

COMMENCEMENT

Distinguished leaders to be awarded honorary degrees



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For outstanding achievements in their respective fields, Sheilah Clay, Joanne Danto, Robert J. Gibbs, Jane Houdyshell, J. Michael Kosterlitz and Sheldon Yellen have been selected to receive honorary degrees from Oakland University.

Sheilah Clay was selected to receive a Doctor of Humanities Honoris Causa

Clay was the president and CEO of Detroit's Neighborhood Service Organization (NSO) for 22 years. She serves as a role model for those who aspire to be leaders in community service and healthcare, with her tremendous efforts to address homelessness and mental health issues. Under her leadership, the historic Bell Building was converted into permanent housing for homeless and other vulnerable populations.

She has served on the boards of many organizations, including the Michigan Non-profit Association, the Southeastern Michigan Public Policy Task Force and the Non-Profit Leadership Collaborative of the Harvard Business School Club of Michigan. She is founder of the Farmington African American Parent Network and has received many honors, including the NAACP Hall of Fame Award and Michigan Chronicle Women of Excellence Award, to name a few. She has also presented leadership best practices to students at Oakland University's Honors College since 2014.



Sheilah Clay

Joanne Danto was selected to receive a Doctor of Arts Honoris Causa

Danto is a retired ballet dancer and full-time philanthropist. The Detroit native's prestigious international career as a ballet dancer included a stint as the Principal Dancer with the Joffrey Ballet in New York. She also performed as a lead with the Joffrey Ballet of Washington, the National Ballet in Washington, the Frankfurt Ballet in Germany and the Pennsylvania Ballet in Philadelphia.



Joanne Danto

She has taught ballet at the National Ballet Academy in California, the University of Michigan, the Interlochen Arts Academy, and Point Park College, among others. Danto also studied Art History at Oakland University. She currently serves as Trustee of the Marvin I. and Betty J. Danto Family Foundation. Additionally, her personal philanthropy has included gifts benefitting the Cranbrook Educational Community, Interlochen Center for the Arts, the Detroit Institute of Art and the Michigan Opera Theatre.

Robert J. Gibbs was selected to receive a Doctor of Arts Honoris Causa

As a founder and president of Michigan-based Gibbs Planning Group, Gibbs has taken on leadership roles to plan, design, and transform a number of historic towns and communities in and outside of the United States. One such example is the Birmingham 2016 Master Plan, which helped make the city one of the most walkable and beautiful towns in Michigan. Gibbs earned a bachelor's degree in Social Studies at Oakland University in 1977 and received the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award in 2015.



Robert J. Gibbs

Some of Gibbs's key accomplishments include being honored by the Clinton Presidential Library for his contributions to urban planning, being recognized by Planetizen as one of the 100 most influential urban planners and receiving the Michigan American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Merit Award. He has consulted for over 500 cities, institutions and real estate developers around the world.

Jayne Houdyshell was selected to receive a Doctorate of Arts Honoris Causa

Houdyshell is an award-winning actress and alumna of the Academy of Dramatic Arts at Oakland University. Graduating with honors in 1974, she has enjoyed a successful 40-year career appearing in hundreds of productions around the world. She received the 2016 Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Feature Role in a Play for her portrayal of Dierdre Blake in *The Humans*. The New York Times spotlighted

Houdyshell's acting skills, noting that "colleagues praised her timing, her flair for comedy, her sophisticated understanding of a script."

Houdyshell has also appeared in film and television. Her television credits include *Law & Order*, *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Third Watch*, *The Good Wife* and *The Good Fight*. She has also appeared in the films *Everybody's Fine*, *Trust the Man*, *Garden State*, *Changing Lanes* and more recently *The Chaperone*.



Jayne Houdyshell

J. Michael Kosterlitz was selected to receive a Doctorate of Science Honoris Causa.

Kosterlitz has made seminal contributions to the field of condensed matter physics. In 2016, he and collaborators David Thouless and Duncan Haldane were awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for theoretical discoveries of topological phase transitions and topological phases of matter. He was named a member of the National Academy of Sciences in 2017 and has been a Fellow of the American Physical Society since 1987.



J. Michael Kosterlitz

He is listed as a co-author on more than 9,000 scientific papers. He visited Oakland University in the late 1990s and has published four papers with OU physics professor Ken Elder. In one manuscript, a new model was developed to understand eutectic solidification, the process in which a binary alloy solidifies and produces complex patterns made up of stripes of different alloy composition. These patterns often play a strong role in determining the structural, electromagnetic and thermal properties of materials.

Sheldon Yellen was selected to receive a Doctor of Science Honoris Causa.

As the CEO of BELFOR Property Restoration, Yellen has been helping repair communities that have been devastated by natural disaster to restore key infrastructure. For almost 30 years, BELFOR has been one of the first responders in natural disasters in the United States and around the world, including Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Hugo, the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, and more recently, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.



Sheldon Yellen

A Detroit native, Yellen began working as an 11-year-old and dropped out of high school to support his family. His entrepreneurial spirit and willingness to learn from his experience, peers, mentors, friends and employees are keys to his success. Further evidence of his commitment to education was his decision to complete his high school diploma at the age of 53. His approach to his business has drawn international attention and garnered him three appearances on the CBS television show *Undercover Boss*.

Clay, Danto, Gibbs, Kosterlitz and Yellen will receive their honorary degrees at Oakland University's fall commencement exercises on December 14. Houdyshell received her honorary degree at OU's Alumni Awards Banquet on November 23.

Honorary degrees are awarded by OU's Board of Trustees in recognition of distinguished accomplishment and service within the scope of the arts and letters, sciences, professions and public service as recognized and supported by the University. The awarding of honorary degrees reaffirms Oakland University's scholarly, creative and humanitarian values, and ties the university to the community at large.