

Dear Campus Community,

For the 2021 review process for Chancellor Amiridis we conducted a comprehensive five-year review of his leadership of UIC. This effort was led by Terry MacTaggart, Senior Consultant and Senior Fellow, at the Association of Governing Boards, who has extensive experience in conducting such reviews. The evaluation process involved an extensive set of interviews with members of the campus community as well as leaders of peer institutions. Dr. MacTaggart also reviewed key documents and initiatives undertaken over the past five years. He submitted a detailed and broad ranging report that I am sharing in its entirety.

May 15, 2021

**Report of a Comprehensive Assessment
Of
Chancellor Michael D. Amiridis
The University of Illinois Chicago
January—May 2021
Conducted by
Terrence MacTaggart, AGB Senior Fellow**

Introduction

This is the report of a comprehensive 360 assessment of Chancellor Michael Amiridis' leadership covering his tenure at the helm of Illinois' public urban research university over the past five years. University of Illinois Board policy stipulates that comprehensive assessments be scheduled during the fifth year of each chancellor's tenure. The University of Illinois System contracted with the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) to conduct this review. AGB in turn proposed Dr. Terrence MacTaggart, an AGB Senior Fellow and former chancellor on several occasions, as the consultant. His biography is attached to this report. From January through April of 2021, Dr. MacTaggart reviewed materials and conducted approximately forty confidential interviews focused on the Chancellor's performance to date and his potential for leadership going forward.

This report is organized under the following headings:

- Review Process
- Assessment Summary
- Illustrative Comments
- Popular Confidence
- Milestone Accomplishments
- Recommendations for the Future

I. Review Process

Confidential individual and small group interviews conducted via Zoom as well as a review of key documents confirming actions and achievements form the

evidentiary basis for the Chancellor's assessment. Topics of inquiry included the Chancellor's strengths as well as opportunities for growth, and his aspirations for the future of the University.

The review process followed these steps:

1. An initial conversation between Dr. MacTaggart and University of Illinois President Killeen
2. An initial conversation between Dr. MacTaggart and Chancellor Amiridis
3. Recommendations from the President and the Chancellor on persons to be interviewed
4. MacTaggart's review of materials related to the Chancellor's performance and communications, in particular his May 7th, 2020 summary report on performance over the preceding five years
5. Approximately forty individual and small group interviews by ZOOM conducted largely in the month of March. Interviewees included the University of Illinois Board Chair, the Chancellor's leadership team, faculty, staff, community leaders, student leaders and the Chancellor's Leadership Board (a group of distinguished external advisors to the Chancellor)
6. A draft report for review by the Chancellor and the President for accuracy and comprehensiveness
7. A final report to the Chancellor and President

Interviews

Interviews began with an explanation of the purposes of the review, its confidential nature, and a request that each interviewee describe their position and relationship to the Chancellor. All interviews included discussions of the Chancellor's strengths, achievements, personal qualities, and priorities for his attention in a post-pandemic environment. Interviewees were forthcoming, offered detailed examples to support their views, and were very positive regarding the Chancellor's leadership before and especially during the pandemic.

Materials reviewed

- The Chancellor's five-year self-assessment of performance
- The Chancellor's mass mailings to the campus community
- University plans
- Organizational charts and related documents
- University policies
- University of Illinois System and Board policies
- Additional materials on the UIC website

II. Assessment Summary

Michael Amiridis' performance is exceptional. In the opinion of those interviewed and this reviewer, his attention is focused on the right strategic and tactical objectives. As the chief executive of an R1 public urban research university, he displays the personality of an engaged, highly visible leader combined with the acumen of an engineer expert in the workings of research institution. UIC is widely regarded within the University and by outsiders as on a clear upward trajectory in terms of quality and reputation. Chancellor Amiridis is ideally suited to continue to advance a University still adjusting to the effects of a two-year budget impasse, continuing budget constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic.

III. Illustrative Comments

The following are exact quotations or near paraphrases from the words of the more than forty individuals articulated in one-on-one interviews and group conversations. There were virtually no negative comments regarding the Chancellor's ability to accomplish the strategic goals of the University. Several interviewees offered priorities deserving his attention going forward. A summary of those recommendations appears in a later section of this report.

