I. Introduction & Executive Summary:
The picture that emerges from this “snap-shot” inquiry into UIU’s strategic past, present and future is both compelling and challenging. It is compelling because the generous body of oral data collected describes a university that has been transformed over time by a remarkably determined institutional commitment to the identification and implementation of strategic initiatives that have distinguished the school from its own past as well as from its contemporary competition. It is important to stress that this is not a recent phenomenon: UIU has enjoyed, going on four decades, a continuous flow of transformative ideas that have succeeded in altering the strategic trajectory of the university. Regional Centers for extended education, online course fulfillment, international campuses and Division II athletic programs are just a few examples of differentiating macro-strength strategies that have defined UIU’s strategic past and present and which will continue to contribute strategic vitality to its future.

Over the past seven years there has been a newly determined effort to build on these historic strengths and to reinterpret them for the rapidly evolving educational environment of the 21st century. Alan Walker arrived as UIU’s president in 2004 and, early in his tenure, initiated a number of strategic plans and programs with the intention of continuing and accelerating UIU’s strategic momentum. Then in 2007 a strategic planning process was initiated that had as its genesis a campus-led reexamination and rearticulation of UIU’s mission and vision. In 2008 the board of trustees approved the final version of a strategic plan that had emerged from an eleven month comprehensive process dominated by open, inclusive, and transparent dialog and debate.

There is unanimous consensus among those interviewed for this assessment that not only are UIU’s strategic accomplishments over the past seven years real and tangible but that they have served as a catalyst for important governance transitions. There is, for example, a widespread, conclusion, among all interviewees, that the strategic plan has succeeded in focusing the UIU community on strategic goals and objectives. There is, however, a concurrent consensus that this focus is at times imperfect. That there can on occasion be lack of clarity. And there is shared disagreement with how the strategic plan has in some instances allocated resources. But those negative perceptions are viewed as inevitable consequences of a decision-making environment that is urgent, dynamic and fast moving. In that context, there is additional unanimity that the negatives while real do not detract from the overarching seven-year success of strategic implementation. Instead, the imperfections are seen as opportunities with which to engage the future so that UIU might better manage the vast network of intended and unintended consequences that flow from a management culture that is driven by open, transparent and inclusive participation.
UIU’s governance picture, as earlier suggested, is not only compelling but also challenging because while there is a widely held view among the interview participants that UIU must continue to be a strategic innovator, it is of equal importance for UIU to carefully consolidate the gains that have been realized over the past seven years, to ensure that they are deeply rooted and supported so that there can be no backward slippage.

This focus on not slipping back includes, as will be seen from the interview data, yet another strongly and widely held conviction that UIU must continue to invest in those programs and initiatives through which it can accelerate the process of earning a peer-level reputation in higher education for its excellence as a student-centered culture of teaching and learning.

Finally, the phase of the interview process that was designed to attract macro-level new strategic ideas found a bottomless well. The challenge, as will be seen, is to test and prioritize those inspirations and then fit them into a relatively complex matrix of legitimately competing strategic goals and objectives all contending in a finite pool of human and financial resources.

The reader will now find in the balance of this Findings Report the following sections:

- **Section II: Recommendations**—These are the author’s best judgment for how the strategic refreshment process might be focused and organized to proceed in 2012. The recommendations are rooted in the extensive database of oral remarks contributed by the institution-wide interview participants.
- **Section III: Assessment Process**—This section strictly serves to recall how the interview database was created.
- **Section IV: Findings & Conclusions**—The reader will find here the raw oral data from the interviews as well as brief summaries that attempt to capture the principal themes, especially those that are expressed by a significant number of participants.

**II. Recommendations:**

A synthesis of the findings from this inquiry, when focused on the most appropriate steps for UIU to take during the process of strategic “refreshment” (see Section III, below), suggests that the central, urgent and overarching theme that should define the planning work in 2012 is to frame a comprehensive answer to the deceptively simple question “Who are we?” The inquiry data urges that the answer to that question should be found in the work of strategic “refreshment” if that process is driven by four parallel and simultaneously executed planning tracks. The tracks are phrased below as missions and charges for those who will be responsible for the strategic “refreshment”. These are not fully developed “tracks” intended to capture the central core, the subparts and all of the nuances of very complex strategic goals. That necessary outcome should be the first responsibility of four steering task forces, each assigned to one of the tracks.

