Celebrating staff excellence[1]
[2]

In addition to recognizing the 10 recipients of this year's University of Colorado Staff Council (UCSC) Staff Excellence Awards, the 2026 ceremony provided an opportunity for university leaders to express their gratitude for CU's staff systemwide.

"It's a great honor to work with such a remarkable community of people," said Board of Regents Chair Ken Montera during the ceremony. "You help make CU a place where all people can feel a sense of belonging and find the support they need to thrive. Thank you for all that you bring to the university every day. Thank you for going above and beyond. And thank you for your dedication and outstanding work."

In addition to Montera, Regents Frank McNulty, Callie Rennison and Ilana Spiegel attended the awards ceremony on April 24 at the Lone Tree Golf Club and Hotel. President Todd Saliman was also in attendance and helped kick off the ceremony by congratulating the 2026 honorees, thanking staff across CU and highlighting the importance of shared governance. Both Saliman and Montera praised UCSC Co-Chairs Ja'Net Hurt and Kimberly Slavsky for their work to serve as liaisons between CU leadership and staff systemwide.

"I want to acknowledge and express my appreciation for our shared governance model at CU. It works," Saliman said. "We work very closely with you to deliver for you because when we deliver for our staff, faculty and students, we're delivering for the university."

CU staff members – two from each campus and system administration – received the honors presented annually to recognize those who go above and beyond their job duties and consistently surpass expectations. The award criteria are based on CU's Guiding Principles: Integrity and Respect, Responsibility, Discovery and Excellence, and Community. Each honoree received a $250 award.

This year's recipients are:

University of Colorado Boulder
Jay Bolan, Graduate Program Manager **Nicole Bryant**, Director of Finance and Administration and Research Administrator
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
Lindsay Coppa, Program Manager, Office of Research **Lindsay Knell**, Program Assistant in the College of Public Service
University of Colorado Denver
Alexander Freedman, Director of Marketing, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences **Taylor Collazos**, Development and Stewardship Associate
University of Colorado Anschutz
Ryan Grip, Manager of Business Operations, Colorado Springs Department of Pediatrics **Lainie Harrison,** Office Supervisor
University of Colorado System Administration
Stefan Martorano, Program Director, PeopleSoft HCM **Mike Wolbrom,** Program Director, Advancement Training and Outreach
This year's call for nominations resulted in over 120 nominees being eligible for the award.

For more information about the Staff Excellence Awards or the University of Colorado Staff Council, please visit www.cu.edu/ucsc/ucsc-staff-excellence-award[3].

Open Enrollment: Build your ideal plate at the Benefits Bistro[4]

Finalists announced for 2026 CU Innovation & Efficiency Awards[5]

The Office of University Controller has announced the finalists for this year's CU Innovation & Efficiency (CU I&E) Awards Program.

These are the innovative projects transforming our systems, saving time, money and effort. Click on the links to learn more about how these teams are making an impact. You might find a solution that you want to adopt.

AI?Augmented Personalized Feedback[6]
This project uses AI tools to deliver faster, more personalized feedback while maintaining academic and professional quality standards. The approach saves staff time and enhances the clarity and usefulness of feedback for recipients.

Automated SpeedType One?Liner[7]
By automating a previously manual data?entry task, this solution significantly reduces repetitive typing and the risk of human error. The result is quicker processing and a smoother workflow for staff who rely on frequent system inputs.

Automating Advancement Report User Guides[8]
This initiative converts advancement report metadata into ready?to?use user guides through automation, replacing a labor?intensive documentation process. It improves consistency, accuracy and turnaround time while freeing staff to focus on higher?value work.

CU Denver | CU Anschutz Project Closeout Automation[9]
This project automates key steps in the research project closeout process, reducing delays and improving compliance across campuses. The streamlined workflow helps ensure timely financial reconciliation and clearer communication between stakeholders.

Facilities Hub Intranet[10]
The Facilities Hub Intranet centralizes tools, resources and communications into a single, intuitive platform. Staff gain faster access to critical information, improving coordination and day?to?day operational efficiency.

Facilities Management Power Automation[11]
By leveraging automation within existing tools, this project simplifies complex facilities management processes. The solution reduces manual effort, improves data accuracy and accelerates routine operational tasks.

Financial Aid Batch Job Spreadsheet Automation[12]
This finalist eliminates a manual, error?prone spreadsheet workflow by automating financial aid batch job tracking. The improvement increases reliability while saving staff significant processing time during peak cycles.

