

REPORT OF A FOCUSED VISIT

(COMMISSION MANDATED)

TO

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS**

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FOR

The Higher Learning Commission

A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

EVALUATION TEAM

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I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT

A. Purpose of visit

The purpose of the visit to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was to assess the effectiveness of the Board of Trustees' efforts to address the educational and governance issues surrounding the athletic symbol, Chief Illiniwek.

The focused visit followed a Higher Learning Commission (HLC) mandated progress report from UIUC filed with the Commission on January 1, 2001, delineating the processes that the institution had initiated to prepare for the focused visit on the issues surrounding the Chief. The progress report described the Board of Trustees' actions to "create an open, respectful, and civil dialogue concerning the issues surrounding Chief Illiniwek," including the "enhanced dialogue" process in spring, 2000, that elicited more than 18,000 comments from various University constituencies. The Commission accepted the progress report on January 31, 2001.*

B. Accreditation status

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, established in 1867, is a charter member of the North Central Association, and has been continuously accredited since 1913. During the comprehensive NCA accreditation visit of 1999, one of the areas of concern examined (identified in the previous comprehensive visit) was diversity. The 1999 team found that the university had worked to address the concern of the 1989-90 team in the area of diversity, but that other issues had arisen that indicated an ongoing need for attention in this area. The other diversity issues ("major challenges") were identified by the team as follows.

- *The controversy over Chief Illiniwek is divisive, pitting many faculty members and students against University administrators and the Board of Trustees. It has the potential to worsen over time to the detriment of a great university.*
- *A related challenge is the need to continue emphasis on recruiting, and retaining African American, Latino/a, Native American, Asian American and senior women faculty and administration.*

In the area of Governance, the team also identified concerns.

The governance of a great university such as UIUC is shared among the Trustees, the administration, the faculty, the students, and the staff. The team notes with alarm the fact while many are talking, few are listening. In the team's judgment:

- *The controversy over The Chief has divided the University community. It interferes with the educational climate and with the institution's stated goal of creating an inclusive community.*
- *A process is not in place to engage the appropriate constituencies to bring about a resolution of the Chief controversy.*

C. Institutional context

The report of the comprehensive evaluation team which visited the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in September, 1999, recommended that the campus submit by January 1, 2001, a progress report delineating the processes that the institution has initiated to prepare for a focused visit on issues surrounding the Chief. The requested progress report was submitted on January 1, 2001

Discourse, often passionate, representing the full range of views on the Chief controversy continues to the present. Most recently, the Board of Trustees heard extensive public comments on the matter at a meeting on the Urbana-Champaign campus on March 11, 2004. Speakers included students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the public and included Native Americans. Shortly thereafter, the campus' student government organization held the first student referendum on the issue. More than 13,000 students voted in the referendum, with 69 percent voting in favor of retaining the Chief and 31 percent voting in favor of retiring the Chief. On April 15-16, 2004, a group of about 40 students, faculty, and community members staged a sit-in in the campus administration building seeking the retirement of the Chief. The sit-in ended when the Chancellor committed to arranging for the group to meet with members of the Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and the Illinois Legislative Latino Caucus, and also offered an opportunity for 8-10 representatives of the group to meet with the HLC focused visit team. An institutional focused visit report was received by the team members on April 20, 2004, preceding the focused visit. On April 22, 2004, supporters of the Chief met with Provost Richard Herman to request that pro-Chief representatives receive the same agreement granted to anti-Chief protesters by Chancellor Nancy Cantor the previous week. Pro-Chief representatives were also invited to meet with the HLC focused visit team.

D. Unique aspects of visit

Team members found that preparations by the leadership of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for the focused visit were not as extensive as the team would have expected, given the complexity and seriousness of the issue and the gravity of the situation encountered during the team's visit. In particular, the team expected to find that the issues had been resolved or that the Board and university leadership had a clearly defined strategy to resolve them. Regrettably, we found neither to be the case.

E. Interactions with institutional constituencies (see Appendix 1)

F. Principal documents, materials, and web pages reviewed (see Appendix 2)

II. AREAS OF FOCUS

A. Statement of focus

The report of the NCA Commission comprehensive team visit in 1999 to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign includes a recommendation for a

follow-up visit focused on the Board of Trustees' efforts to address the educational and governance issues surrounding the athletic symbol. The recommended visit is characterized in the following words from that report:

'During the focused visit the team recommends that the institution present convincing evidence in the two areas:

Intra-institutional communication and shared governance: The institution should show that all relevant constituencies have been allowed to engage fully in discussion, and that the reasons for decisions reached have been fully articulated to all interested parties. In particular, the institution should address the educational impact of the continued use of The Chief.

