Five questions for Kimbra Smith[1]

The scholarly work of Kimbra Smith, Ph.D., has led her across the globe. An associate professor of anthropology at UCCS, she spent much of this academic year in Ecuador, conducting sabbatical research on a Fulbright grant.

But the threads of Smith's research and teaching are tied very close to home, too. They run throughout a broad swath of the Colorado Springs area, inviting those who might rarely set foot on campus to learn more about the community and its connections to the liberal arts.

Smith's recent project, "COS Interactive: Reframing and Revaluing the Liberal Arts & Sciences in Colorado Springs," received support from CU's Timmerhaus Ambassadors Fund[2], which helps fuel endeavors that promote the public understanding of higher education's value in Colorado and beyond.

She set out to provide residents and visitors alike with "a gallery of opportunities to better understand how the liberal arts and sciences are integral both to their everyday lives and to exceptional situations and experiences." Smith and her team developed several ground-level experiences rooted in the Colorado Springs landscape, serving as examples of how UCCS research has transformed or contributed to understanding of the areas they visit.

The result, The City Interactive[3], boasts a collection of "storymaps," interactive online exhibits that integrate photos, videos, maps, archival resources, recordings of community members' stories and more.

"They highlight the interconnections of college and community, as well as the ways individuals' experience might be impacted by our work," Smith said.

1. Why do you think there is a disconnect between the perception of liberal arts and sciences in academia, and how the arts and sciences are thought of among the wider population?

I think we as academics don't always communicate what we do or why we do it as well as we could. In some cases, we may be lacking direct access to the media a particular public consumes, and in others, we might just be ignoring the importance of public engagement. It's really easy to get caught up in one's research bubble — in the lab, in the archives, on our computers — and to forget that not everyone is thinking about the questions and ideas that are so important to us.

And in terms of public understandings of the liberal arts and sciences, language is a social invention, as we know. It's something that adapts based on usage, and if more voices and louder voices use words in a particular way, we can't just say, "Well, academically speaking, that's not what these words mean," when people are using them in those ways. If you've learned through social interactions that "liberal" is a polarized political position — and worse, if it's been framed for you as a monolithic, shared perspective that is anti-freedom — then the idea of institutions dedicated to the liberal arts and sciences is at the very least going to be very off-putting. But I think we as academics need to find ways to show the value of what we do, not just create alternative labels for it.

2. How did you come up with the idea for an immersive experience that became The City Interactive? How is the Timmerhaus funding supporting this?

Part of my theoretical work is interested in how humans engage with the world through creating collective understandings of it — like in the language example above. A lot of recent research in fields from psychology and philosophy to cognitive science and anthropology supports the idea that cognition is enacted. In other words, what we know and how we know it depends greatly on who and what are in the space with us as we come to that knowledge or understanding. We engage with the world around us, impacting our perceptions of the world but also in turn impacting the world itself. I wanted to use this insight to create more resonant and positive ways of shaping our collective understandings of one another, our community, and what research can do in people's lives.

Through the storymaps, I hope people in Colorado Springs can get a better sense of how research in the liberal arts and sciences affects them in their daily lives by encountering information within their lived landscape.

The Timmerhaus funding allowed me to hire students from each department in the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences [4] to help collate information on the research people are doing and how it impacts our community, and to create some of the multimedia components of the storymaps.

3. You were on sabbatical this academic year in Ecuador. What is the nature of your research there?

I've been working with an indigenous community in coastal Ecuador for over 25 years. Between October and February, I was conducting ethnographic, ethnobotanical and ethnohistorical research throughout the region. Among other questions, I was investigating the deep connections among all the communities in the region that were effectively historically erased during the early republican period in Ecuador, as well as local practices and histories that are being forgotten as life becomes more mechanized and monetized and urbanized. The elders in the communities want to know that their experiences aren't going to be lost.
[5]

This year, I've been using everything I've collected in the past quarter century to create interactive storymaps both for local museums (either for virtual tourism or for those who are physically unable to participate in tours) and for regional archives within these communities.

