Background

The “Campus Conversation” initiated in fall 2004 by President Koob consisted of two related questions:

• What makes UNI a great place to work? and
• What would make it better?”

President Koob added to these questions the following statement: “We are seeking answers to these questions which can be implemented to benefit not only individual employees, but can contribute to the realization of UNI’s mission of offering a world class university education, providing personalized experiences, and a lifetime of opportunities to students and employees alike.”

Process

A Campus Advisory Committee was assembled to: 1) consult with the President of UNI and provide advice on broad campus issues, and 2) encourage and facilitate communications and coordination among the various constituencies at UNI. The Campus Advisory Committee consists of 12 representative members from administration, faculty, staff and students, 2 ex officio members from United Faculty and the UNI AFSCME local, and the President of UNI.

http://www.uni.edu/pres/univcomm/advisory.shtml

Requests for comments in response to the two overarching questions were solicited from the campus via UNI Online as well as through division channels. Responses to the questions were received from 146 individuals and groups representing all sectors of the UNI campus. Members of the Faculty Senate sought input from their colleagues and submitted compiled comments from each of their respective colleges as they deemed appropriate.

The Campus Advisory Committee considered all responses, consolidated the overall themes suggested by the responses, and developed this white paper to share with the campus as the next step in the conversation.

In reviewing the comments submitted, it became apparent that according to Iowa Code, the topics listed on page 5 under the heading Mandatory Bargaining & Permissives may only be pursued through collective bargaining. By law it is not possible for these topics to be part of the campus-wide discussion planned for February 2005.

Next Steps

All members of the campus community are urged to read and react to the thoughts in this white paper, except as noted above. Some comments were excerpted to illustrate the overall conclusions reached by the Campus Advisory Committee. Anyone who is interested may review all the comments received by visiting this Web site where the comments are recorded anonymously.

http://www.uni.edu/conversation/
A campus-wide workshop to discuss the areas which are open to consideration will be held in February 2005 at a time and location to be announced. The Campus Advisory Committee encourages all members of the campus to participate.

Participants in the campus-wide workshop will have the opportunity to look at the information contained in this white paper from several different perspectives. Among those will be:

- A discussion of the possible solutions identified by the Campus Advisory Committee as well as other approaches uncovered in the course of the discussion;
- A consideration of the cost/benefit of the possible solutions in the overall context of University needs; and
- Identify which approaches will do the most to help the University realize its overall mission of offering a world class university education, providing personalized experiences, and a lifetime of opportunities to students and employees alike.

“What Makes UNI a Great Place to Work?”

In terms of the question “What makes UNI a great place to work?”, the responses tended to fall into four interrelated categories:

- **Campus Community and Campus Life**
- **General Comments about Educational Mission/Goals**
- **Community Outreach**
- **Employment Benefits** (This category falls under the Iowa Code related to collective bargaining and therefore the comments received may not be presented or discussed in this document.)

**Campus Community and Campus Life**

The vast majority of the responses centered around two interrelated areas within the larger category described as “Campus Community and Campus Life.” These responses enthusiastically described 1) The “sense of community” on the UNI campus, and 2) The “family atmosphere” felt by those who work here.

Comments within this category ranged from those by individuals who feel the University offers a stimulating and welcoming environment -- to those who feel a family atmosphere surrounds every aspect of life on the UNI campus. In addition, members of the University community frequently mentioned such areas as the friendly and helpful nature of everyday interaction on campus, the positive outlook that seems to be shared by all, the supportive work environment that has been built in all sectors of campus, the fact the campus is intellectually stimulating, and the pride all take in sharing well-maintained and beautiful grounds.

Two individual comments in particular summarize the thoughts shared by so many in this category:

“I feel UNI is the best place in the world to work. When I reflect on why I feel that way, I conclude that it is because of the community atmosphere. UNI is attractive, well maintained, and friendly, with a spirit of camaraderie woven throughout the entire community.”
“There is a sense of community and common purpose here. I can not think of an occasion when I called upon others to help me when that help was not enthusiastically forthcoming.”

