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Executive Summary

On October 5, 2010, President Mark B. Rosenberg welcomed more than 100 of South Florida’s top education, business and civic leaders to the Modesto A. Maidique Campus of Florida International University to discuss FIU’s strategic direction and future goals. This second Community Leaders Summit was a follow-up to two summits held in 2009 to engage the community in FIU’s strategic planning. For the second year, the summit was led by Maria Alonso, Bank of America senior vice president and chair of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce; Jack Lowell, Flagler Development vice president and chair-elect of the Beacon Council; and Judge Michael Chavies of Akerman Senterfitt.

President Rosenberg updated participants on the university’s progress during the past year, specifically highlighting recommendations that have been implemented as a result of the first summit. A key message of the 2009 summits was that FIU needed to improve its public communications with a university-wide branding campaign. In March 2010, FIU launched the “Worlds Ahead” branding campaign to share the FIU story. Worlds Ahead is the university’s public declaration of what makes FIU unique: FIU is a vibrant, student-centered public research university, ideally located in Miami that is worlds ahead in its commitment to learning, research, entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity so that our graduates are prepared to succeed in the global marketplace. The Worlds Ahead message was uniformly praised during the summit, and it formed part of the call to action for summit participants.

Feedback and recommendations from the 2009 summits served as a guide for the university’s strategic plan, and are reflected in the university’s goals for the next five years. These themes and goals were integrated in the topics for the five breakout discussions of the 2010 Summit:

- Student Centered Academics
- Building Affinity: Communications, Marketing, and Athletics
- Revenue Generation: Finance and Fundraising
- Strategic Partnerships
- Community Outreach and Alumni Relations

These topics resonated with community leaders as the right priorities for the university’s future. The emphasis on expanding strategic partnerships with other important institutions and organizations created significant enthusiasm at the summit. Participants continued to emphasize the importance of partnering with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, as
this will benefit students in our community, as well as the public schools and the university. Hosting the summit on campus also served as a way to accomplish one of the goals – building affinity. Participants left feeling energized about FIU’s future, and many said that they would be back on campus soon.

In general, participants offered positive assessments of FIU and the role it plays in the community. They commented on the quality education that FIU provides, and the important role it plays in providing access to students because it is an excellent value for the cost. Several were impressed that the university acted so quickly on one of the recommendations presented last year by creating the Office of Engagement. As one participant stated, “FIU is well positioned to publicly demonstrate how to be a responsible community partner.”

The good news is that FIU is already implementing several of the recommendations made by this group of South Florida leaders at the 2010 summit. These accomplishments must be better communicated to the community. The challenge lies in how to implement this improved communication strategy and expand FIU’s initiatives in a time of dwindling financial resources. South Florida’s leaders agree that FIU provides high-quality education and serves as a vital economic engine in the community. We must all work together to strengthen that message.
Key Recommendations:

Expand the Worlds Ahead brand campaign:
• Showcase faculty and research
• Inform the community of achievements and cultural resources
• Share alumni success
• Increase social media presence

Build alumni relations:
• Leverage faculty to help bring alumni back to campus
• Ensure quality communication with alumni
• Develop out-of-state alumni outreach efforts
• Establish FIU Alumni Days at civic organizations
• Enhance partnerships with high school alumni associations
• Focus on improving customer service with current students to build affinity

Improve student graduation rates:
• Conduct survey to determine why some students take longer to graduate
• Implement a strategy to improve retention and graduation rates
• Assign undeclared majors to a faculty or peer advisor to provide support
• Develop a monitoring system that tracks student progress and initiate contact at the first sign of change in attendance

Increase revenue generation
• Develop and promote a concrete ROI as an incentive to donate
• Focus on raising awareness of FIU among donors who do not send their children to FIU
• Begin fundraising campaign with faculty and staff
• Create regional fundraising teams
• Expand international student recruitment to increase revenue base
• Position FIU as a think tank for the business sector
• Expand offerings for fee-based professional, technical and non-degree seeking certification programs
• Seek ways to monetize research

Build community affinity
• Create a countywide FIU Pride Day
• Expand Pantherization around the BBC and MMC campuses
• Increase opportunities for the community to visit campus

Improve student recruitment
• Build stronger relationships with high school guidance counselors
• Begin college student recruitment at the middle school level
Student-Centered Academics

Community leaders expressed interest in a range of academic issues: from admission standards to the importance of retaining top-notch faculty. The group discussed at length the importance of reaching out to middle and high school students so that students begin, at an early age, to identify FIU as a first-rate research university. Several recommendations were made to successfully reach potential FIU students: expand our Book Award Program, whereby outstanding high school juniors are selected and presented with a book written by an FIU graduate, and enhance partnerships with local high school alumni associations.

