

WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Matthew Barzun Hon LLD

Oration by Professor Simon Swain
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, External Engagement




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It is a great pleasure to introduce to this Congregation the former United States ambassador to the UK, Mr Matthew Barzun.

Matthew Barzun was appointed to London by President Barack Obama in 2013 and served until January 2017. He brought to the post expertise in business, public engagement and diplomacy. Mr Barzun was a pioneer in the early days of the internet. After graduating from Harvard, he joined CNET Networks in 1993, rising to the position of Executive Vice-President; he also invested in a number of internet start-ups, including co-founding MedTrack Alert. A lifelong Democrat, in 2008 he used his technology and media skills to drum up grassroots support for Obama's presidential campaign, creating the first 25 dollar per person, supporter-driven fundraisers; in 2012, he became National Finance Chair in President Obama's re-election campaign. Appointed ambassador to Sweden in 2009, Matthew Barzun again reached out to a wider public: he launched the US Embassy Road Show, bringing people, resources and exhibits out of the Embassy in Stockholm to Sweden's smaller cities and communities.

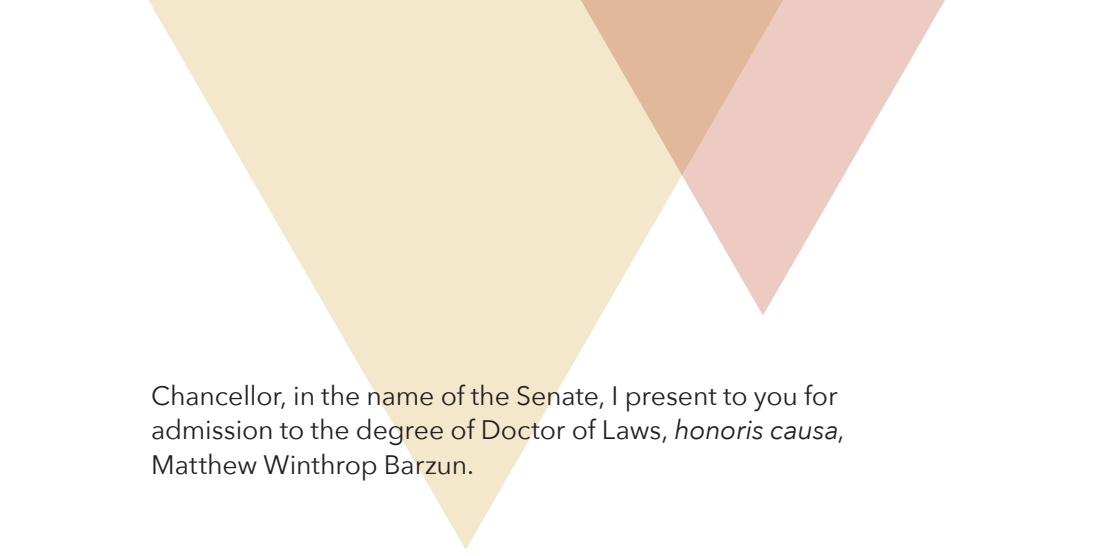
In London, he continued to pursue what he described as 'new ways of doing a more grassroots style of diplomacy'. Here, he focused on engagement with young people, setting up the Young Leaders UK (YLUK) programme that allowed him to communicate with young people from across the UK. He visited sixth forms in both state and private schools, holding workshops and discussions on themes ranging from opportunity, freedom, food and NASA, and arranging for members of YLUK to meet President Obama during his visit to the UK in 2016.



During Mr Barzun's time in London, the international scene was complex, difficult, sometimes alarming: war in the Ukraine and the Middle East; Ebola in Africa; the migrant crisis in Europe; the ever-present threat of terrorism at home and abroad; the British decision in June 2016 to leave the European Union. Throughout all this, Matthew Barzun continued to stress the virtues and necessity of the unique relationship between Britain and the USA, one based on cultural, commercial, intellectual and emotional connections. These links, he said, were unbreakable – 'unbreakable because they are flexible'; he stressed the 'historic bond of responsibility between the USA and Britain'. He also stressed the importance of NATO – 'the most powerful alliance in the world' – and in 2016 attended the NATO summit in Wales, where he contrived to master enough Welsh to be able to welcome President Obama to the host country.

At the same time, he practised what the *London Evening Standard* described as 'diplomacy by music and gaiety', opening up his official residence in Regent's Park to artists, musicians, actors and sixth formers as well politicians, officials and international statesmen. The popular concept of a senior ambassador is perhaps of someone staid, even a little bit stuffy. Matthew Barzun was neither – there cannot be many official ambassadorial residents that boast a skateboard ramp in the garden!

On his return to the USA last year, Mr Barzun was honoured by the US Department of State and by the British government. From the former, he received the Sue M Cobb Award for Exemplary Diplomatic Service; from the latter he received the Marshall Aid Commemoration Medal for his dedication to strengthening US/ British relations. We at Warwick are delighted to be able to honour him again, today.



Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, Matthew Winthrop Barzun.