A series of campus forums in October 2015 brought together faculty, staff, and students to help identify where the University can marshal its research strengths most powerfully to address critical societal challenges.

Forums were organized around broad thematic areas overarching multiple ideas from faculty. The broad themes were Just and Equitable Societies, Human Health; Human Potential and Well-Being; Sustainable Cities and Resilient Communities; and Food, Water, and Energy. Summaries for each of the forums are posted on the TC Campus Strategic Plan website.

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**Grand Challenges Research Forum**

**October 13, 2015**

**Theme: How Will We Foster Human Potential and Well-Being Across the Life Course in a Diverse and Changing World?**

**Introduction**

*How will we foster human potential and well-being across the life course in a diverse and changing world?* The Grand Challenges Research Forum structured around this theme took place Oct. 13, with 100 faculty, staff, and students attending from varied University departments and programs. The agenda, overview, and discussion questions were posted two days in advance. Five members of the GC Research Team were the primary organizers and “listeners” for this forum: Jean Wyman (team lead), Bruce Blazar, James Bradeen, Deborah John, Phyllis Moen, Gary Muehlbauer, and Steve Ruggles.

The following summary synthesizes notes from recorders who were on hand to capture key elements of the discussions. It highlights important points, recurring themes, and potential connections identified through the discussions.

**Summary of Discussion**

Forum participants engaged in a wide range of discussions pertaining to the Grand Challenge question. Some groups focused on how to best define a Grand Challenge and what steps would be needed to foster interdisciplinary research to address these challenges, while other groups focused on specific topics that would best meet the criteria for a Grand Challenge.

Although the content of these discussions was quite varied, several themes were discussed across multiple groups at the forum. These themes pertained to how we should define Grand Challenges and what we need to do to address these challenges:
**Defining Grand Challenges:** Forum participants discussed how we should think about the nature and scope of Grand Challenges. Opinions were expressed that Grand Challenges should have a common objective of “helping people to live better,” but that norms for what is “better” or “successful” may vary across differing cultural/ethnic groups. Several groups recommended that we view the process of defining Grand Challenges using POEM (Problem-Oriented Evaluation that Matters) to identify problems and design research of tangible importance.

**Interdisciplinary Focus:** A common theme across multiple table discussions was that addressing Grand Challenges would require an interdisciplinary effort, in which we bring together people from different schools/departments, instead of a silo-based approach in which only one school/department would take ownership. Participants noted the need for greater collaboration between departments, especially between STEM/Physical Sciences and the Humanities.

**Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research:** Several discussions centered on overcoming hurdles to integrating researchers and disciplinary knowledge as needed to address Grand Challenges. We need to establish mechanisms to improve communication between researchers from differing disciplines, provide resources for communication and integration to occur, and think about incentives for making these conversations an ongoing part of our research agendas.

**Community Engagement:** Table discussions stressed the importance of engaging communities in Grand Challenge research, both to understand the problems in community settings and to leverage our location within a diverse and changing population. We need to look for partners in the community (e.g., organizations, businesses, individuals) and embrace the idea of our communities as an urban laboratory.

**Areas of Potential Focus**

Forum participants also discussed areas in which the University could productively leverage research strengths for greater impact in enhancing human potential and well-being across the life span. The following are areas of strength and/or potential focus discussed across multiple tables:

- **Children’s Well-Being and Education**
  A common theme in discussions was that we can have great impact focusing on children because even small changes can lead to long-lasting outcomes. The challenges of closing the achievement gap among children, and addressing inequities and educational access, were frequently discussed as areas where the University had both significant cross-disciplinary strengths and opportunities for expanded Grand Challenges impact. Participants discussed the importance of K–12 research collaborations aimed at fostering the full potential of children across diverse communities, including attention to STEM education, healthy lifestyles, and creativity as essential to human potential and well-being.

- **Coping with Change/Diversity**
  Across table discussions, participants noted that accelerating societal changes have far-reaching consequences for individual and social well-being. Related issues include
technological advances reshaping all aspects of society as well as the increasing urbanization, globalization, and shifting population demographics. The challenges and opportunities of communities reshaped by increasing diversity and by immigration changes were also mentioned. University research collaborations to help individuals and society meet these challenges is crucially important.

• **Life Transitions**
  Many discussions focused on the importance of helping people manage pivotal transitions in life (childhood → young adulthood → adulthood → retirement years). Participants noted that helping individuals realize their full potential also is fundamental to broader economic and social well-being, from ensuring an engaged citizenry to building vibrant communities to meeting workforce needs. The discussions noted that societal changes are shaping and reshaping life transitions in significant ways. Related issues include career transitions at a time of great technological change, changing self-identities as people move through the life course, transitions of and among immigrant populations, and the transitions associated with aging and the profound impact of the aging of populations for communities and governments.

• **Inequality/Social Justice**
  Participants across the multiple tables talked about reducing inequality as a unifying theme to enhance human potential and promote well-being. Income inequality was most discussed. Specific issues discussed included how inequality affects educational opportunities, social justice, and access in the digital world.

• **Strengthening Communities**
  Forum participants discussed topics related to how we can create communities that build on the strengths of diverse populations, engender civic engagement, and benefit from the research expertise of University faculty across our range of disciplines. Several discussions focused on how faculty and students can participate in community education programs.

**Interconnected Issues**

Table discussions highlighted the complex interrelationships among the variables important to fostering human potential and well-being across the life span.

Issues of life transitions melded with discussions of income inequality and the needs of diverse racial/ethnic/immigrant populations. The challenge of ensuring children’s education and well-being interconnects with issues of inequality and achievement gaps. And the multiple challenges posed by rapid social and technological changes intersect fundamentally with education, especially the need to educate children, teens, and college students to be lifelong learners to cope with these changes.

Participants noted that the University has opportunities to integrate a broad range of strengths to address these intersecting issues.