The major challenges and opportunities that we are faced with today and in the future are and will be multi-dimensional in nature. Those great challenges and opportunities cannot be addressed effectively through uni-dimensional technological, legal, political, economic, or social/behavioral interventions. Rather, the coordinated application and thoughtful convergence of knowledge derived from multiple disciplines will be required. Problems will be successfully tackled by teams of scholars with strong disciplinary backgrounds who understand how their approaches mesh with those from other fields. For these reasons, interdisciplinarity in our teaching, research and creative works has the potential to transform our campus, perhaps more than any other idea that emerged from the Academic Futures visioning process. The Academic Futures Interdisciplinarity Task Force is charged with defining more precisely what CU Boulder should be doing to support, to incentivize and to facilitate interdisciplinary efforts.

The task force will need to address the connections between teaching and scholarly and creative work, as well as identifying paths for emergent intellectual breakthroughs that can come from interdisciplinary discourse.

As a campus, we are at different points in many of these areas. For example, we have a strong history of interdisciplinary research in the sciences and engineering, driven by demands of funders, while in the arts and humanities, the paradigm is less fully developed, though clearly on the ascent, on our campus. There is general consensus that, in terms of interdisciplinary teaching, CU Boulder struggles campus-wide with organizational, cultural and budgetary structures that limit our ability to move forward

Given the differential progress of interdisciplinarity across CU Boulder, and recognizing that interdisciplinary work looks different in various parts of the campus, the task force will need to chart a course for campus that allows interdisciplinary teaching, research and creative works to become a hallmark of our institution.

Some specific questions arise from the work of the AF committee:

1. In what way does CUB imagine itself as using interdisciplinary work to address key challenges facing us all? What key areas of interdisciplinary work are we on the cusp of, as a university? Are there centers of interdisciplinary intellectual gravity on campus that should be highlighted and supported, as they represent a delineator for the university in a national context? Are there new areas we need to develop?
2. How do we prepare our students to understand the importance of individual scholarly disciplines, as well as the importance of the relationship of the disciplines in the context of problem solving? If we are going to increase interdisciplinary teaching options, what should they look like and why are we pursuing them? How should these efforts be integrated into, for example, the Freshman Seminars? How do we translate our leadership in key areas of interdisciplinary research into our curriculum with facility and agility?
3. What would it mean for the staff as well as the faculty to be involved in interdisciplinary efforts?