the Liberal Arts Building, I want to share the significance of Dennis's \$8.3 million gift.

First, the improvements to 12 Liberal Arts classrooms enable students and faculty to use state-of-the-art technology. We can use the most advanced audio/visual and distance learning platforms to reach students and other audiences here and abroad. The energy-efficient windows facing the Oval allow for improved lighting and ventilation, both of which enable us to focus on engaging, student-centered pedagogy and enjoy our time in the classrooms. We also appreciate the flexible, modular furnishings, which support large and small group discussions.

Second, the total renovation of the lower-level auditorium (LA 11) makes teaching and learning in the theatre-style classroom a pleasure. Students and faculty love this space because it supports large classes (of approximately 120 to 140 students) in a personable (rather than sterile) environment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been able to teach all my methods courses in-person because of this very safe and comfortable classroom.

Third, the new second and third floor lounges in the Liberal Arts Building provide students (and faculty, staff, and visitors) with comfortable areas to gather and study. With the magnificent wall-to-wall windows, we now enjoy beautiful views of the Oval, Mount Sentinel, and other parts of our lovely campus and environment. The English Department is one of many groups that have hosted special events in the lounges because of the calm, relaxing atmosphere.

Fourth, the Liberal Arts Building now has a large, central entrance that welcomes people to our teaching/learning/work environment. Like the upstairs lounges, this first floor atrium—named Eck Hall-- is often used as a gathering place and sets the mood for our renovated classrooms, lounges, and Academic Advising Center.

Fifth, Dennis's gift enabled us to renovate the suite of offices in LA 133 into a student-friendly, centralized Academic Advising Center. Because of this dedicated space for advising, students can more easily meet with their advisors and receive support for their academic success.

I am deeply grateful for Dennis Eck's generous support of the University of Montana and his genuine commitment to enhancing the teaching/learning/work environment of our students, faculty, and staff. Because of his outstanding record of philanthropy to our university, Dennis Eck is truly worthy of an Honorary Doctorate degree.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Beverly Ann Chin". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Beverly Ann Chin, Ph. D.  
Director, English Teaching Program and Montana Writing Project  
Former Chair, Department of English  
Past President, National Council of Teachers of English  
Past Board Member, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

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15 October, 2021

The University of Montana Alumni Association  
Missoula, Montana

I write to support the nomination of Mr. Dennis Eck for an honorary degree at the University of Montana. Such an honor depends upon an individual demonstrating significant contributions to the community, and often to our university and the State of Montana. Dennis has without a doubt made contributions to all three of these, and it is my great pleasure to outline some of these contributions so that he may be recognized as a UM Grizzly who has maintained a distinguished association with the University.

Dennis grew up in Wolf Point Montana and attended UM where he graduated after studying history and political science. While Dennis and his wife Gretchen currently reside in California, they are both Montanans who maintain strong connections with our state and return to campus frequently.

After graduation, Dennis Eck pursued a career in business and, over the years, he was employed at increasingly demanding positions across the country and internationally. He was a manager and then a CEO of several companies in the food and consumer goods sector of the economy. He served as CEO of a major US food chain and ultimately as CEO of the largest direct consumer marketing business in Australia. What distinguishes Dennis so deeply, and really qualifies him for honorary academic recognition by UM, is his consistent work outside the strict demands of business to include creative assistance to the communities he and Gretchen have lived in. For example, while on the east coast, he was on the Board of a major hospital in Philadelphia – helping it expand its reach in health care delivery. As the CEO of a large corporation in Australia, Dennis realized that to

create an effective and diverse workforce his company needed to offer educational training within it's ranks. In effect, he founded a college within the company to offer educational pathways to advancement while being employed. This allowed many people who would not have gained higher education degrees the chance to do so. I see this as one of Dennis's most novel contributions, and it shows his natural inclination to support education.

Closer to home, Dennis served on the Board of the UM Foundation, and subsequently established a productive partnership with the College of Humanities and Sciences to envision and generously fund a major renovation of the Liberal Arts building. This is the largest classroom facility on campus and while it has a sound overall structure, its facilities were quite out of date by the start of this century. Dennis, and his wife Gretchen saw this as an opportunity to give back to UM. Of note, he encouraged and brainstormed an environmentally sound approach to renovate the existing structure and thus recycle its useful parts. As a result the new "Eck Hall" became a more technologically advanced and green structure.

Perhaps less well known is a contribution made by Dennis to H&S for a pilot program to develop summer leadership institutes for women in academia. This act is consistent with one of Dennis's most charming attributes: he is a "natural" feminist who believes women make essential contributions as leaders that we have often foolishly failed to cultivate. This belief is not a recent response to trend, it is a belief that he has clearly held for many years. As a result, he consistently displays generous help to advance opportunities for women.

