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Joslyn Institute to Host Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0 Focus to be on University-City Opportunities for Sustainability

Cities are the vanguard in addressing immediate effects of climate change, population migration and growth, and infrastructure modernization in the United States. Amidst a general atmosphere of federal and state political deadlock, cities now face frontline and more urgent demands with fewer resources to address them. Universities, on the other hand, are virtual laboratories of Big Data, technological breakthroughs, and innovative sustainability research and modeling. The Joslyn Institute for Sustainable Communities proposes to find common ground among a select number of universities and their host cities in its Urban Thinkers Campus (UTC) 2.0, to be held in Lincoln August 24–26, 2017 at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s Innovation Campus.

The Roles and Opportunities for Small and Mid-size Cities in Town/Gown Relationships: Actionable Urban/Rural Planning for the New Urban Agenda is the topic of the conference. Lincoln Mayor Chris Beutler and UNL Chancellor Ronald Green, along with Joslyn Institute President and CEO W. Cecil Steward, will host mayors, university administration representatives and other decision leaders from among the 14 cities and universities of the Big 10 Athletic Conference to discuss and lay the groundwork for how these universities and their host cities can collaborate, support, and strategize for long-term sustainability, resilience, and high qualities of life in the upper Midwest and Northeast areas of the U.S.

The August UTC 2.0 conference is intended to be the second of at least two more, following on a format developed for the JISC’s highly successful first Urban Thinkers Campus in November 2015. UTC 2.0 will have a series of concurrent focus group “conversations”, each centered around such strategies as shared learning, communications, data and metrics, research and innovation, among others. University/city, university/university, city/city, urban/rural, university/city/rural connections and interdependencies will inform the explorations.

Town/Gown relationships have been sometimes adversarial since the Middle Ages, and often disassociated enterprises, in part because of their divergent priorities and different governing systems. Today, such relationships can be not just conciliatory but fruitful collaborations. A recent federal effort to promote greater collaboration established

the MetroLabs Network in 2015, with incentives for the development of “smart city” and high-tech projects in a number of selected city/university partnerships to address such issues as transportation, housing, wage inequality, energy, and more.

The Joslyn Institute’s Urban Thinkers Campus 2.0 goes far beyond the “smart city” concept to embrace not just technological collaborations, but to include four other domains of sustainability: socio-cultural, environmental, economic and public policy.

A major goal of the UTC 2.0 will be to utilize UTC 1.0 recommendations, the Paris Climate Agreement, UN–Habitat’s Sustainability Development Goals, and the recent Habitat III New Urban Agenda report as foundational materials for the conference, considerations of a long-term consortium of the 14 Big 10 universities and their home cities.

“One of the key recommendations from the first UTC 1.0 was that small and mid-size communities should be active learning communities, and that the city, its surrounding rural context, and its nearby academic institutions should collaborate on interdisciplinary knowledge bases, and applications strategies, for comprehensive sustainable development,” said JISC CEO and President W. Cecil Steward. “Our UTC 2.0 in August will be the first step in organizing a long-term consortium of university/city partners in the upper Midwest/Northeast region.”

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For more information, or to schedule an interview with W. Cecil Steward or Donna Woudenberg, please contact one of the three listed above as contacts.