The group highlighted the importance of focusing on how high school guidance counselors perceive FIU, as they are the ones who advise students of their future educational opportunities. Student leaders who participated in the session suggested that guidance counselors have more negative perceptions of FIU than the students themselves. While potential and current students see the many positive opportunities at FIU, they could be discouraged from attending if they receive inaccurate information. In an effort to be innovative in marketing FIU, one participant suggested focusing on the companies that recruit FIU students. Marketing where FIU students are placed in the workforce could serve as another way of increasing the value of the FIU degree.

Several groups spoke about the importance of improving the FIU experience for current students as the best way to build affinity for future students and alumni. President Rosenberg’s focus on creating a student-centered campus aims to address this concern and serves as an avenue for improving FIU’s retention and graduation rates. The need for a more direct relationship between students and their academic advisors was also mentioned as an important way to improve retention rates. It was suggested that each student be assigned a specific advisor from the moment they enter FIU. Participants felt that FIU should become more aggressive with contacting students at the first sign of an issue. Understanding the limited resources available, participants suggested assigning faculty or peer mentors to assist with these efforts.

Community leaders then discussed the unique demographic found at FIU where many students may be supporting a family or have other responsibilities while studying. It was suggested that FIU establish a cooperative education program for those students. Such an initiative could provide these students with an opportunity to participate in a rotating internship program, for instance, and enable them to gain experience while working to support their families.

Another topic of discussion was block tuition, where each student pays one rate of tuition regardless of the number of credits he or she takes per semester. The Florida Board of Governors is currently reviewing a proposal for block tuition, and summit participants were asked for suggestions on how FIU should respond. Participants expressed concern over the feasibility of introducing this concept at a traditionally commuter school like FIU. They suggested ensuring that there would be options or different tiers of block tuition to give students flexibility with respect to class times, like weekend classes, to enable them to meet their outside obligations while taking additional courses.

Finally, the group talked about the current tuition structure and indicated that they felt FIU's tuition was low compared to our peers. They raised the concern of attracting great faculty when we do not have the funds to pay them competitively. Although participants agreed that FIU should be affordable, they felt that we should price our product more competitively. Being sensitive to student concerns regarding increased tuition, community leaders felt that FIU should offset those increases by providing greater scholarship opportunities for our students.
Building Affinity: Communications, Marketing and Athletics

South Florida’s leaders agree that the university’s efforts in every aspect can only be strengthened by building affinity with FIU and the overall FIU experience. Participants were impressed with the Worlds Ahead branding campaign, and are optimistic about the positive impact it will have on the future. Community leaders agreed with FIU targeting prospective students for the campaign and suggested using social media and including the parents of prospective students in our outreach. Attendees did caution that the Worlds Ahead campaign cannot be merely a logo or slogan – there must be substance behind the brand. Some stressed the importance of effectively communicating the university’s accomplishments and suggested that the Worlds Ahead campaign was the perfect platform to do so.

Leaders also embraced the idea of “Pantherization” of the South Florida community. While still in its infancy, Pantherization consists of partnering with local businesses to place FIU memorabilia and signage in the areas surrounding each of the university’s campuses. The participants discussed the importance of this visual affirmation of FIU’s presence in the community and suggested highlighting the Biscayne Bay Campus and surrounding areas in our Pantherization efforts. The City of Sweetwater, for instance, has shown an interest in helping FIU build a college-town feel by enhancing our partnership with the city. Pantherization is another avenue for building affinity with prospective students and thus furthering FIU’s Worlds Ahead branding campaign.

The importance of inviting individuals in the community to visit the university’s campuses to see, firsthand, how it has grown and flourished, was highlighted by this group. One participant noted that spreading the information about FIU starts with each individual telling the FIU story. Pantherization and campus visits provide ways for the community at large to become more aware of FIU.

Participants then discussed at length the importance of athletics as an affinity builder. While participants cautioned that there must be a balance between athletics and academics, everyone agreed that athletics is a good platform to effectively and positively brand the university. The remaining challenge is to increase community participation in athletic events – particularly in South Florida where there is so much competition for the community’s attention. Participants also indicated the need for promoting FIU’s research and our faculty’s achievements to ensure that academics remain a critical component of the FIU brand.

Strategic Partnerships and Research

The creation of the Office of Engagement was a direct result of recommendations made by leaders in the 2009 Community Leaders Summits. Participants supported this concept of having FIU align its intellectual capital with
the community’s needs in order to serve as a solution center for the community. Leaders also discussed the need to be informed of the initiatives FIU is already pursuing in the community. The Office of Engagement was created to centralize all of FIU’s strategic partnership initiatives. This opportunity for co-recruitment, co-hiring and joint programming are additional avenues for FIU to heighten its profile in the community.

Suggestions were made to increase FIU’s partnerships with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, as a vast majority of Miami-Dade’s teachers received their degrees at FIU. South Florida’s leaders recognize the importance of expanding FIU’s involvement and partnership with the City of Sweetwater. Participants agreed that the proximity of Sweetwater to the Modesto A. Maidique Campus makes it natural for the university to strengthen its relationship with the city. Another suggestion was to incorporate community service as a requirement in the student experience, and as a way to help build relationships in the community.

