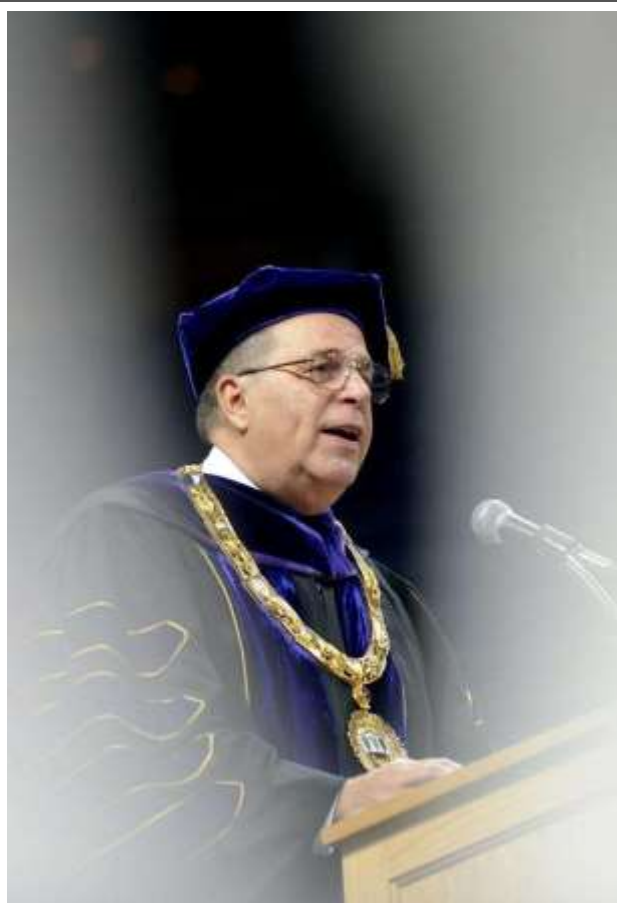


University of Bridgeport seeks president to replace Neil Salonen

Linda Conner Lambeck
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University of Bridgeport's 10th president, Neil Salonen

Bridgeport -- To put it bluntly, the committee looking for the University of Bridgeport's 10th president is searching for a clone.

"We would love to recreate a Neil Salonen," presidential search committee chairman Robert Berchem. "I think he has done an exceptional job. Whoever we pick is going to have to have his talents, presumably with their own individual style."

At work since the fall, a nine-member committee working with Isaacson, Miller -- a consulting firm -- has attracted an "excellent application pool" according to Berchem, a Milford attorney.

How many applicants, he won't say. Interviews are expected in February.

There are said to be a number of strong candidates, including one or more internal one.

"We are working diligently to sort our way through it," Berchem said.

Salonen became president in late 1999, when the university was still on the mend from a near financial collapse almost a decade earlier. UB was saved from closure in 1992 when its board

of trustees struck a deal with the Professors World Peace Academy, an organization founded by the controversial Rev. Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church.

The partnership came with a large infusion of cash and gave the PWPA the right to name a majority of trustees. Over the years, most of its appointees have been local leaders.

Salonen was an unapologetic member of the church and chairman of the UB Board of Trustees when a search was launched to replace Richard Rubenstein, the university's eighth president. Salonen had no background in higher education administration, but took the job when nominated by a search committee.

At the time, Frank Zullo, a member of that search committee, called Salonen "top shelf." Zullo is now co-chairman of the UB Board of Trustees and a member of the new search committee.

Berchem said he doesn't believe the university's past is relevant in the current search, which was launched shortly after Salonen announced in May that he would retire in June 2018.

"I would say the university is in an outstanding position now," Berchem said. "The results of the search so far support that."

Dr. David M. Brady, vice president of health sciences at UB, agreed. He was a junior faculty member during the last presidential search.

"We have come a long way under Salonen," Brady said. "The institution is in a remarkably different place. We want someone who appreciates that and who can maintain the trajectory."



The University of Bridgeport campus in Bridgeport, Connecticut

Fundraising plans

Were he on the search committee, Brady said, he would be looking for someone with a strong track record of leadership in private, tuition-drive colleges, someone with experience in classroom and research and a strong business acumen.

"It's a tall order, but those people are out there," Brady said. "It is a matter of finding them."

Since 2000, UB has slowly rebuilt its enrollment, financial footing, and reputation. Donors have returned, and the university is starting to build a modest endowment. Enrollment this fall stood at 5,326 -- four times what it was in 1992. Nearly 25 percent of UB students come from outside the U.S.

According to Berchem, the new president will be expected to not only keep the momentum going, but hit the accelerator.

"There is still room to grow," he said.

The online profile posted for candidates on the university website says UB's next president needs to build a one-of-a-kind international university of the future. He or she will be tasked with overseeing the university's first capital campaign launched, the website says, to guarantee UB's future.

UB's "new president needs global perspective, fundraising history, trusted leadership," according to the posting.

Berchem said that when interviews are held in February, a small number of finalists will meet with local campus constituents. The full board will have the ultimate say on who becomes president.

Others on the search committee, in addition to Berchem and Zullo, include Trustee co-Chairman Thomas Walsh, trustees Barbara James, Diane Allison and Mark Fries, faculty members Sara Connolly and William Lay, and Provost Stephen Healey.