HUNTER COLLEGE - HONORARY DEGREE FOR WALTER ISAACSON:

RESOLVED, That Hunter College award Walter Isaacson the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa, at the college’s winter commencement ceremony on January 24, 2013.

EXPLANATION: Walter Isaacson has served as president and CEO of the Aspen Institute, a nonprofit educational and policy think tank, since 2003. The Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College has partnered with the Aspen Institute on many occasions. Mr. Isaacson’s vital insight and participation has helped to broaden substantially the aim and scope of both organizations.

Mr. Isaacson formerly served as chairman and CEO of CNN and editor of TIME magazine. Mr. Isaacson is also chairman of the board of Teach for America, former chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, and the author of acclaimed biographies of Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, and Steve Jobs.
Statement of Hunter College President Jennifer Raab on Walter Isaacson

Earlier this year, Walter Isaacson was named by TIME magazine as one of the world’s 100 most influential people. In his citation, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright wrote the following:

One indication of influence is the ability to stand boldly against hostile trends and thereby alter them. The age of landmark biographies had, we might assume, long since passed...Enter Walter Isaacson and his trio of brilliant works about men of genius — Franklin, Einstein and Jobs. This is influence of the best species, educating us while demonstrating the continued fascination of the seriously examined life, rendered by Isaacson with the objectivity of a true historian and the flair of a born storyteller. But what most separates Isaacson, 59, from would-be peers is his wisdom in choosing subjects whose individual talents have affected all our lives...Both as an author and as president of the intellectually fertile Aspen Institute, Isaacson is a purveyor of knowledge, a supplier to addicts who seek a deeper understanding of all manner of things.

I cannot imagine a more suitable honorary degree recipient than a person who helps us “seek a deeper understanding of all manner of things.” The breadth of Mr. Isaacson’s intellectual and cultural expertise is remarkable on its own, but what makes him truly exceptional is his ability to connect what he knows to our own lives and to encourage us, as individuals and a society, to use that wisdom to improve ourselves and the world.

Mr. Isaacson’s academic credentials are superlative; he is a graduate of Harvard and a Rhodes Scholar. But his life and career have not been carried out behind ivy-covered walls. Rather, he might best be characterized by his widespread public impact. He changed the face of print, broadcast, and radio journalism – as editor of TIME, chair and CEO of CNN, and chair of the Broadcasting Board of Governors. He is a champion of educational access, which he promotes as the chair of Teach for America. And he reaches out across the oceans too, as vice-chair of Partners for a New Beginning, which promotes international ties between the United States and the Muslim world.

These qualifications alone testify to Mr. Isaacson’s dedication to public service, diversity, leadership, and everything else we promote and celebrate at Hunter College. We have seen these values in full bloom in our association with Mr. Isaacson and the Aspen Institute, the nonprofit educational and policy think tank he leads. Mr. Isaacson has been an invaluable partner and has helped us bring Roosevelt House to the forefront of the nation’s public policy institutions. With his support, we have expanded the reach of our institute beyond even what we first imagined. It has been a personal and professional pleasure to work with him.

For these reasons and more, we ask your approval in honoring Walter Isaacson with an honorary degree.