In the university setting, publications are great, but if the communities impacted by our research aren't consuming printed academic works, then we have to find other ways to communicate. These people don't have academic libraries or bookstores they can access easily, but they do have cell phones and computers in community museums. I'm creating resources that respond to the ways local people get information, and that will be engaging for the younger generations.

A set of these is currently available in Spanish here[6]. I'm still translating them into English and creating more of them.

4. What's next for your teaching and research?

I am working on a few projects at the moment. In terms of my Ecuadorian research, in addition to writing an ethnographic/ethnohistorical piece on the impacts of historical events on a particular celebration in Ecuador and a methodological article on site elicitation — taking people to places in the landscape to spark memories and stories about those places — I'm working with Cerian Gibbes, Ph.D., in Geography and Environmental Studies. We are investigating the effects of widespread burn practices on well-being in rural Ecuador.

Here in Colorado Springs, I'm expanding efforts to co-create community-based historical archives reflecting experiences of groups of people not often depicted in typical history books. This dovetails with my teaching, as I incorporate this work into student research for upper-division applied anthropology courses. (A related storymap collection of student work from those courses can be seen here[7].)

Finally, I've recently finished a draft of a novel I wrote to try to convey the implications of some of my theoretical interests, like the idea of enacted cognition or epigenetic memory, into more approachable language. I'm going to work on edits and try to get that published this coming year.

In terms of teaching, I want to create more interdisciplinary courses: looking at humans and environmental change through multiple lenses, for one example, or using ethnographic theater as a community-building tool, for another.

5. How do you enjoy spending your free time?

Oh, so many things, and one goal I have for this sabbatical is to get in the habit of carving out even a small bit of free time every day. But if I had to label what my favorite thing is, it's learning. I'm always learning new languages, for example — I love realizing that there are entire experiences that are central to people in one place, but in other cultural spaces we simply haven't created words for those experiences. I love being in the woods, outdoors, watching birds or learning about plants or noticing what's going on in a particular little corner of the natural world. Reading. Listening to

people. Live music, especially when it's spontaneous. So many things.
[8]

[President Todd Saliman names Justin Schwartz, Ph.D., chancellor of CU Boulder][9]

University of Colorado President Todd Saliman on Friday named Justin Schwartz, Ph.D., chancellor of the University of Colorado Boulder, effective July 1. The University of Colorado Board of Regents unanimously approved a three-year contract for the new campus leader.

"CU Boulder will have a dynamic new leader with an outstanding vision who will build upon an impressive foundation already in place," Saliman said. "He appreciates our deeply held commitment to our mission of serving Colorado, Coloradans and society. Justin had engaging discussions at forums with students, faculty, staff and community groups during his CU Boulder campus visit. With every group, the conversations demonstrated his knowledge of the opportunities and challenges on the horizon for the institution. The feedback from forums was overwhelmingly positive."

Schwartz has more than 30 years of experience in higher education as a faculty member, dean and executive administrator. He most recently served as executive vice president and provost at Pennsylvania State University, where he previously was the Harold and Inge Marcus Dean of Engineering. Prior to that appointment, Schwartz served on the faculty at Florida State University and as department head at North Carolina State University.

He earned a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a bachelor's degree in nuclear engineering from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

"It is an incredible honor to serve the University of Colorado, our students, faculty, staff and alumni, and the people across our state," Schwartz said. "CU has incredible momentum, and we will carry the torch into a new era for the institution, elevating every aspect of our university. It was clear throughout my conversations with members of the Search Committee and my engagements during my public visit that the CU community has a deep passion for the university, the city of Boulder and the state of Colorado. I am thrilled to be a part of all with my family."

President Saliman named Schwartz as the finalist for the position on April 2. Since then, Schwartz participated in open forums on the campus with faculty, staff, students and the community. The announcement followed a search process that began in November 2023 after Chancellor Phil DiStefano announced his plans to retire after nearly 15 years in the role and 50 years on campus. Chancellor DiStefano will return to the faculty in the School of Education, where he began his CU Boulder career in 1974.

