Approved by the Board of Trustees

September 22, 2022

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Board Meeting

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# AWARD HONORARY DEGREE, CHICAGO

**Action:** Award Honorary Degree

**Funding:** No New Funding Required

The University of Illinois Chicago Senate has nominated the following person for conferral of an honorary degree at the Commencement exercises in December 2022. The Interim Chancellor, University of Illinois Chicago, and Vice President, University of Illinois System recommends approval of this nomination.

**Erika Allen, Co-Founder and CEO-Operations for Urban Growers Collective and the President of Green ERA Educational NFP and Co-Owner of Green Era Sustainability Partners –** the honorary degree of Doctor of Public Health

Erika Allen’s work exemplifies a strong commitment to sustainability with her dedication to the eradication of environmental injustice and promotion of regenerative, urban agriculture within Chicago. Additionally, her commitment to youth education and economic growth in Chicago’s South and West sides through her work in developing urban farming make her a strong candidate for this honorary degree.

Erika Allen has dedicated her professional career to public service, developing sustainable community food systems and advocating for just and environmentally friendly food policies. After receiving her Master’s degree in Art Therapy from UIC, she became the Projects Director of Growing Power and expanded this Milwaukee-based urban farm by opening a branch in Chicago. Since then, she has fostered numerous urban farms within the city, using the opportunities to teach young people the value of locally grown food, introducing healthy and diverse food options into food deserts, and creating jobs for individuals in low-income neighborhoods. Her drive to establish self-reliant, urban farms that sell produce to nearby residents requires not only skill and expertise, but passion and dedication as well. Her work embodies two core values of UIC, diversity and service, in particular to the Chicago community.

Her accomplishments have earned her the Good Eating Award by the Chicago Tribune, an appointment to the Illinois Local and Organic Food and Farm Task Force, and a fellowship at the Post Carbon Institute. She is the co-founder and CEO of the Urban Growers Collective (UGC), which operates seven urban farms in Chicago’s Southside and works to establish food security and economic stability in disadvantaged communities. UGC is also actively involved in policy initiatives at The Chicago Food Policy Council and National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

She served as a Chicago Park District Commissioner from 2012-2017, and presently she is a Board member of NeighborSpace. Additionally, she was the recipient of the Mother of the Environment for Minneapolis/St. Paul in 2009 by the Women’s Environmental Institute and honored by Family Focus in 2006 for her work in community food systems.

Erika Allen’s commitment to the public sector through the promotion of sustainable agriculture, forging economic opportunities for low-income individuals, and creating access to healthy food has made a strong and considerable impact on the City of Chicago.

Erika Allen’s public service embodies the core values that define UIC, and therefore she is most deserving of an Honorary Degree from the University of Illinois Chicago.

The Board action recommended in this item complies in all material respects with applicable State and federal laws, University of Illinois *Statutes, The General Rules Concerning University Organization and Procedure*, and Board of Trustees policies and directives.

The Interim Executive Vice President and Vice President of Academic Affairs concurs with this recommendation.

The President of the University of Illinois System recommends approval.