Mr. Chancellor, I am honoured to present Mr. Michael Audain. Like the artists whom he celebrates, Michael Audain follows his own path and inspires many along the way. He combines a keen sense of business with an ardent passion for the arts and a civil libertarian’s commitment to justice and equality for all.

Michael Audain puts his beliefs into practice. As a young man, he learned at the London School of Economics a profound sense of the dangers of the state dominating civil society and the importance of public institutions for the promotion of education, the arts and social welfare. He learned also of the long history of social protest in confronting government and reforming public policy. On his return to Canada, he engaged actively in the major political developments of his time: travelling to Berkeley to protest the Vietnam War; joining the Mississippi civil rights marches against racial segregation and being imprisoned for his efforts, and playing an important role in the birth of the BC Civil Liberties Association, whose first meeting was held in his living room.

Such commitment informs all areas of his life. In 1980, after a successful career in social planning, he assumed leadership of Polygon Homes Ltd. As its Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, he has overseen the construction of more than 10,000 dwellings in the Greater Vancouver area. His foresight has transformed the face of many Vancouver neighbourhoods and earned him the admiration of his peers. In recognition of his astute judgment, they elected him Chairman of the Business Council of British Columbia in 2002.

We, too, have relied greatly on his knowledge and talent. The participation of Polygon Homes Ltd. in our UniverCity development has ensured the long-term success of this project. We are fortunate, as well, that this great friend of education has also agreed to use his considerable influence to help advance our fundraising campaign for SFU’s School for the Contemporary Arts.

This latter commitment reflects Michael Audain’s deep commitment to the arts, and the pivotal role he has played in the promotion of the arts in our community. As a result, Michael is esteemed by the entire arts community. Many have said that he is indispensable to the arts in our province. A gracious patron and generous philanthropist, he has eloquently argued that the visual arts are vital to the economic well-being of this province, and he has backed his words with action. Over the years, he has supported numerous exhibitions of painting and sculpture, created the Audain Prize for the Visual Arts, and endowed a curator’s position at the Vancouver Art Gallery. For his exemplary contributions, he was honoured with the Edward Bovey Award for Leadership Support of the Arts in 2004.

Mr. Chancellor, the narrative of Michael Audain’s life is profoundly interwoven with that of this province. A fifth generation British Columbian, he has embraced all with his generosity and good will. He has demonstrated better than anyone how business interests can be made consistent with ethical and social obligations, making equally important contributions to our economic and social welfare. Only his self-effacing modesty prevents him from the wider public acknowledgement he deserves. On behalf of the Senate of this University I ask that you confer upon Michael Audain the degree Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.