Redesigned Research Studies Website Boosts Access and Engagement[13]
A redesigned research studies website improves usability, accessibility and discoverability for participants and researchers. The updated structure drives greater engagement while making study management more efficient.

The top five teams are eligible for cash prizes up to $1,500 and will be announced in early June.

Which campus will take home this year's top honor?

View all CU I&E Finalists here**[14]**

- Office of University Controller

Faculty Council elects leadership for 2026-27[15]

Faculty Council[16] set its leadership team for the 2026-27 academic year by electing two officers. The council's election took place during the governance group's April 23 meeting, held virtually.

Because **Diana White**[17] was chosen as chair-elect a year ago, she will take on the role of chair beginning July 1. She succeeds current chair **Jorge Chavez**[18], who will assume the title of past chair.

Greg Kinney[19] was chosen chair-elect for the coming year, meaning he will continue as chair in the 2027-28 academic year.

Current secretary **Monica Yoo**[20] was re-elected to the post for the coming year.

The next Faculty Council meeting, which will include the presentation of its annual awards, is scheduled for May 14 at 1800 Grant St.

In other business at last week's meeting of the Faculty Council and Faculty Senate:

President Todd Saliman appeared during the Faculty Senate meeting, held concurrently with the Faculty Council meeting, to provide an update and take questions. He discussed details[21] of the proposed state budget and recapped the Board of Regents' votes earlier this month on tuition, fees and compensation. He said two CU-backed bills introduced at the current legislative session are progressing at the Capitol: One would expand concurrent enrollment opportunities for high school students, while the other would update higher education statutes to achieve greater efficiencies.

"Thank you for all of your work during this academic year," Saliman said to the faculty members. "I appreciate all you do for our students and for your research, scholarship and creative work. You are the heart and soul of all we do and we're grateful."

Faculty Council members provided feedback on CU's Strategic Plan 2.0[22], now in development. Chad Marturano, vice president and chief financial officer, and Lynn Vidler, provost at UCCS, presented an update[23] that was recently shared with the Board of Regents. Marturano and Vidler are Strategic Planning co-chairs for the systemwide effort.

While meetings of the Strategic Plan Working Group continue through the end of this academic year, the group is recommending a shift from the five-year structure of the previous plan to a 12-year foundational approach with three-year strategic cycles and annual review of progress toward goals. The change is designed to enable faster decision-making and alignment.

Faculty are invited to share feedback on the plan by emailing custratplan@cu.edu[24]. Regents will next consider the plan and provide feedback at the board's June 4-5 meeting in Greeley.

Faculty Council voted to establish two ad hoc committees, one focusing on AI, the other on collective bargaining. Both will work this summer to bring together campus-based groups already exploring the topics.

A fresh take on the 'COVID generation': How the pandemic may have changed young people for the better[25]

College of Education faculty hosts beginning teachers workshop[26]

Seeing the value: How one CU Denver student found his path through college to a career in construction[27]

Why are women more likely to develop MS? New proteomics study finds clues[28]

Federal update: Budget resolution to fund ICE, more[29]

From April 24, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on budget resolution to fund ICE, grad PLUS Loans counting toward lifetime borrowing limit, online accessibility compliance deadline, new DEI executive order challenged, NIH continuing modified peer review practices, and WH released executive order on medicinal psychedelics research.

Click here to read the post.[30]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[31] page.

UCCS engineering professor advances professional framework beyond the numbers[32]

President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winner

The thought of "engineering" might immediately suggest cold, hard numbers and formulas rather than human warmth. And while the field necessarily emphasizes technical competencies, **Peter Gorder,** Ph.D., has built a programmatic framework that also emphasizes empathy, cultural awareness, teamwork and community engagement as essential engineering skills.

Gorder is professor and chair of the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department in the College of Engineering and Applied Science at UCCS. He also is director of the Senior Design Program, which he designed, expanded and has led for more than 25 years. He emphasizes that engineering is inherently a team activity. Students must learn to listen, communicate across their differences and recognize the dignity and needs of the communities they serve.

Gorder's leadership extends beyond UCCS. Universities across the United States, Europe and Africa have partnered with him or expressed interest in adopting the program model he developed. Recent projects with international partners have included outdoor rec space for children with disabilities in Poland and working with the local population in Uganda to devise a system to obtain freshwater from a nearby lake.

Gorder works to make sure that students understand the local context before they even begin thinking about solutions alongside the local community members. He teaches students to think critically and compassionately about the communities they enter, guiding them away from a mindset of merely "helping" toward one rooted in understanding and partnership.

Gorder is one of five 2026 President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winners.

