

***Report of the Chancellor's Commission on Native Imagery:  
Healing and Reconciliation***

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## Chancellor's Commission on Native Imagery: Healing and Reconciliation

### Overview

In Fall 2018, Chancellor Robert Jones established and convened the Commission on Native Imagery to provide advice and suggestions to help the university explore institutional strategies to begin the process of moving our university community forward given the retirement of the Chief Illiniwek university tradition. Establishment of the Commission was suggested by an advisory committee that facilitated communitywide critical conversations in Spring 2018 about the use of Native imagery at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. From November 2018 to April 2019, the Commission held monthly meetings to examine relevant background material, dialogue, and deliberate on a path forward for the University in the four key areas charged by the Chancellor:

- Provide closure, healing and reconciliation for stakeholders
- Facilitate the establishment of new traditions
- Remember the history of the Chief – with a focus on both the intent and impact of the tradition
- Honor and partner with the Native Nations for whom Illinois is their ancestral home

Convener and Co-chair Eric Jolly and Co-chair Stu Levenick facilitated the conversations of the 12 Commission members representing the broad experiences of students, faculty, staff, alumni, and athletics, including Indigenous university stakeholders and former portrayers of Chief Illiniwek. All Commission members were provided the observations of the Chancellor's Critical Conversations on Native Imagery Report and were asked to read the report in preparation for their deliberative work. In addition, the feedback for the meetings included e-mails to the Commission Co-chairs, conversations between the Co-chairs and individual Commission members, and the collection of more than 2,000 informal online survey responses on the intent and impact of the portrayal of Chief Illiniwek.

## Summary of Commission Suggestions

The following suggestions reflect the concurrence of the Commission stakeholders.

### 1. Provide closure, healing and reconciliation for stakeholders

- a. *Launch materials and programming developed for the recognition and commemoration of the history, intent and impact of Chief Illiniwek at a significant public event. This event should serve as both closure for the past and the pivot to the future.*
- b. *Use this event as a formal and public retirement of Chief Illiniwek. The event should invite all stakeholders, including Indigenous students, faculty, staff, alumni and the Council of Chiefs; and should account for issues of power and avoid the appearance of a unidirectional cultural transaction.*
- c. *Establish a plaque or monument outside Memorial Stadium commemorating the history, the original intent of the Chief, and the University's decision to retire the tradition to better align with current educational perspectives on diversity and inclusion.*
  - i. *Establish permanent recognition for those who served as university-sanctioned Chief portrayals, recognizing their intent to positively impact school spirit.*
  - ii. *Establish permanent recognition of the work of Native American student and faculty leadership and of the Critical Conversations participants.*

### 2. Facilitate the establishment of new traditions

- a. *Engage and collaborate with all key University stakeholders in the development of new traditions for students and alumni to enjoy, build momentum around, and rally around collectively.*
- b. *Be transparent regarding proposals and processes for developing new traditions. This process should maintain a clear distinction between the establishment of a university symbol and the creation of a mascot.*
- c. *Dedicate resources by utilizing, as appropriate, external professional resources to engage all key stakeholders in identifying new tradition(s) such as music, symbols, branding, marketing, or a mascot that do not rely upon Native American images or traditions.*

**3. Remember the history of the Chief – with a focus on both the intent and impact of the tradition**

- a. *Facilitate the development of an historically accurate account documenting the Illini, Fighting Illini, and Chief Illiniwek, including:*
  - i. *the origin of the symbols inclusive of the original intent;*
  - ii. *the modern evolution of public understanding of Native American imagery in sports towards what is now understood by many as an inaccurate misappropriation of Native American culture, which is inconsistent with the University’s values of diversity and inclusion;*
  - iii. *the decision by the University to retire the Chief in 2007, including the role of key stakeholders: the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, activists, students leaders and groups;*
  - iv. *the ineffective implementation of that decision, resulting in years of division and strife.*
- b. *Launch of an “Illustrated and Annotated History of the Illini, Fighting Illini and Chief Illiniwek Tradition,” as a long-term web based and University curated content space. This content space should be developed with modern journalistic integrity, rich academically rigorous history, and housed in a prominent and accessible campus location.*
- c. *Facilitate a curated space for a public posting of memories, both positive and negative, of the intent and impact of the Chief traditions. An ever-changing and limited number of these entries will be accessible to all visitors.*

**4. Honor and partner with the Native Nations for whom Illinois is their ancestral home**

- a. *Solicit input and feedback on the Commission’s suggestions and additional ideas from representatives of the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma and other federally recognized Native Nations.*
- b. *Establish a Native American Liaison Officer within the Chancellor’s Office as a conduit to Native American organizations and tribes.*
- c. *Establish ongoing activities for the University to collaborate with the Native Nations for whom the state of Illinois is their ancestral home.*

- d. Collaborate with the American Indian Center of Chicago to partner with the urban Indian communities in Illinois.*
- e. Collaborate with the Native American & Indigenous Student Organization (NAISO) to prioritize and implement events and resources. Some examples might include a public speaker series, Native American history exhibit, a plaque in the stadium or other facilities recognizing Illinois' Indigenous heritage.*
- f. Dedicate an on-campus or local site to the tribes on whose traditional lands the University of Illinois resides, to center the histories of Native Nations in the State, and to acknowledge the State of Illinois' contemporary connections to the American Indian nations who have been forcibly removed from the State.*

Throughout this entire process of critical conversations and the Commission's deliberations, it was often emphasized that healing is a process that helps individuals to rid anger and blaming and to reconcile unfinished business. The suggestions presented here attempt to begin that process for our university. They strive to underscore the importance of including many voices, to seek and welcome input, and to create spaces to both remember and acknowledge who we are and have been as a University. Our hope is this report provides the opportunity for the University of Illinois to continue to acknowledge our responsibility to tribal nations, while ensuring that those University participants who took part in the events of the past are respectfully remembered in the next steps of the process to move the University of Illinois forward. It is in this spirit that we submit this report.