Consistent policies: The institution should resolve what appear to many, both within and outside of the University, to be inconsistencies between its exemplary diversity policies and practices, and its policies regarding The Chief. The team emphasized again that it does not believe that The Chief, per se, is an accreditation issue. It is incumbent upon any public institution, however, to articulate the rationale for its policies, especially when they are in apparent contradiction with each other."

B. Statements of evidence

1. Evidence that demonstrates adequate progress in the areas of focus

Since the comprehensive visit in 1999, the Board of Trustees of the University has sponsored an "enhanced dialogue" process that received more than 18,000 comments and commissioned and accepted two reports, the Garipo report and the Plummer report, summarizing aspects of the controversy. Immediately preceding the HLC visit, in March 2004, the Board of Trustees heard comments from constituents. Negotiations with anti-Chief advocates during a sit-in in April resulted in their being given a time to express concerns to the team. Pro-chief advocates requested and were given a time to express concerns to the team as well.

It appears to the team that while many "*relevant constituencies have been allowed to engage fully in discussion,*" faculty and campus leadership, the constituents most capable of addressing educational impact, have not publicly been consulted by the Board.

The institution has engaged in activities to support diversity, such as the establishment of a Native American House, additional courses with Native American content, and other programmatic initiatives including increased efforts to recruit minority students.

2. Evidence that demonstrates further institutional attention is required in the area of focus

Evidence reveals the use of the Chief to be so significant and the controversy over continued use to be so pervasive that related issues of institutional effectiveness require not only institutional attention but also Commission follow up. This evidence is underscored by the fact that no progress has been made toward resolution, resulting in an increase in polarization and weakening of educational effectiveness.

3. Evidence that demonstrates further institutional attention and Commission follow-up is required in the area of focus.

The Chief issue and surrounding controversy have an influence that is harmful to educational effectiveness in a variety of areas, especially leadership, governance, educational integrity, and campus climate. The University appears not to have given sufficient attention to evidence of the damage caused by the controversy. The evidence of this damage is cited persuasively in such places as the Resolution to Retire Chief Illiniwek by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Senate on March 9, 1998, the letter to Mr. Stephen Crow, Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education of the North Central Association, January 22, 2003, and signed by 115 faculty members from throughout the institution, the statement of the Chancellor quoted on November 12, 2003, and other resolutions and letters from schools and departments including those such as anthropology and sociology whose professional expertise is directed toward identifying harmful effects of the symbol.

Damage was also reported to the team members in meetings with faculty members, deans, and representatives of student and minority student organizations. In summary, the institution's symbol is an embarrassment to many of its most distinguished constituents. It creates a situation in which expressions of opinion by students, faculty, leadership, or applicants for positions at the institution may be stifled or lead to harassment. It creates a situation where some faculty and staff do not want to attend national meetings, especially meetings dealing with diversity issues, because of the "hypocrisy they sense in the institution's continued use of the symbol. It creates a situation which can cause peers and colleagues across the country to decide against applying for positions on the UI campus or participation in events held there. It appears likely to diminish the pools of candidates for the institution's highest positions and could interfere with the selection process to fill those positions.

Evidence regarding leadership includes the following:

- Since the comprehensive team NCA visit in 1999, neither the Board nor the institution has taken action to resolve the chief issue or the controversy. Inaction leaves the impression that the elaborate "enhanced dialogue" process and the two resulting reports sponsored by the Board have had no impact on the Board's ability or willingness to reach a decision. To quote the Higher Learning Commission staff: "How the Board responds to this massive input will signal its commitment to

‘address the differences’ on this matter.” The Board has made no response.

- It is impossible not to draw the inference that the Board chooses to ignore the damaging effects of both the controversy and the Chief symbol. In the absence of decisive action, the Board is, in effect, saying that it prefers to face the consequences of eroding damage to the effectiveness, governance, and reputation of the institution than the consequences of retiring the Chief.
- As taking no vote on this matter represents a decision, then it would seem incumbent upon the Board to have articulated reasons for retaining the Chief as symbol.
- The outgoing chancellor of the institution made a statement quoted in the News Gazette Online on Thursday, November 13, 2003, regarding the removal from the agenda of the Board of Trustees of a resolution to retire Chief Illiniwek: The statement included the following text: “The delay is troubling to me because this has been an extremely divisive issue that has held us back and unnecessarily clouded our future. I am concerned about our ability to move forward with programs that depend upon an inclusive atmosphere within the university. The future of initiatives on integration and inter-group dialogue and the recruiting of diverse faculty and staff hang in the balance.”