**Track 1: Make Student-Centered Excellence the Highest Institutional Priority:** Identify the priorities, develop the plans, assign responsibilities and time-lines that are dedicated to creating student-centered excellence starting with the identification of potential
matriculants, the investment in and enforcement of academic rigor, and a commitment to state-of-the-art student services, all of which combine to answer the question “What is a UIU educated person?”

**Track 2: Decide What Institutional and Educational Structure Will Empower UIU to Best Fulfill its Mission:** Identify the priorities, develop the plans, and assign responsibilities and time-lines that are dedicated to pushing UIU into the strategic future: should it look and perform like a traditional university with commitments to a broad variety of schools and professional colleges? Or should it be more narrowly defined as a university that is focused on the arts and sciences and targeted professional colleges? Or something in between? If so, what core competencies should UIU “over-invest” in? Are these different from today’s competencies? What resource base will this require? Is there a credible combination of institutional aspirations that can be matched and supported by the necessary depth of human talent and fiscal capacities? If not, how does UIU build that support?

**Track 3: Ensure that UIU’s Operational Present and Strategic Future are Sitting on an Educational and Financial Foundation that is Sustainable Over Time:** Identify the priorities, develop the plans, assign responsibilities and time-lines that are dedicated to consolidating the strategic and operational gains, to getting the resource allocation balances right, and to making certain that UIU is sitting on a solid, stable and sustainable academic and financial foundation.

**Track 4. Sharpen UIU’s Communications Practices:** Build a comprehensive program of institution-wide communications that continues the recent history of open, transparent and timely explanations and updates that describe UIU’s strategic goals and objectives, that defend the rationale for resource allocations, that describe how individuals and departments fit into the larger strategic picture, and which create the opportunities to recognize shortfalls and celebrate success.

As is readily seen, the four tracks do not independently stand-alone as self-contained strategic topics. They are interconnected and sometimes overlapping. That is good. When aggregated, pulled together by the task forces, a variety of opinions and recommendations will have been generated and the strategic “refreshment” suggested by the four tracks should then yield a comprehensive and cohesive answer to that same simple question: “Who are we?”

**III. Assessment Process:**
There is general concurrence that UIU has reached a point in its strategic planning history, having absorbed the early Walker initiatives and the subsequent strategic plan, now three years old, that in 2012 UIU’s strategic thinking should be “refreshed”. There is a supporting conclusion that launching a new, full scale strategic planning process in 2012 would be an unnecessary misdirection of UIU’s resources. Instead, the process of “refreshment” initiated by this assessment has been focused on the development of answers to a series of interlocking questions:
1. **Is there concurrence that what are cited as UIU’s strategic accomplishments over the past seven years are real and credible?**

2. **How would you describe the UIU structure of strategic governance; what are its strengths and weaknesses and how does it match-up with high-performance characteristics?**

3. **What must UIU continue to do as it seeks to meet the day-by-day operating demands of the established UIU strategic direction?**

4. **What new macro strategic ideas or initiatives might be examined as part of the “refreshment” process; ideas that would further distinguish UIU from its competition?**

During May, June and July of 2011 a number of group and individual interviews were conducted in an attempt to surface answers to the four questions. On May 10 the AGB consultant conducted a series of four group interview sessions: one with new administrators, those who have joined the UIU administration since the approval of the 2008 strategic plan; a second with members of the original strategic planning steering committee; a third with members of the AQUIP committee; and a fourth with new faculty, members of the faculty who have joined the UIU faculty ranks since 2008. In June and July, trustees were interviewed by phone as were staff and faculty members of the UIU Regional Centers. In total, the views of approximately fifty-five UIU trustees, faculty and staff are represented in this Findings Report.

Next steps in the assessment process are anticipated: an all-campus open forum Q&A review of the Findings in late August or early September followed by a report to the board of trustees in September that should conclude with an endorsement of the next steps in the “refreshment” process. Finally, the strategic “refreshment” process will unfold in 2012 and terminate in a planning document that articulates a “refreshed” vision supported by the next steps in the development of UIU’s strategic future.

**IV. Findings & Conclusions:**
The feedback received from the various interviews has been organized to respond to each of the four questions raised above. Note that the use of quotation marks is intended solely to capture the spirit of the comments and not the verbatim language. The conclusions at the end of each section are those of the author.