CU Boulder leader achieves far-reaching impact via community-minded collaboration [33]

President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winner

The transformative impact of **Patricia Gonzalez,** Ed.D., reaches within and far beyond her corner of CU Boulder. In her role as assistant dean for Access and Community Engagement (ACE) in the College of Arts and Sciences, she supports students, faculty and staff. Among her first initiatives after arriving on campus in 2021 was the establishment of the ACE Mentoring Program for staff and faculty, pairing mentors and mentees to support greater understanding of the college and CU Boulder. She is intentional about ensuring that every member of the college, regardless of title or position, has a voice. She works to elevate the potential she sees in those whose talents might otherwise be overlooked.

As co-chair of the JEDI Leaders Community of Practice, which she co-founded with Amy Moreno Sherwood, Gonzalez helped build a community of over 128 members across CU Boulder. The structure and purpose of this engaged network of professionals was informed by Gonzalez's clear vision of community, shared leadership and transparency. Her ability to cultivate a trusted, supportive environment has empowered JEDI leaders to engage in honest reflection, exchange strategies, learn from one another and build resilience.

Gonzalez also manages the Boulder County Latina League (BCLL) Empower Program, providing scholarships and student support, and leads the College of Arts and Sciences Action Plan 2.0 planning committee.

Beyond the college, her collaboration with the CU Police Department resulted in critical changes to police training, while her effort to ensure that emergency alerts are delivered in multiple languages led to the improvement of safety and inclusion for thousands of students, faculty and staff. Gonzalez also played a vital role in campus-wide efforts to ensure that staff members receive parental leave upon hiring, creating parity with faculty and promoting a healthier, more humane work environment for all.

Gonzalez is one of five 2026 President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winners.

By living out leadership, UCCS undergraduate student elevates campus life[34]

President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winner

Isabella Polombo is a senior studying communications and women's and ethnic studies at UCCS. Her studies also focus on leadership, which she's already living out in ways that lift her fellow undergraduates.

An active member of the campus community, Polombo serves as a Resident Assistant (RA) in student housing and is vice president of the Student Government Association (SGA). Her leadership as a key member of the shared governance group has resulted in several initiatives benefiting students.

Polombo co-founded Clyde's Clothing Corner, an expansion to the Clyde's Cupboard food pantry on campus, aimed at alleviating clothing insecurity. The resource has allowed students to avoid stigmatization by operating in a community-centric space where they can gather to collect clothing, connect with friends, access the pantry and study. In its first semester, Clyde's Clothing Corner served around 650 students.

Polombo advocated for the Period Product Dispensers resolution, launching an effort to provide menstrual products free of charge for the UCCS community through dispensers in restrooms across campus. Period Action Day resulted in 40,000 products divided into 2,000 bags and distributed to UCCS students and nearby public schools.

Polombo helped form the SGA's ad hoc Disability and Accessibility Committee, which worked with the campus transportation office to improve accessibility by developing a GPS tracker for shuttles that travel across campus. She is active in the Student Health Advisory Board, LAS Peak Ambassadors and Pi Lambda Chi Latina Sorority Inc.

Polombo is one of five 2026 President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winners.

CU Boulder graduate student's volunteerism leads to community-informed teaching and mentoring [35]

President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winner

Connor Antonio Diaz, a fourth-year graduate student in the Department of Geological Sciences at CU Boulder, is striving to increase accessibility in STEM, improve pathways for underrepresented students and integrate inclusivity across educational, research and civic settings. By taking part in community and civic activities, he has learned strategies that inform his teaching and mentoring.

He volunteers for the Denver Special Education Advisory Committee, a Denver Public Schools advisory group dedicated to improving outcomes for students with disabilities through collaborative and intentional community engagement. His activities have included providing technical reviews of policy documents, presenting on research-based recommendations to city and state officials, and contributing to legislation (Colorado House Bill 25-1017) to protect the rights of people with disabilities.

Diaz also volunteers for the Gigi's Playhouse network of Down Syndrome Achievement Centers, where he helps design STEM teaching modules, trains behavioral therapists in STEM integration and leads family-focused science events.

In his lab activities for an introductory geology course, Diaz implemented multimodal instruction – i.e., introducing concepts using visual, tactile and verbal approaches – to engage students in learning through multiple cognitive pathways, which can be helpful for students with ADHD.

Diaz is one of five 2026 President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winners.