The Chancellor’s position in regard to the use of the Chief as a symbol was clearly a factor in causing her to be attacked with racial slurs and in billboard messages.

Few among the university’s leadership have taken a position on this issue, and the few who have done so (the Chancellor and a new Board of Trustees member) have become lightning rods for attacks by partisans in the controversy.

- In 2002 a ruling in U.S. District Court found that a directive by a different Chancellor in 2001 ordering all faculty and staff to obtain the authorization of the athletic department before speaking to potential student-athletes amounted to a prior restraint on their free speech activities, in violation of critical constitutional protections.

Evidence regarding governance includes the following:

- The Board of Trustees’ assertion that only the Board can make a decision regarding the Chief suggests a considerable disdain for its best source of guidance regarding the educational impact of the situation, the faculty and administration.
- The constituency that is most instrumental in guaranteeing quality in any institution, the most important stakeholder from that perspective, is the faculty. This constituency has expressed itself through resolutions by the faculty governance

structure and its most noted scholars as well as through letters from individuals. The failure of the Board of Trustees to articulate reasons why it has not acted* on the clear recommendations of the faculty in this matter is an egregious abuse of the university's long tradition of shared governance.

*An important footnote to the team's visit was the passage on June 17, 2004, seven weeks after the team visit, of a University Board of Trustees resolution calling for a "consensus conclusion" to the Chief Illiniwek controversy and resolving to "consider and approve guidelines pursuant to which a consensus conclusion will be based." The team is encouraged by the Board's stated willingness to end the symbol controversy and urges timely resolution. Because any symbol serves many constituencies, the team wishes to underscore the point that consensus resolution of the issue must have positive impact upon the University of Illinois's educational programs and public presence locally and nationally.

- The first indication of the governance problem was the failure of the institution to consider the controversy significant enough to address in the comprehensive self-study document in 1999, despite the fact that many of the faculty group resolutions date from 1998.
- The elaborate "enhanced dialogue" process appears to have polarized views and did not focus on those constituencies that make up the institutions' shared governance structure: faculty, students, staff, and administration.

Evidence regarding educational effectiveness in other areas such as educational integrity and climate includes the following:

- The University of Illinois, and especially its Board of Trustees, have modeled behavior that suggests that the issues of minority rights and cultural identity associated with the Chief can be addressed by providing a forum for all interested parties, regardless of the rationale or logical consistency of their arguments or the remoteness of their connection to the University. The approach seems to be that if enough votes are taken, the issue can eventually be decided on that basis alone, without an examination of the merits of the competing opinions. This behavior does not constitute a positive example of dispute resolution nor one that is educationally sound.

The team is concerned by the divisive forces that are increasingly vocal and meddlesome in the university's academic mission. Some of these forces are marked by intolerance, parochialism, isolation and what many would consider to be racism. The institution does not appear to have strategies to address this situation.

- The team is not persuaded by the institution's claim that increased activities to support diversity can effectively counter balance effects of the continued controversy over the Chief. These initiatives do not render the need for a resolution of the

Chief controversy moot or mitigate the damage done by the symbol to university effectiveness.

- There is considerable campus concern that, with this controversy unresolved, the pool of candidates in the impending searches for the next president of the university and the chancellor of the campus will be unduly restricted. The members of the focused visit team share this concern.

There is evidence that a prospective candidate for a faculty or leadership position at the institution could decline an offer upon learning of the controversy or the use of the symbol. At least one candidate for a leadership position in minority affairs expressed the view that one of the reasons for his not accepting the position was the use of the Chief as a symbol.

- There is also strong feeling that a candidate's position on this subject (whether to keep or retire the Chief) could (again) influence the decision of the Board regarding that person's candidacy for a leadership or faculty position. Likewise, students, faculty, and leaders are increasingly singled out for negative attention by other constituencies on the basis of their opinions regarding the Chief.
- In the educational climate thus created, the institution will find it increasingly difficult to attract outstanding faculty, Native American and other minority administrators, faculty, and students, and the most highly-qualified individuals for leadership positions.