1. **Is there concurrence that UIU’s strategic accomplishments over the past seven years are real and credible?**
   - “We need to celebrate from top to bottom the UIU accomplishments; they are real, they are tangible, and they are beyond what many believed was possible.”
   - “Yes, they are real, but I don’t understand what values are driving our accomplishments.”
   - “We made progress but we are still too lenient with our academic standards; they need to be constantly raised.”
   - “AQUIP and the strategic plan have been leading two separate lives; they need to be integrated.”
“No question, for example, UIU’s outreach to the community is a major accomplishment and a positive, tangible change.”

“Retention continues to be a major problem and must receive more focused attention.”

“We have actually achieved a great deal of the difficult goal of a ‘seamless’ student experience.”

“The bond financing was a major accomplishment.”

“UIU has made major cultural changes but they were sometimes painful and almost always difficult.”

“There is a much higher level of trust in the governance system today: trust between the board and the president, the board and the faculty, the board and the administration…and the reverse.”

“There is high unanimity among board members that UIU is on the right strategic path.”

“There has been a significant uptick in the interest of alumni as the UIU story of accomplishments plays out.”

“The senior administrative team is first-class and doing an excellent job executing the strategic plan.”

“Ownership for the strategic plan is not as broad and deep as it can and should be.”

“I am concerned that the tuition bills for our centers are getting a little heavy.”

“A significant and excellent philosophical focus for UIU has been accomplished.”

**Summarizing Conclusion:** There is near unanimity that the strategic accomplishments of UIU over the past seven years are real, tangible and transformative. While there are thoughtful reservations about some aspects of the gains made, they are balanced by references to “soft” metrics such as newly found trust within the structure of governance and a still developing sense of institutional self-confidence.

2. How would you describe the UIU structure of strategic governance; what are its strengths and weaknesses and how does it match-up with high-performance characteristics?

   - “One huge and immediate governance change was that our jobs, down to the lowest levels, were connected to strategic goals and objectives.”
   - “UIU’s leadership has been wonderfully transparent; there is no sense of hidden agendas.”
   - “We should add a step of year-end summaries so that we are reminded of the efforts and achievements.”
   - “We do a good job of connecting the budget process to the approved strategic plan.”
• “We need to drive people to the UIU website so that there is more complete knowledge of UIU’s accomplishments.”
• “There should be a campus-wide ‘budget letter’ when the annual budget is approved so that we know how and why resources are being allocated.”
• “The strategic plan has totally changed the way the board of trustees does its work: before we were strongly inclined to micro-manage the various UIU silos but now we have a strategic focus on the eleven pillars.”
• “The governance changes at the board level have been profound: the routine has been marginalized and staff reports are fully aligned with the strategic plan.”
• “The board has made an exponential governance leap best illustrated by its strategic focus and exclusion of routine, nonstrategic power point presentations.”
• “The committees of the board have been restructured to parallel the strategic plan.”
• “The board’s leadership has been energized and focused on strategic accomplishments.”
• “The board no longer wanders around with its agenda; it has been focused by the strategic plan.”
• “The board’s working agendas are very much driven by the strategic plan: at every meeting the trustees monitor progress.”
• “The plan is fully integrated into board agendas.”
• “The board must elevate its focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum.”
• “The board has become a policy board instead of an operating board.”
• “The strategic plan has changed the board from being reactive to proactive.”
• “The board uses a strategic check list so we know where we stand at each meeting.”
• “The strategic plan has served as an important inducement to attract new trustees to UIU.”
• “I think that the board is now seen by faculty, staff and the community as being engaged in ways it was never seen before.”
• “We must find the ways to significantly leverage UIUI’s philanthropic support; the capital campaigns must be successful and grant support must be expanded.”
• “UIU is too ‘top-down’, we must let the ideas percolate up.”
• “We are not customer driven: let’s focus more on the quality of teaching and learning.”
• “I don’t know what UIU’s strategic priorities are and think that all of us should be constantly reminded and refreshed.”
• “The strategic plan has become a living and breathing instrument of governance.”
• “The plan is actively discussed and tracked at cabinet meetings.”
• “The president and his staff use the strategic plan as an operating tool to set priorities.”
• “We have done a much better job of assessing UIU’s strategic environment and this focus must continue.”
“In the absence of previous operating silos, the governance structure is more unified and coherent.”