"We were in a strong position to recruit an excellent new chancellor because CU Boulder has thrived under Phil's leadership," Saliman said of Chancellor DiStefano's leadership. "I am deeply grateful."

The CU Boulder Chancellor Search Committee was chaired by CU Senior Vice President for External Relations and Strategy Danielle Radovich Piper. The search committee included 21 members, 13 of whom were from the CU Boulder campus community, with the remainder closely connected to CU. The university engaged AGB Search to assist in recruiting, interviewing and advancing a highly qualified, diverse pool of candidates.

For more information about the CU Boulder Chancellor search, including Saliman's full announcement, Schwartz's curriculum vitae and search committee composition, visit https://president.cu.edu/news/president-saliman-announces-dr-justin-schwartz-cu-boulder-chancellor[10]

First lady visits Ludeman Family Center for Women's Health Research [11]

Urban futures: Where science fiction meets reality[12]

The futuristic vision of cities, once depicted as flying tubes and smart-talking robots of "The Jetsons" or the fantastical space tech of "Star Wars," is now a tangible reality in places like Denver. Perhaps, instead of relying on robots to manage your dishes, envision a future where a pocket-size computer drives the transformation of our urban environment.

The real world is sometimes stranger than science fiction, because today scientists at Minus Materials, Inc.[13] are using microalgae to create carbon-negative cement, while the Smart Futures Lab[14] is turning out innovators equipped to help those with disabilities navigate complex urban challenges, even as intricate as Denver International Airport (DIA).

The CU Denver-based Smart Futures Lab, under the visionary leadership of Dan Griner[15], is set to revolutionize urban landscapes as we know them.

Under the guidance of Griner, a leading figure in the fields of smart cities and inclusive design, the Smart Futures Lab thrives through strategic partnerships with influential organizations such as Innosphere Ventures[16] and the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance[17]. Innosphere Ventures, renowned for its incubation and commercialization programs, provides invaluable support to founders launching science and high-tech startups, while the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance serves as a statewide force, uniting government, businesses, and allied organizations to improve the lives of all Coloradans.

Together with CU, these partnerships form a dynamic ecosystem that fosters the growth of pioneering startups and drives civic innovation. Drawing from collective expertise and resources, the lab implements holistic solutions to address challenges, emphasizing collaborative innovation and long-term relationships.

With a commitment to inclusive practices, Griner envisions the Smart Futures Lab not only as a hub for innovation but also as a catalyst for social change. Through ongoing collaboration with its partners, the lab remains dedicated to driving progress through diversity, equity and inclusion.

One notable participant in the inaugural Smart Futures Lab cohort is Lazarillo Holding Inc., under the leadership of CEO Rene Espinoza[18]. Lazarillo[19] is at the forefront of revolutionizing urban navigation through its innovative mapping platform and mobile app. The company's mission is to enhance accessibility for all people, regardless of disabilities, by harnessing the power of cutting-edge technology.

At the heart of Lazarillo's endeavor is the commitment to break down barriers and foster inclusivity in urban environments. Lazarillo is actively collaborating with major hubs such as DIA to make navigating the airport more accessible for individuals with disabilities.

Picture this: a traveler, visually impaired, navigating the airport with ease, guided by the intuitive interface of Lazarillo's app. It's not just about convenience; it's about dignity, independence and a sense of belonging in a world that too often overlooks those with disabilities. With each step forward, Lazarillo is not only transforming physical spaces but also reshaping societal norms, challenging us to see the urban landscape through a lens of empathy and equity.

This partnership with DIA not only demonstrates Lazarillo's dedication to revolutionizing urban navigation but also underscores a fundamental principle: Prioritizing the needs of individuals with disabilities results in an environment that benefits everyone.

"The Smart Futures Lab has been key to our growth, especially in learning how to work with cities and government,"

Espinoza said. “It’s given us expert advice and helped us make important connections, like our big project with Denver International Airport. The lab has been great at bringing people together and moving forward projects that make a difference in our communities.”