The remainder of the responses to the question “What makes UNI a great place to work?” fell into the three additional, and related, areas: General Comments About Educational Mission/Goals, Community Outreach, and Employee Benefits.

General Comments about Educational Mission/Goals:

Comments in this category tended to center around the pride people feel in helping foster the “Students First” climate felt across campus. It was clear from the responses that many feel there is a shared vision within the educational community, a vision where the welfare of the students and enhancing their learning are the primary focus. One individual described this vision thus,

“Shared Vision (inspirational, inclusive climate, collaboration excellent).”

Another common thread in this category described the high quality of the students who attend UNI. One respondent summarized the feelings of many this way:

“'Students First' - I believe we really do this. This is what we should be about, and I think that we are.

Community Outreach:

Still another group of responses focused on the positive relationship being fostered between UNI and the surrounding community. These comments indicated a positive, almost symbiotic, relationship between the UNI community and those in surrounding areas -- as well as across the state of Iowa in general. Those who mentioned this positive relationship most often mentioned a “partnership” that all wanted to see nurtured and enhanced.

One individual in particular seemed to sum up this common feeling best by saying,

“UNI provides an opportunity for students, faculty, staff, and the larger community to interact with and develop relationships with people from Iowa, the U.S., and the world. An opportunity exists for every individual on campus and within the community to have their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives affirmed, challenged, and further developed by a diversity of people and creative thought available on campus.”

Employee Benefits

May not be discussed, as noted previously.

“What Would Make It Better?”

Along with the numerous positive comments came many suggestions for improvement. These suggestions were organized into ten general categories: Employment, Ergonomics, Family Members, Parking, Perquisites, Wellness, Communication, Environmental, Professional Development, and University Culture. Most general categories were further subdivided into sub-categories. Those
wishing to see how all of the comments were organized for review should visit the Campus Conversation website.  http://www.uni.edu/conversation/

Campus Advisory Committee held a four-hour workshop to develop themes that in their judgment best captured the intent of the many suggestions. Seventeen themes emerged; seven of these fall under the umbrella of Mandatory Bargaining and Permissives, which may only be addressed in collective bargaining. The themes in each category were:

**For Full Campus Discussion**
- Campus Culture and Communication
- Conservation
- Curriculum Development
- Diversity
- Employee Gathering Places and Events
- Employee Recognition
- Leadership Development
- Organization Structure and Processes
- Student Employment
- Support Staff

**Mandatory Bargaining & Permissives**
- Career Management
- Campus Parking
- Employment Benefits
- Flexible Benefits
- Professional Development
- Tuition as a Benefit
- Wellness

It is readily seen that there is some overlap in these themes; some are more general and some very specific. For example, campus diversity is certainly an element of campus culture, but was thought worthy of independent development. Also the themes to some degree reflect different ways of thinking about topics. Since it is the purpose of this paper to stimulate conversation, not resolve issues, the committee felt this ambiguity was quite acceptable, perhaps even desirable.

As the Committee discussed the campus input, we identified possible solutions. These possible solutions are included in the following overview. They are not intended to be seen as final solutions, rather as thought starters to stimulate further discussion.

**Topics For Full Campus Discussion**

**Campus Culture and Communication**

Many employee comments spoke positively of the strength of our campus community and the remarkable quality of their colleagues. Some comments however expressed concerns regarding campus culture. Several employees spoke of feeling unconnected with the rest of the University and their colleagues. Others talked of feeling unappreciated and unrecognized for their work and accomplishments. Other concerns focused on the areas of communication and diversity. The fostering of diversity was almost uniformly seen as a priority for the maintenance of a world class, global learning environment. Diversity concerns ran a full socio-economic range from the existence of gender, race or age based “old boys” networks to a failure to maintain a minority presence on all levels of employment and in all departments. Suggestions on how to achieve that diversity were less uniform.
Possible Solutions:

- The University recognizes the quality of employees and community as core strengths. The establishment of a culture of recognition and appreciation would build on these strengths and improve the overall quality of campus life. Components to enhance the university culture could include an institutional recognition program and a leadership development program for all employees.