Participants expressed an interest in FIU looking to research as a way to generate revenue and build affinity for the university. Several spoke of the Gatorade Effect that has benefitted the University of Florida. They emphasized that research can bring heightened exposure for the university while serving the needs of the community.

The suggestion to better utilize FIU’s relationship with the National Hurricane Center was also proposed. FIU’s strength in research related to energy and resource preservation provides additional opportunities to partner with the community to find solutions. FIU’s Solar Decathlon house, built by FIU students in the College of Architecture + The Arts, is one such example. Another participant noted, “Outstanding researchers can generate a powerful platform for spreading the story about FIU similar to what an all-star athlete can do for a university.”

Revenue Generation: Finance and Fundraising Breakout Group

Community leaders were briefed on the status of FIU’s major fundraising campaign. This campaign is in the silent phase of identifying donors, and will soon become public. Attendees were encouraged to see that FIU is being aggressive in its fundraising efforts, and provided suggestions on how best to reach its goals. One such suggestion was to include Broward, Palm Beach and Naples, among others, in the larger South Florida region in FIU’s fundraising strategies. Additionally, participants felt that it was important to target individuals who are not alumni of the university. For a campaign of this nature, non-alumni historically generate the majority of the funds raised. This presents a challenge for FIU in helping the community adopt a greater level of affinity for the university. Another recommendation to expand FIU’s financial reach beyond Miami-Dade County is to focus on the university’s international engagement.

The importance of having accurate data on our alumni was stressed, as well as ensuring the appropriate data cleansing on a regular basis. Alumni need to feel that the university is aware of them and appreciates them. One participant posed the question of whether FIU is adequately communicating to prospective donors the return on investment in FIU.

Participants suggested developing regional fundraising teams similar to alumni chapters which would serve as ways of reaching out to new markets and enticing new donors. Another suggestion was to ensure that the university has the support of its faculty and staff first. Through their commitment to financially support FIU, as is custom at other institutions, they become an example and a strong voice for FIU’s case in the community. Participants agreed that they can support these efforts through their own interactions and serve as ambassadors for the university.
Participants then discussed the university’s new revenue-generating strategies and provided suggestions for doing so. Due to regulations on the use of state funding, the university should seek non-state revenue generators which allow for more flexibility. Faculty could generate additional revenue through student internships. Targeting veterans and other military officials (and their families) who now have eligibility and access to higher education could serve as an added source of revenue for the university. Additional outreach in Latin America could also support the president’s vision of increasing our enrollment and providing additional tuition revenue.

Community leaders support the development of revenue-generating partnerships, as well as the development of revenue-generating research. Such marketable research could address concerns for the community while providing sustainable revenues for FIU. FIU should seek companies where there are current partnerships, engage students and serve as a think tank.

Community Outreach and Alumni Relations

Community leaders recognize that we all have a stake in the success of Florida International University – whether one is a graduate of the university or not. The community benefits from the university as FIU helps build an educated workforce.

Communicating FIU’s impact to the community was stressed as a crucial need for the university to reach its alumni and surrounding community. It was suggested that a large-scale advertising campaign be launched to make the community aware of FIU’s accomplishments.

It was further noted that faculty members have an important role to play as ambassadors of the university in the external community. One participant suggested conducting a survey to see what types of activities FIU faculty are currently engaged in and to keep track of this involvement. This could serve as a highly effective tool for the university. The group also suggested recognizing such involvement in the community during faculty evaluations.

Engaging FIU’s broad alumni base is seen as the best way to engage the South Florida area. Ensuring that FIU has a current alumni database was discussed as critical for reaching and communicating with as many alumni as possible. Suggestions for improving affinity include encouraging alumni to participate in community service projects that FIU is already engaged in and asking faculty to host social gatherings for their graduates. Participants agreed that student interaction with faculty is a key factor in how FIU is perceived by students. Participants emphasized that if the student experience was not positive, the alumni will not have affinity and loyalty to their alma mater.

One noteworthy suggestion was to identify key civic organizations in Miami-Dade County in which many FIU alumni participate and raise FIU awareness through those organizations. This is seen as a way of “friend-raising” and “brand-raising.” This notion mirrors the “FIU Corporate Days” initiative that Alumni Relations hosts with employers who have several FIU graduates and offers an opportunity to inform alumni on FIU’s latest accomplishments. One final suggestion was to create an “FIU Pride Day” for all of Miami-Dade County.
Special thanks to all the individuals and organizations who helped to make the Community Leaders Summits a success:

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- Maria Alonso, Bank of America
- Jack Lowell, Flagler Development Group
- Michael Chavies, Akerman Senterfitt

**Summit Facilitators:**
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