I can think of no better candidate at this time to honor with a degree. Dennis embodies the best we hope for from a liberally educated member of the Griz family: generosity of spirit, demonstrated respect for the diversity of talent

that people from all backgrounds bring to solving the problems, and a zest for advancing projects in a sustainable relationship with the environment. I am happy to enthusiastically endorse Dennis Eck for receipt of an honorary degree from his alma mater.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Christopher Comer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Christopher Comer  
Professor of Biology and Neuroscience Emeritus  
UM College of Humanities & Sciences





September 16, 2021

Ms. Cindy Williams  
President and CEO  
University of Montana Foundation

Dear Ms. Williams:

Thank you for inviting me to write in support of Mr. Dennis Eck as a candidate to receive an honorary doctorate degree from the University of Montana. As the former CEO and current Executive Chair for Ulta Beauty, I have known and worked with Dennis for over 8 years in his capacity as a director for the Ulta Beauty Board. During that time Dennis often shared his passion for education, his deep respect for the University of Montana and his pride in supporting the university both financially and personally.

Dennis served on the Ulta Beauty Board for over fifteen years and during that time provided leadership, guidance, and contributed his deep retail expertise as well as valuable insights to the company's management team and fellow directors. Mr. Eck also consistently demonstrated commitment and passion for Ulta Beauty's Mission, Vision and Values which left a lasting impression on the company and its associates.

In light of Dennis' professional accomplishments and contributions to Ulta Beauty, I am pleased to support Dennis' recognition as the recipient of an honorary doctorate from the University of Montana. I am sure Dennis will be thrilled!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary M. Dillon". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Mary Dillon  
Executive Chair, Board of Directors

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Planned Parenthood Federation of America

July 14, 2021

Mr. Cindy Williams  
President and CEO  
University of Montana Foundation  
P.O. Box 7159  
Missoula, MT 59807

Dear Ms. Williams:

I am writing to share my support for the awarding of an honorary doctorate degree by the University of Montana for Dennis Eck.

Dennis has been a very generous supporter of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and we are grateful for his commitment to our mission. With his support, Planned Parenthood is empowering patients with the care and education they need to live their best, healthiest lives — and we're supporting Planned Parenthood health centers as they provide care on the front lines during the worst public health crisis in generations.

Planned Parenthood health centers serve more than two million patients each year, and it is clearer than ever that they are a crucial part of our nation's public health infrastructure. But the health care landscape is rapidly changing. That's why we're piloting new ways of delivering sexual and reproductive health services in person, as well as through leading-edge telehealth technology. This is crucial to our nation's health, and will help shape the future of health care delivery.

We are grateful for Dennis's support as we work to create a new reality: one where care is within reach for all, and one where every person has the right to make their own reproductive health decisions — unapologetically and free from stigma.

My very best,

  
Jethro O. Miller  
Chief Development Officer  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America

## Dennis K. Eck '67

Dennis Eck is a native of Wolf Point, MT and grew up on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, tribal headquarters for the Sioux and Assiniboine tribes. He is a University of Montana graduate with a degree in History and Political Science.

Dennis enjoyed a successful business career that began in the grocery retail industry with Jewel Companies, Inc. Beginning as a Manager of Produce Buying, Dennis' hard work led to future appointments as Vice Chairman and Executive Vice President of American Stores. He later assumed executive positions with The Vons Companies and Coles Myer, one of Australia's largest retailers. Beginning as a Managing Director of Coles Myer, Dennis quickly rose through company ranks to hold the positions of Managing Director, Chief Operating Officer, and ultimately Chief Executive Officer and Director.



Recent professional positions include Interim Chief Executive Officer and Non-Executive Chairman of the Board of Ulta Salon Cosmetics & Fragrance, the largest U.S. beauty retailer providing one-stop shopping for prestige, mass and salon products, and salon services. Dennis has also been a Principal with DKE Retail Studies since 2001.

In addition to Dennis' service as a Trustee of the University of Montana Foundation in 2006, his civic involvement has included service as Chairman of the Alfred Hospital Foundation; lecturer at Melbourne University; supporter of a private university tied to Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia; and involvement as an active grandparent at Chiaravalle Montessori School. One of Dennis' proudest accomplishments is the significant role he played in developing a community outreach program for high school dropouts in Australia. The program had dramatic success in re-engaging former dropouts in higher education and improving their employment opportunities.

A sampling of Dennis' many technology accomplishments include development of emerging technologies related to EFT-POS systems, e-commerce, and web-based training tools; fully automating bookkeeping systems; creation of loyalty programs using electronic data; and development of the first working model of virtual warehousing supporting multiple brands. His extensive experience as a technology pioneer in business and in large, less technologically advanced countries has given him the insight that "technology is an equalizer."

Dennis has long been an advocate of women's access to healthcare and for women in business and politics. His philanthropy related to these causes include support of Planned Parenthood and Emily's List. Together, Dennis and Gretchen Eck have contributed more than \$10 million to the University of Montana, primarily for renovation of Eck Hall, to launch the S.E.A. Change Initiative for UM Students, and to establish the Dennis and Gretchen Eck Native American Scholarship Fund.

Dennis is dedicated to improving technology, education, and social and economic conditions throughout his home state of Montana and beyond.