- One suggested strategy for meeting diversity needs was building diversity incentives into university growth or reformulation initiatives and another was providing diversity training as a core component of the University wide leadership development program (noted in a later section).

Conservation

Many individuals participating in the “Campus Conversation” expressed interest in exploring options for recycling across the UNI campus.

In discussion, several points were made. First, within the Cedar Valley and surrounding communities, recycling just does not appear to be of the highest priority at this time, a fact which makes attaching any campus effort all the more difficult to institute. If there aren’t appropriate support systems around us, any efforts we make in this area will be uphill. That does not mean we should not be proactive.

Possible Solution:
A possible first step would be to look at the packaging of items offered for sale in the Maucker Union and other sites on campus. Just to name one example, taking steps such as replacing Styrofoam cartons with paper cartons could help in this area. Additional study of the area of recycling would be appropriate.

The second area within this particular topic related to “energy conservation” on campus. Comments in this area ranged from the possibility of shutting down the campus during holiday breaks, to keeping windows in offices closed while the heating system is functioning, to turning out the lights in rooms when they are not being used. The main focus of these comments was on educating individuals on campus to the actions everyone could take to help in this area.

Possible Solution:
Since energy conservation is everyone’s responsibility, consider implementing a campus-wide energy education program.

Curriculum Development

Faculty expressed the need for support in curriculum development and teaching skills. Examples of specific suggestions included:

- Electronic (web based) training through “Skillsoft”.
- Re-institute the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching, or set up some type of formal mentoring process that can match up those who are known to be good teachers with new incoming faculty or faculty who may struggle with teaching.
• Academic program reviews should be managed on campus, not by the Regents.
• Facilitate cross-disciplinary curricular exploration and development.
• Review curriculum change process.

Possible Solution:
Explore the types of curriculum development and teaching skills which when implemented could have the greatest impact on the campus and identify an approach for delivering those services.

Diversity

There was a strong sense expressed by several respondents that UNI should be more active in promoting diversity. The comments centered around academic support, commitment to recruiting and hiring faculty and staff of color, and University structure to promote diversity. The following comments are representative of those submitted:

“Diversity and receiving a multicultural education through courses that are taught from a multicultural perspective are given a lot of lip service but ‘show me the money’ that indicates a multicultural academic curriculum exists and is valued to the point that it is reviewed, improved, implemented and that allocated resources within each college specifically are designated . . . to implement a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy . . . “

“What is the University’s commitment to recruiting, supporting, and retaining U.S. faculty of color? What is the University’s interest in knowing about and addressing concerns of faculty of color?”

“An important contribution would be greater leadership from the President’s office in the area of diversity. Even the name of the office – Compliance and Equity Management – suggests a narrow mandate. At UNI, we focus apparently only on compliance and management of equity. We apparently offer the university community no proactive leadership and vision.”

Possible Solutions:
• Establish a system to assure that diversity efforts are regularly reviewed and improved. Allocate resources within each college specifically designated for multicultural materials and multicultural professional development opportunities.

• Expand Compliance and Equity Management’s role to provide leadership, education and support to help reach a greater understanding and appreciation for a diverse and inclusive university. The definition of diversity should be understood to include nationality, religion, economic status, and age in addition to more commonly understood issues of race and ethnicity.

• Finally, efforts to diversify the student body should be continued and intensified.
Employee Gathering Places and Events

A good many individuals expressed interest in having a “dining/gathering” place for UNI employees (similar to the Oak Room) and “event assistance” that would reduce the cost of attending some events held on campus.

Possible Solution:
The frequency of these comments suggests it may be time to explore the current feasibility of providing such a dining/meeting place, which would be open to all UNI employees. It was suggested that the space once occupied by the Commons Dining Service, for just one example, might be an appropriate site. There might be other potential sites as well.