- You know a true leader when you see one, and Michael is one
- His key traits are decisiveness, perseverance, and being consistently data-driven
- The best chief executive I've ever worked for
- Easy to work with...you always know where he stands
- He is warmly supportive of individuals
- He has a detailed understanding of the workings of the University
- Michael is charming, direct and seems to draw energy from challenges and problems
- He directly engages with the community with the full force of his personality
- He is very attentive to the complex politics and competing interests of this city
- He is realistic in gauging the agendas of our many community advocates
- Michael is genuinely committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Thank God he is interested in the public perceptions of the University as well as its internal realities
- He engages personally with the media to the benefit of his and the University's credibility
- He is very much on top of the budget, and seems to never forget a number
- A lot of leaders talk innovation, he operationalizes it
- Michael brought the 'entrepreneurial' mantra to UIC
- As smart as he is, he always listens first before deciding

- He is impressive with donors
- I came here because of Michael...he usually gets the people he wants
- Michael remains very attentive to our large health care enterprise, and knows what he needs to know about it
- There were no missteps in his handling of COVID-19
- He really understands the core mission and values of the academy
- He is one shrewd Chancellor

IV. Popular Confidence

Every chief executive needs to hold at least an implicit vote of confidence from a significant proportion of the faculty in order to succeed. Interviews with faculty leaders indicated that these representatives of the academic community hold Chancellor Amiridis in very high regard. Their appreciation of his leadership goes well beyond their response to his ebullient personality. To be sure, he engages the academic community with genuine enthusiasm and takes their recommendations seriously. At the same time, he is reported to be transparent when he chooses a course of action that does not enjoy unqualified faculty support. He is also reported to be a firm negotiator in collective bargaining.

The staff members who work closely with him hold the Chancellor in equally high regard. Several choose to come to UIC based on the vision of the Chancellor. They appreciate the respect he shows his staff and his readiness to hear their professional opinions and recommendations before acting.

Most university chief executives receive positive reviews for their handling of the response to the pandemic. The Chancellor no doubt benefits from this groundswell of support for a decisive leader who communicates often and well in a climate punctuated by fear and uncertainty. However, faculty and staff confidence in Michael Amiridis goes beyond appreciation for his service in the pandemic. They view him as a highly effective champion of their interests and the University where they work. Veteran members of the academic community view him as the most able Chancellor in their memory.

V. Milestone Accomplishments

Confidence in a leader might initially come from a warm personality and respectful relationships. Confidence is confirmed, however, over the long run by signature accomplishments. This section of the report summarizes the Chancellor's most significant achievements under the following headings:

- Crisis leadership
- Academic and student success
- The business of the University

- Milestones

Crisis Leadership

Few institutions are emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic in as good a condition as UIC. Michael Amiridis played an active role in organizing the University's response to the pandemic. His work included overseeing the shift to more online educational delivery, managing the institution in a virtual environment, ensuring timely testing, maintaining safe social and educational interactions, communicating effectively with the campus and the larger community, and sustaining morale with his realistic yet upbeat persona. In terms of fiscal stability, enrollment as well as health and safety, the University remains a strong institution as it emerges from the pandemic.

The Chicago environment presents special and ongoing challenges on the physical safety and security front. Chancellor Amiridis took timely steps to beef up campus security, to intensify training of emergency responders and public safety personnel, and to conduct tabletops and other exercises to prepare for disruptions. He made sure that the University conducted safety operations and planning in close collaboration with its partners in the crises response community. As the author of a book on crisis leadership for presidents and boards, I would be hard pressed to name a more able crisis leader than the Chancellor.

Academic and student success

The Chancellor currently enjoys little less than heroic stature among faculty representatives. To be sure, his support of new tenure track positions and his vocal championing of the quality of the faculty and their programs represents savvy academic politics, but in the Chancellor's case these are viewed as deeply felt and authentic attitudes. He makes good use of the University's significant royalty revenues to support faculty research in STEM as well as the humanities and social sciences. UIC's dramatic rise in national rankings comes in no small measure as a result of these and similar initiatives.

The Chancellor has been the personification of a student-focused leader. He is highly visible in helping students transition onto the campus, meets regularly with and is well-regarded by student leaders, and is featured in the impressive campus video entitled "You are Welcome Here." He is especially sensitive to the rise in mental health concerns among students. He supported the work and recommendations of a task force on student mental health.

The business of the University

UIC operated, like other Illinois public institutions, within the confines of the two-year state budget impasse. Under the Chancellor's leadership, exercised in close concert with his financial officers, the University managed to avoid furloughs, layoffs, and other debilitating measures. UIC's population of low-income, first generation students results in high demand for institutional aid. Relatively few of UIC's students can afford to pay

full tuition. Despite the challenges of the last few years, UIC under Amiridis' leadership continued to allocate \$60M from the annual operating budget to enable more students to enroll and complete their education.

If managing scarce resources when the need far outweighs the funds available is a prime chancellors' responsibility, so is developing alternative sources of revenue and constraining costs. Chancellor Amiridis carefully managed additional revenue from the commercialization of intellectual property to support initiatives which have the potential to further increase external resources. His naming of a Vice Chancellor for Innovation whose job it is to implement new ideas is a farsighted and practical change. Since the vast majority of University expenditures support its human resources, discipline in negotiating with employee bargaining units is essential. Chancellor Amiridis allows his labor relations specialists to do their jobs, yet remains close to that process.