C. Other accreditation issues (if applicable)

If the Chief issue is resolved in political or what appear to be political terms or out of expediency and failure to confront the underlying message of this symbol, the issue will not die and things will simply get worse. Moreover, the institutional problems revealed by, or growing out of, the symbol controversy will have been exacerbated. The real issue here is a troubling failure of enlightened leadership and shared governance by the board of a major world-class research university. The list of institutions which have dealt successfully with similar issues is long, and all have moved forward as a result. The list of those institutions still attempting to defer or avoid the obvious solution is very short.

III. AFFILIATION STATUS

A. SUMMARY OF COMMISSION REVIEW

NO CHANGE

B. NATURE OF ORGANIZATION

1. Legal Status

NO CHANGE

2. Degrees Awarded

NO CHANGE

C. CONDITIONS OF AFFILIATION**3. Stipulations on Affiliation Status**

NO CHANGE

4. Approval of Degree Sites

NO CHANGE

5. Approval of Degree Sites

NO CHANGE

6. Reports Required

NONE

7. Other Visits Scheduled

A focused visit will be scheduled for the 2006-2007 academic year. The purpose of the visit will be to determine the educational impact of the use of the Illiniwek symbol (or the resolution of the controversy surrounding the symbol) on the institution's ability to carry out its mission in regard to educational effectiveness as reflected in such aspects of effectiveness as leadership, governance, educational integrity, and campus climate.

A major element of the focused visit report will be assessments by the faculty and institutional leadership of the educational impact of the continued use of the Chief symbol (or the resolution of the controversy surrounding the symbol) including evidence to support the assessments.

D. COMMISSION SANCTION OR ADVERSE ACTION

NONE

Appendix 1

Interactions with Institutional Constituencies

Provost

Some members of the Provost's staff
Chairman and two other members of the Board of Trustees
Representatives of Progressive Resource/Action Cooperative

Eleven individuals including members or representatives from the following UIUC organizations or groups: Women of Color, Asian/Asian Pacific organization, Latino organization, the NCAAP campus group, Native American students; the Student Body President, the Assistant Director of Native American House,

Council of Deans

Deans or their representatives from Colleges of Fine and Applied Arts, Engineering, Liberal Arts and Sciences; Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences; and Communications; Directors, Deans, or representatives from the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, Applied Life Studies, University Library, International Programs and Studies, Institute of Aviation, Graduate College, Veterinary Medicine, Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, and Vice Chancellor for Research

Representatives of the Honor the Chief Society and Students for Chief Illiniwek

Six individuals including the portrayer of the Chief, a Student Senate representative, a student from the Marching Illini and Chancellor's Scholar, a community representative of Honor the Chief Society, an alumnus

Members of the Senate Executive Committee (14 faculty members)

Representatives from the following offices:

Enrollment Management and Admissions and Records
Minority Admissions recruiter and staff member
Minority Student Affairs, Graduate College
Office of Minority Student Affairs
Committee on Retention
Committee on Diversity Initiatives

Appendix 2

Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed

Report of a Special Emphasis Visit to University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, September 27-29, 1999, for the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Parts I and II

Information for NCA Focused Visit, April 26, 2004, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Office of the Provost

Appendices

Progress Report to the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Submitted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, January 1, 2001

Staff Analysis of Institutional Report, Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, January 26, 2001

Board of Trustees Resolution, University of Illinois, January 13, 2000

The Chief Illiniwek Dialogue, Intent and Tradition vs. Reaction and History, A Report to the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois, Louis B. Garippo, Moderator; Addendum to Report

Seeking a Compromise: Chief Illiniwek, A Report by Trustee Roger Plummer to the University of Illinois Board of Trustees, March 12-14, 2002

Resolutions Concerning Chief Illiniwek Approved by the Urbana-Champaign Senate and by Various Academic Departments, with a Letter from 115 Faculty Members to the Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education

Some Undergraduate Courses with Native American Content
Native American House Event Calendar, Spring 2004

Chicago Satellite Office History, Authored by Alicia Gilmore Catching

Multi-Cultural Recruitment Activities, 2003-2004

Ethnic by Applied, Admitted, Enrolled, Yield (1994, 1999-2003)

Miscellaneous unsolicited materials on the Chief and related issues

Supplementary Information Requested by Focused Visit Evaluation Team, Office of the Provost, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 19, 2004

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Web Sites