The comments made by those interested in event assistance seemed to gravitate most to whether it might be possible to eliminate or reduce the cost of attending some events on campus. Such events mentioned ranged from athletic events to events held at the GBPAC. It was noted that reducing revenue generated through ticket sales for events would place a burden at some other place within the operating budget.

Possible Solution:
Explore the feasibility of offering employees unsold tickets at a reduced rate.

Employee Recognition

Several employees spoke of feeling unconnected with the rest of the University and their colleagues. Other employees talked of feeling unappreciated and being unrecognized for their work and accomplishments. The University recognizes the quality of employees and community as core strengths.

Possible Solution:
Establishment a culture of recognition and appreciation that would build on recognized University strengths and improve the overall quality of campus life.

Two suggested components of this culture would be the creation of an institutional recognition program and a leadership development program for all employees. The institutional recognition program that recognizes service and excellence in substantive, meaningful ways, would work to enhance the promotion of an internal culture that assigns real value to the contributions of exceptional employees on every level. Further, leadership development for all employees (as noted in Leadership Development Section) would promote a culture of leadership on every level, training traditional leaders in the values and mission of the University and providing non-traditional leaders with the tools and support to effectively participate in collaborative leadership of the University and its departments.

Leadership Development

In their comments many employees identified concerns about the University’s direction and their role in it. Questions of University priorities and the role of department heads and their selection were voiced by several employees. The sentiments of many were captured in these comments:
“Poor leadership, passive faculty or even frequent administrative turnover has allowed some departments to fail or stagnate, drifting away from the University’s mission and goals.”

“No head should serve three terms. A one time, six-year term should be sufficient.”

Many employees identified problems facing the University, but failed to identify a role for themselves in the solution of those problems.

**Possible Solution:**
The Advisory Committee suggests that one solution is to establish a leadership development program that empowers all employees to play an active role in the fulfillment of the University’s mission and the promotion of its vision and values. Such a program would provide all employees with enhanced communication skills, conflict resolution training, diversity training and other educational experiences that would allow for professional growth and an enhanced role in the campus community.

**Organization Structure and Processes**

This general theme had the widest range of suggestions, as the list of examples below will demonstrate.

- Address issues of inequality between workgroups.
- Provide greater accessibility to managers, supervisors, and administration.
- Align our work with UNI’s vision and core values.
- Suggest that an active, campus-wide safety program be endorsed and promoted by the President and Cabinet to reduce both the number of work related injuries and illnesses...
- Convert to a system of elected departmental chairperson rather than appointed departmental heads.
- Review the incentives and other aspects for becoming a Department Head
- Reassess of the value of the MEMFIS system to campus.
- Decentralized budget has not been good for graduate education in recent years. Not every college makes graduate education a priority and some colleges have been unwilling to take up the budget slack that has weakened graduate education.
- Fall in-service training for new department heads (coordinated jointly by UF and Academic Affairs) on collective bargaining.
- ...with increasing demands for contact knowledge coming from national organizations and State accreditation departments, we are going to have to add hours to student’s programs.

**Possible Solution:**
Perhaps the lesson here is that UNI needs to establish opportunities for regular examination of its own structure, practices and processes by both faculty and staff. The Campus Advisory Committee suggests that this review may uncover the financial resources necessary to implement some of the other initiatives that will undoubtedly require a financial commitment.

**Student Employment**

Rising tuition and other expenses have led to greater reliance of many students on working long hours. The general observation was that this was not in students’ best interest academically.
Possible Solution: Conduct a regular review of student work needs and University approaches to hiring students to identify ways to provide more financial support for students.

Support Staff

The long period of budget reductions expressed itself in the need for more staff positions. Faculty expressed need for more help in the form of teaching and research assistants, and clerical and technical staff. Staff members noticed how thinly they were spread in many areas. Food service was offered as a specific example of the latter.

Possible Solution: Include ‘Support Staff’ levels required to most efficiently accomplish any job or set of jobs as an element in the examination of University structure, practices and processes noted in the “Organization Structure and Processes” section.