Madam Chancellor, I have the honour to introduce Clara Anne Hughes. Humanitarian, philanthropist, author, and six time Olympian; Clara Hughes is a champion of sport and a champion for humanity.

Born in 1972 into an artistic, literary, and complicated family, few would have expected Clara to forge a path to the Olympic Games in two mentally and physically gruelling sports. Certainly, Clara’s 60% mark in Grade 11 physical education was no predictor of her future athletic prowess!

Nonetheless, her family’s creative qualities influenced her life experiences in unanticipated ways. It was the artistry Clara saw in the elegant stride of Gaetan Boucher in the 1988 Olympic Games that ignited her passion for speed skating. As she cycled, the aesthetics of the flow experience gave her joy in competition and relief from relentless pain and fatigue in training.

From the early days of speed skating on hockey skates and performing wheelies on her white and pink BMX racing bike, Clara went on to be one of the most decorated athletes in history. In six World Championships, 13 World Cups, and four Olympic Games, she earned 21 speed skating medals. As a road and track cyclist, she won three Commonwealth, seven Pan American, and two Olympic medals. Clara Hughes is a 35-time Canadian Champion in cycling and speed skating. She is one of five Olympians with a podium finish in both the winter and summer games and the only person in history to have won multiple medals in both.

One of Canada’s proudest moments came during the opening of Vancouver’s 2010 Winter Olympics when the Canadian team, led by flag-bearer Clara Hughes, marched into the stadium. Clara’s joyful smile embraced us all.

About her success, Clara commented, “What is the point of celebrity if not to be a platform to help others?” Her philanthropic efforts began with Right to Play, an athlete-driven international organization facilitating access to sport for disadvantaged youth. Her efforts expanded to other humanitarian youth initiatives including Vancouver’s Take a Hike program for students struggling in the mainstream school system, an experience with which Clara is very familiar.

Named to the Order of Manitoba and as an Officer of the Order of Canada, Clara has been inducted into Canada’s Walk of Fame and the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame and included three
times on the national list of Most Influential Women in Sport. The International Olympic Committee has honoured her with the prestigious Sport and Community Award for her commitment to the values of sport and play.

Throughout her life, Clara’s experiences ranged from horrendous to heroic, from depressive to joyous, all shared with us in her unflinching memoir, *Open Heart, Open Mind*, published in 2016. It would be understandable if Clara were to bury the painful memories under her accumulated triumphs. Instead, Clara, motivated by her experiences with depression, became the spokesperson for Bell Canada’s mental illness initiative. With her support, at least $100 million will be provided to Canadian mental health programs by 2020.

In her memoir, Clara acknowledges that her accomplishments masked a history of self-loathing and anger. Clara writes, “[although] my warrior self had served me well while I was competing...[I now have to] find the courage to accept my wounded self...”

Poet and priest, Thomas Merton wrote that pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real. If that is so, no one need doubt Clara Hughes’ authenticity, just as none doubt her courage and love of humanity. She is (to play upon the words of Shakespeare) *as full of kindness as of valour – queen-like in both*.

Madam Chancellor, it is my privilege to present Clara Anne Hughes for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.

Written and presented by
Dr. Geraldine Van Gyn, Professor Emerita
School of Exercise Science, Physical and Health Education
Faculty of Education
University of Victoria