**Summarizing Conclusion:** UIU’s most striking governance transformation is the strategic plan’s influence on how the board of trustees organizes and conducts its work. In parallel, there is an equally and strongly voiced opinion that the entire UIU organization, top to bottom, has been touched by a new culture of goal setting and personal accountability. On the flip side, however, there is a desire by all non-trustee interviewees that goals and accomplishments are under-communicated: they express an unfulfilled need for regular reviews that remind what the goals are, what obstacles are being encountered, what accomplishments have been realized, and some indication of “where I fit in”.

**3. What must UIU continue to do as it seeks to meet the day-to-day operating demands of the currently established UIU strategic direction?**

- “We must continue to work very hard at ‘global integration’; it is not easy and so far it is incomplete.”
- “I don’t think we have come close to really delivering on the strategy of global citizens.”
- “Have we slipped away from the original dedication to the fulfillment of our commitment to ‘global citizenship’?”
- “We still have silos that distinguish the Fayette campus from the UIU Centers and from our international campuses.”
- “There still is a feeling that we work hard to finance the ‘fat cats’ in Fayette.”
- “We must continue to work to understand how our strategic direction has also changed the UIU culture; we are more integrated now, no more silos, but there are strains to overcome.”
- “We have huge strides yet to make in the total range of customer services to UIU students.”
- “We have a long way to go in the assessment of student outcomes.”
- “We have improved the quality of our faculty but this must continue as a strategic priority.”
- “We must continue to work at clarifying what a ‘global citizen’ is in the UIU educational context.”
- “The absence of foreign language training at UIU is a serious academic defect.”
- “Our educational modalities need to be much more flexible, allowing, for example, Fayette students to enroll in online courses.”
- “We need to fully integrate the next version of the strategic plan with AQUIP.”
- “We need to do a much better job with student services; financial aid is the biggest challenge to a ‘seamless’ campus.”
• “There are instances where UIU’s course registration systems do not integrate each of the concerned departments; student services, as a result, do not meet the tests of excellence.”
• “The faculty handbook is still a distant goal that must be pursued and closed.”
• “We need to do a better job of communicating UIU’s strategic directions; old perceptions are difficult to change.”
• “We must be careful not to underemphasize the importance of the UIU Centers; they are economically important and their success has huge mission implications.”
• “We need to impose the same standards of educational quality on every UIU mode of teaching and learning.”
• “UIU has current institutional strengths that our peers do not enjoy; let’s take full competitive advantage of those assets.”
• “There needs to be an unremitting emphasis on delivering quality in our educational program.”
• “We still are a ‘paper-driven’ administration and therefore probably top heavy with people; put renewed emphasis on efficiency.”
• “We must succeed with the capital campaign and demonstrate that the greater UIU community is behind UIU’s strategic direction.”
• “Fayette enrollment must continue to ratchet up in both numbers and quality.”
• “We must attract a higher caliber of student-athlete so as to be more competitive in the class room and on the playing fields.”
• “We must monitor carefully retention data for online and the centers as well as the associated rate of loan defaults.”
• “We have made a major leap forward but let’s keep our eyes on the ball.”
• “Don’t let our vision run too far ahead of financial realities.”
• “Let’s get each component of the university on a sound footing so that subsidies, one for the other, are eliminated or at least minimized.”
• “We need to do a better job of converting enrollment inquiries into matriculating students.”
• “UIU still has silos—within Fayette and between Fayette and the centers, for example—they need to be eliminated.”
• “Make certain that our growth is sustainable: continue to exercise fiduciary care when allocating resources.”

Summarizing Conclusion: This question elicited a number of strongly held and often repeated criticisms, all constructive, that focused on ways to improve UIU’s current strategic performance. The underlying theme that ties together the critical comments is that UIU should continue to improve by investing in the people and programs that will further raise the level of excellence for strategic initiatives already committed:

• AQUIP should be integrated into the strategic planning process and not live in a parallel track;
• Academic quality and rigor must be a relentless pursuit;
• Balance must be found between resource allocations among competing entities: Fayette vs. Centers vs. International vs. Online;
• Work must continue to credibly create a seamless educational community;
• Work must also continue to find answers to these questions: What or who is a UIU global citizen? What is the UIU definition? How is the “global citizen” outcome achieved? What are the metrics for knowing that we have reached the goal?
• Continue to eliminate silos: there is a difference of opinion whether UIU silos persist, some see them, and some do not.
• Demonstrate that UIU can attract significant philanthropic funding and succeed with strategically targeted capital campaigns.