Another organization committed to cultivating a future where smart cities prioritize purposeful design, environmental awareness, and stimulate innovation across sectors, including the construction industry, is Minus Materials, Inc[13]. The team is integrating the biogenic limestone-based portland cement into the infrastructure of smart cities, so urban planners can ensure that every aspect of city development contributes to a cleaner, greener future. This approach not only reduces carbon emissions but also turns buildings and infrastructure into active agents for carbon sequestration, effectively turning the city into a carbon sink.

“For the industry, now is the time to solve this very wicked problem. We believe that we have one of the best solutions, if not the best solution, for the cement and concrete industry to address its carbon problem,” said Wil Srubar, lead principal investigator on the project and associate professor in Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering and CU Boulder’s Materials Science and Engineering Program.

This resolution is not only scalable but also versatile because microalgae can be cultivated within city limits, providing a local source of construction materials while also serving as a renewable resource for biofuels and other co-products, fostering a circular economy within the city.

By incorporating this nature-inspired solution of biogenic limestone into urban development, smart cities can fulfill their purpose of providing livable, sustainable environments for current and future generations. These cities not only mitigate the negative impacts of urbanization but also actively contribute to a healthier planet, setting a new standard for urban development worldwide.

Fill up for less: CU health plans to offer no-cost generic preventative drug coverage[20]

CU Non-Production Data Center move slated for early May [21]

Workplace experts develop mental health Skillsoft course in Spanish for CU employees[22]

Experts from the Colorado School of Public Health’s (ColoradoSPH) Center for Health, Work & Environment (CHWE) are releasing a suite of workplace health, safety and well-being courses for CU employees in Spanish.

The center is beginning with the launch of the Salud Mental en el Lugar de Trabajo[23] (Workplace Mental Health) course. It’s designed to help individuals understand the importance of employee mental health in the workplace and offers strategies on how to prioritize mental health support in their organizations.

The course was created in partnership with CU Employee Services’ Learning and Development department to help equip Spanish-speaking individuals – including leaders, managers, faculty, staff and student workers – working anywhere in the CU system.

Available now through Skillsoft at no cost for university employees, this 30-minute, self-paced training can be completed online. Through this course, learners will:
Engage in the content through video testimonials and interactive activities to gain a better understanding of how they

can play an active role in supporting the mental health and well-being of working people. Learn practical and helpful action steps to raise awareness about mental health, reduce stigma, and prioritize care for all employees. Take the free Workplace Mental Health course in Spanish.[23]

The training will also be available to the greater Colorado community. An estimated 11% of the state's population speaks Spanish at home.

“Latino businesses are looking for resources to help their employees with mental health,” said Madison Goering, MSW, MPH, senior professional research assistant at CHWE. “Offering the Workplace Mental Health Module in Spanish provides greater accessibility, as employers and employees can learn concrete tools in their heart language.

“As a member of the CU system and community, we want to ensure that our Spanish-speaking coworkers have access to our education and training programs. We look forward to expanding these types of courses to Latino workers and employers across Colorado.”

For questions about CHWE’s Skillsoft courses, contact Casey Torbet, casey.torbet@cuanschutz.edu.[24]

Groundbreaking innovations win big at the 17th New Venture Challenge Finals [25]

New collaboration between UCCS and Pikes Peak Philharmonic [26]

Medical providers lack in postpartum care for women, CU Denver study finds[27]

Multi-campus effort aims to regenerate arthritic joints [28]

Popovic elected to National Academy of Inventors [29]

Coleman relishes role as commencement marshal [30]

Schwab named UCCS Employee of the Quarter [31]

How lessons from the cannabis industry will impact Colorado's budding psychedelic scene[32]

The University of Colorado Colorado Springs hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony for new engineering center[33]