Milestones

Fundraising. In 2017, the Chancellor launched an ambitious \$750 million capital campaign. IGNITE: The Campaign for UIC required a 50% hike in fundraising targets for each of five years. Despite the barriers posed by the pandemic, the campaign which is still in progress has achieved over 80% of its goal and is expected to reach its target. This achievement could well be the beginning of pattern leading to higher levels of philanthropic support.

Facilities planning and expansion. Early in his tenure the Chancellor pushed through the development of a fresh Campus Master Plan, secured funding for construction of a new Engineering Innovation Building and an Academic and Residential Complex, and oversaw completion of these two signature buildings. The Residential Complex became possible through a public-private partnership, the first such partnership in the University of Illinois System. In the works are an Outpatient Surgery Center as well as Computer Science, Drug Discovery, and Advanced Chemical Technology buildings. The cumulative total of projects under construction or in a serious planning stage is \$450M.

The UIC John Marshall Law School. The merger of UIC with the John Marshall Law School created the first public law school in Chicago. Mergers and acquisitions of private entities by state-funded institutions is a complex financial and political endeavor that requires political savvy and finely honed negotiating skills. By all accounts, Chancellor Amiridis possesses those talents in abundance.

Health Affairs. Early in his tenure, the Chancellor played a determinative role in the transfer of responsibility for health care delivery oversight from the UI System to UIC. This organizational change confirmed Board and System confidence in UI Chicago's capacities and leaders, supported a more complete integration with the health sciences Colleges and opens the door to increased revenues.

VI. Recommendations for the Future

When asked to offer recommendations for growth opportunities or aspects of the Chancellor's performance needing adjustment, most respondents had little to suggest. They appreciate what they have experienced in the nearly six years of his leadership and wish it to continue. When pressed, however, several individuals recommended that with the much-desired receding of the pandemic, the Chancellor might turn his attention to considering fresh strategic directions, leadership in rebuilding the social and economic health of Chicago and taking good care of himself.

Although the full consequences of the pandemic remain unclear, better information is emerging concerning student behavior, virtual or *in situ* instruction, their choice of programs, their capacity to afford higher education and related issues. The next few months would seem to be the right time to revisit and perhaps adjust existing plans and the assumptions upon which they are based.

Commentators external to the University called attention to UIC's potential for playing a key role in what they described as rebuilding Chicago. They see the congruence of new presidents at the University of Chicago and Northwestern University as offering the possibility of a partnership of research universities contributing to Chicago's revitalization. Whether alone or with partners, with its strengths in health care delivery and research, its reach to a broad spectrum of Chicago residents and its enterprising Chancellor, UIC would seem well positioned to accelerate the rebuilding of this great American city.

Finally, many of those who work closely with the Chancellor in staff or academic roles appreciate the workload and time commitments of this highly engaged chief executive. COVID fatigue is a reality. With the close of the academic year approaching, several recommended that the Chancellor take a little down time and attend to his own health and work-life balance for the good of Michael Amiridis and his family, and the University he so ably leads.

Respectfully submitted,

AGB Senior Fellow

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Terry MacTaggart is an experienced leader and scholar in higher education. His consulting and research work focuses on higher education leadership, presidential assessment and development, strategy and policy, board development, and issues of shared governance. He has served as a faculty member and administrator at several public and independent colleges and universities where he has led or participated in multiple institutional turnarounds. He has held the Chancellor's position at the University of Wisconsin Superior, at the Minnesota State University System and on two occasions at the University of Maine System.

He has served as a consultant and/or facilitator of leadership retreats for numerous colleges, universities, and systems. His clients include major research universities, urban and metropolitan universities, distinguished independent institutions, regional comprehensives as well as international colleges and universities in Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific Rim, minority serving institutions, nontraditional colleges, community colleges and proprietary schools.

He has served as Chair of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). He has led multiple visiting teams for several regional accrediting associations. He has served as a Fulbright Scholar to Thailand and to Vietnam as an expert on accreditation and quality assurance.

His research and publications focus on governance, improving relations between institutions and the public, and restoring institutional competitiveness. His most recent books are the forthcoming *Assessing and Developing College and University Presidents: An Enterprise Leadership Approach* and *Crisis Leadership: A Guide for Boards and Presidents*, both published in the summer of 2020. In 2017 he published *The 21st Century Presidency: A Call to Enterprise Leadership* (AGB Press). His best-selling book is titled *Leading Change: How Boards and Presidents Work Together to Build Exceptional Institutions*, published by the Association of Governing Boards Press in 2011. In 2007, he published *Academic Turnarounds: Restoring Growth and Vitality to Challenged American Colleges and Universities*. He has authored numerous articles on presidential and board evaluation, high performance standards for boards, presidential search, and strategies for a highly competitive environment.

His academic credentials include a doctorate and master's degree in Literature from Saint Louis University, an MBA, and two honorary doctorates. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