4. What new macro strategic ideas or initiatives might be examined as part of the strategic planning “refreshment” process; ideas that would further distinguish UIU from its competition?
   • “Let’s have a serious dialog to identify what we want UIU’s reputation to be---‘What is our strategic center of gravity?’—and then build on and invest in that competitive position.”
   • “We must demonstrate how a UIU student benefits from a ‘fully integrated learning experience’ from classroom to online.”
   • “How can we leverage the Fayette campus experience and culture to the other components of UIU’s educational structure?”
   • “We should evolve UIU into a classic university structure with an integrated collection of colleges.”
   • “Let’s change the entire architecture of the academic program: create multiple schools and colleges.”
   • “Introduce a STEM college.”
   • “We should excel in engineering.”
   • “We should examine the addition of a weekend law school to the UIU structure; this would cause an instant shift upward in the perception of UIU’s level of excellence.”
   • “Law and STEM are good ideas but we must carefully assess the competition for law degrees and STEM.”
   • “Restructure the business school as a free standing college.”
   • “Add masters programs.”
   • “Add 2+2 degree programs.”
   • “Let’s challenge the existing paradigm for how students pay for their education; let’s break the mold and invent a new model.”
• “Let’s reinvent career advisory services; create a UIU model that sets the standard.”
• “Build and manage a Fayette hotel and use it as an anchor for a new school of hospitality management.”
• “At every UIU location, demonstrate how education impacts economic development.”
• “Introduce a UIU system of scholarships that is globally competitive.”
• “We must add a languages component to the UIU educational experience.”
• “Intensify UIU’s collaborative connections with community colleges.”
• “Redefine liberal arts as an academic goal in the context of a new UIU definition of an ‘educated person.’”
• “Rethink and enhance the academic advisory function.”
• “Introduce a senior capstone experience.”
• “Just keep ratcheting up academic rigor.”
• “We need to do a better job of defining what a ‘global citizen’ is and then drive our students to achieve specific benchmarks.”
• “Bring major/minor music and the performing arts to the curriculum.”
• “Really important to hear the voices of the faculty and staff; let’s see where they think UIU’s transformative future lies.”
• “Continue the investment in the Fayette campus as the strategic heart of UIU.”
• “We should challenge the way we think in order to find new ways to serve our principal constituents: students.”
• “Let’s challenge the way we think about the future.”
• “UIU should seek to further expand its geographic reach, both in the United States and to new international markets.”
• “Let’s reinvent higher education to make it more affordable, more effective, better outcomes, and distinctively different.”
• “Let’s be careful and not lose sight of the need to consolidate our strategic gains before charging off in new macro directions.”
• “Let’s take UIU to secondary school education: offer core courses, online, weekends, to contribute to the remedial preparation of our future students.”
• “UIU students should have extensive access to internships and externships to help them confirm their career directions.”
• “UIU students should be required to spend time fully immersed in a diverse culture, either international or domestic.”
• “Support the Centers so as to maximize their potential.”
• “The critical student-mass for Fayette must be raised to the 1500 level.”
• “UIU should be marketing its brand beyond current geographic boundaries: extend to some of the larger metro markets like Chicago and Minneapolis.”
• “Instead of a shot gun geographic expansion why not invest so as to saturate and control major markets; be number one rather than a struggling me-too.”
• “Make certain we are in control of our current priorities before prematurely diluting our resources and energies.”
• “We need to perfect our basic ‘blocking and tackling’ as a central focus on guaranteeing the future.”
• “We need to do a better job of defining our goals—‘What is success?’—and how do we measure accomplishments.”
• “We should upgrade our educational centers, make them more permanent, and extend them to larger markets.”
• “We need to figure out and confirm what our core competencies are and then support them with resource allocations.”
• “Continue the focus on the UIU brand and how we market it to our many constituents.”
• “Our athletics strategy is not clear; we seem to set lofty goals but do we allocate resources consistent with those pronouncements?”

Summarizing Conclusion: There is no end of “big-macro” ideas that emerge from interviewees when they are inspired to unrestricted dreaming. The challenge that is now open to the “strategic-refreshing” process is to sort through the competing priorities and develop a “refreshed” vision for UIU that is both cohesive and credible. The recommended “four tracks” that close Section II of this report are intended as the first steps in that process.

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