'Miracle' weight-loss drugs could have reduced health disparities. Instead they got worse[34]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-kimbra-smith[2] https://www.cu.edu/ptsp/timmerhaus-fund-ambassadors[3] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/d62539c349a2405d9159208ecc31e835[4] https://las.uccs.edu/[5] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/learning_from_locals_five_questions_smith_crop_04-25-2024.jpg[6] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/f6248ab36d1a491fab70e9dd86a3fedc[7] https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6d5af1956eb04c68b59951c00d01b256[8] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/kimbra_with_folkloric_dance_group_five_questions_smith_crop_04-25-2024.jpg[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/president-todd-saliman-names-justin-schwartz-phd-chancellor-cu-boulder[10] https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fu7061146.ct.sendgrid.net%2Fls%2Fclick%3Fupn%3Du001.gqh-2BaxUzlo7XKIuSly0rC3-2B66VahxMSpU-2FuqTV6KQIK19k-2FhkKkSzR7-2B-2FiAb0Ct-2FOw9-2BwRwtlzXI3-2FLTvj-2FVAlSaVCGORkOpeyjCL7iKX8GYGv-2FC6SucUVHdaxYhDZfMs2bzmyJqzjYr1CjJwXXYKQ-3D-3D5koQ_mDi496VXBdOx-2BZ191TvuXFwC9LicySX0K3F7yA5MmEGbByqQ4pBY1snW-2Bmk3w-2BnrZZL9LmjoNqJWBq6xGLwbter1Z0DYrdhjtVrAbSlFRydokKJ29DLxmCll0QVHdNRKie-2Bb3gGvI0DcWqUf-2FQa6GIJ-2F6hs1JMbymL2UYXtEwzpkAEBQi7UivWBW882qN0n5EYDBsB7iMk0bJMw9s4SuNxEznyvZU2IUxt2AAezvmUBEJBJ2VYUVAHhqt6VmGLQkKAqjCVV5Nb-2BbeQxsTuA8a3ihPt6NkVWAL6PJCQKH3qyv8-2FZhTGFPunPy36HF99MBbt-2BDELepj6W5er4FwDPtkkPAXBg6sFcZooytCD6HaPQ-3D&data=05%7C02%7Cdedrick%40cu.edu%7Caabbd3d259254cac87f008dc6088e820%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C638491388389997943%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=zhJtza9Vv6hOZylaf%2BdD6Ywyf0jN5iOMZO%2F3y32U3JU%3D&reserved=0[11] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/first-lady-visits-ludeman-family-center-women-s-health-research[12] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/urban-futures-where-science-fiction-meets-reality[13] https://www.minusmaterials.com/[14] https://smartfutureslab.com/[15] https://www.linkedin.com/in/dangriner/[16] https://innosphereventures.org/[17] https://coloradosmart.city/[18] https://www.linkedin.com/in/rene-espinoza/?locale=en_US[19] https://lazarillo.app/[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/fill-less-cu-health-plans-offer-no-cost-generic-preventative-drug-coverage[21] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-non-production-data-center-move-slated-early-may[22] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/workplace-experts-develop-mental-health-skillsoft-course-spanish-cu-employees[23] https://universityofcolorado.skillport.com/skillportfe/custom/login/saml/login.action?courseaction=summary&assetid=_scorm12_cu_u00239_0001[24] mailto:mailto:casey.torbet@cuanschutz.edu?subject=Workplace%20Mental%20Health%20in%20Spanish%20course%20on%20Skillsoft[25] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/groundbreaking-innovations-win-big-17th-new-venture-challenge-finals[26] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-collaboration-between-uccs-and-pikes-peak-philharmonic[27] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/medical-providers-lack-postpartum-care-women-cu-denver-study-finds[28] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/multi-campus-effort-aims-regenerate-arthritic-joints[29] https://connections.cu.edu/people/popovic-elected-national-academy-inventors[30] https://connections.cu.edu/people/coleman-relishes-role-commencement-marshal-0[31] https://connections.cu.edu/people/schwab-named-uccs-employee-quarter[32] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/how-lessons-cannabis-industry-will-impact-colorado-s-budding-psychedelic-scene[33] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/universi

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