As state population evolves, CU Denver college ready to develop next generation of engineers [36]

President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winner
[37]

The **CU Denver College of Engineering, Design and Computing** (CEDC) has built durable systems and partnerships that position it as a statewide engine for engineering and computing workforce development. CEDC believes that to serve Colorado and the nation, it must educate more engineers — and educate them to meet the rapidly changing needs of the modern workforce. The approach acknowledges that Colorado's engineering talent pipeline will increasingly come from its disproportionately young and U.S.-born Hispanic population.

CEDC's diversity, nationally recognized faculty, inclusive pedagogical practices and strong experiential-learning and innovation ecosystems align directly with the state's demographic and economic future. CEDC is ready to lead Colorado into the next decade of workforce and innovation development, demonstrating that inclusion-centered transformation strengthens excellence, innovation and community prosperity.

Under the leadership of Dean Martin Dunn, CEDC has created a curricular and co-curricular ecosystem where all

students are thriving at increasingly equitable levels in highly technical majors that fuel Colorado's tech economy.

CEDC centers access, opportunity, excellence and success for all students in its work. It is the most diverse engineering college in Colorado: Since 2018, enrollment of Hispanic students has increased 202%; enrollment of women up 82%; and overall enrollment growth of 40%.

CEDC is building an inclusion-centered ecosystem by integrating belonging-focused advising, peer mentoring, evidence-based first-year experiences, and increased financial support for students. CEDC has redesigned search processes to strengthen pools in terms of both quality and diversity.

The CU Denver College of Engineering, Design and Computing is one of five 2026 President's Inclusive Excellence Award Winners.

Historic Heller Center in Colorado Springs continues humanities legacy of original owners[38]

How data centers could heat neighborhoods[39]

Former Sen. Ben Sasse talks about dying, 'miracle drug' on '60 Minutes'[40]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/celebrating-staff-excellence[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/staff_excellence_1228_web_4.jpg[3] https://www.cu.edu/ucsc/ucsc-staff-excellence-award[4] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/open-enrollment-build-your-ideal-plate-benefits-bistro[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/finalists-announced-2026-cu-innovation-efficiency-awards[6] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-ai-augmented-personalized-feedback[7] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-automated-speedtype-one-liner[8] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-automating-advancement-report-user-guides[9] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-cu-denver-cu-anschutz-project-closeout[10] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-facilities-hub-intranet[11] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-facilities-management-power-automation[12] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-financial-aid-batch-job-spreadsheet[13] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/current-submissions/cu-ie-submission-redesigned-research-studies-website[14] https://www.cu.edu/controller/i-e-awards/2026-finalists[15] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/faculty-council-elects-leadership-2026-27[16] https://www.cu.edu/faculty-senate-faculty-council[17] https://clas.ucdenver.edu/mathematical-and-statistical-sciences/diana-white[18] https://education.ucdenver.edu/about-us/faculty-directory/Chavez-Jorge-UCD6000756948[19] https://coloradosph.cuanschutz.edu/resources/directory/directory-profile/Kinney-Gregory-UCD5259[20] https://coe.uccs.edu/people/teaching-and-learning/monica-yoo[21] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/regents-vote-approve-tuition-fee-and-compensation-adjustments[22] https://www.cu.edu/strategic-planning/[23] https://cu.community.diligentoneplatform.com/document/ecce1fee-bcdb-42be-a16a-1e5d51918933/[24]

mailto:custratplan@cu.edu[25] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/fresh-take-covid-generation-how-pandemic-may-have-changed-young-people-better[26] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/college-education-faculty-hosts-beginning-teachers-workshop[27] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/seeing-value-how-one-cu-denver-student-found-his-path-through-college-career-construction[28] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/why-are-women-more-likely-develop-ms-new-proteomics-study-finds-clues[29] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-budget-resolution-fund-ice-more[30] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-42426[31] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[32] https://connections.cu.edu/people/uccs-engineering-professor-advances-professional-framework-beyond-numbers[33] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cu-boulder-leader-achieves-far-reaching-impact-community-minded-collaboration[34] https://connections.cu.edu/people/living-out-leadership-uccs-undergraduate-student-elevates-campus-life[35] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cu-boulder-graduate-student-s-volunteerism-leads-community-informed-teaching-and-mentoring[36] https://connections.cu.edu/people/state-population-evolves-cu-denver-college-ready-develop-next-generation-engineers[37] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/departmentinclusiveexcellenceaward-webimage_1.jpg[38] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/historic-heller-center-colorado-springs-continues-humanities-legacy-original-owners[39] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/how-data-centers-could-heat-neighborhoods[40] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/former-sen-ben-sasse-talks-about-dying-miracle-drug-60-minutes