Five questions for Ben Kirshner[1]
[2]

While in his 20s, Ben Kirshner worked as an educator with a youth organization in the Mission District in San Francisco. He felt called to be a teacher of middle- and high-school students, and enjoyed working in a setting that encouraged experiential learning and community-building. But after five years, he became interested in working with college-aged students and researching topics related to learning and youth development.

“I loved books and ideas, and I didn’t have time for that with the pace of being a youth worker,” he said. “I had questions I wanted to pursue about learning and education that were generated through my work in a youth organization called Youth in Action.”

He became curious about how and why some students in the youth organization who were exceptional leaders, thinkers, speakers and problem-solvers were getting low grades in middle school.

“That didn’t really compute for me, and so I became interested in how different social contexts shaped opportunities for young people to be recognized for their intelligence and skills.”

He also was concerned about contradictions and inequities in the education system. He worked closely with young people who took and passed the classes required to graduate from public high school in San Francisco, but who were still not eligible to attend the state universities because courses required by the state system had not been offered in their schools.

Kirshner was inspired to understand more about learning and education policy issues. When he finished his Ph.D. at Stanford University, he applied for a position at the University of Colorado in 2004. He is now a professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development in the School of Education, and is the founding faculty director of CU Engage, a center that collaborates with communities, schools and organizations to address complex public challenges.

Earlier this year, he was awarded the 2016-17 Chase Faculty Community Service Award[3] for his body of work as an internationally recognized scholar of youth development; community-based, participatory research; and youth activism. Kirshner will be recognized for the award at an Oct. 4 reception at CU Boulder[4] (space is limited). He also is an award-winning book author.

1. Your research focuses on how “learning can be organized in ways that lead to meaningful intellectual and social outcomes for students.” Why does this research interest you and what do you hope it achieves?

Initially I approached the work from a place of curiosity and concern, trying to understand how learning is socially organized and how young people learn to speak up about issues that affect them directly. As I’ve grown and changed as a scholar, I’ve wanted to give greater priority to equitable partnerships, which is to say finding better ways for the research to be directly valuable for the people who participate in the research and their goals for local social change.

Making sense of ideas is important to me, but I also value having a local consequence to the work so that people who are kind enough to let me into their organization or community or classroom get something from it. I want people in the setting that I’m studying to help shape the research narrative or develop new skills, or maybe, do action research that leads to stronger institutions or programs.

Most of my research has been local to Colorado, but I have done some of it out of the state and out of the country. For instance, I partnered with a scholar at City University in New York to do an international study of youth organizing in several different cities around the world to understand how organizations in these cities supported young people’s political development and activism. The research explored how young people interpreted issues of education justice and developed power to influence education policy in their cities or provinces.

2. Why do you focus on marginalized youth and what is your approach?

What has drawn me to the range of places where I’ve done research is that I really try to approach it from a strength-

based perspective. I want to understand how young people interpret issues of fairness and justice and how they can participate in creating a better world.

In the case of marginalized youth, such as black and Latino youth who grow up in low-income neighborhoods in the United States, I have been fortunate enough to spend time in organizations that nurture youths' political awareness and activism. I have been drawn to these settings because youth who experience injustice are in a position to offer insights and ideas that are necessary to fix problems in their schools or cities. In my view, people who experience the painful consequences of inequality and white supremacy in their everyday lives deserve to participate – and are needed for their ideas – as we all try to develop thriving and just communities.

I should add that I grew up in an upper, middle-class town, and there were a lot of things I took for granted in terms of the quality of school I went to and the opportunities I was offered. So when I do research and seek out partnerships, I try to be reflective about assumptions I bring and be humble as I walk into a new setting.

3. What types of youth activism do you study and/or promote?

There are two kinds of what I would call youth activism or youth voice that I am most interested in and encourage. That doesn't mean that I don't think other things are as important. I think cleaning up parks is very important, and in my own work, that is where I started with Youth in Action. That's a good thing, but that's not my research area or the area I try to support through intergenerational collaborations.

So, one area of youth activism that I study is where youth and adults who don't have formal authority within a system find ways to make change in that system. That could involve protesting in the street, presenting policy analysis and proposals at a school board meeting, or organizing a grassroots campaign to change the school discipline policy because the policy leads to too many referrals to police. Those are all forms of activism from the standpoint that the people who are trying to make that change don't necessarily have any acknowledged formal role or authority within an institution or system.

The second kind of activism I am interested in is sometimes called youth participation or youth voice; it takes place when school districts or cities or youth organizations formalize or institutionalize opportunities for young people to have a voice. In those cases, it would be built into the structure to have a governance council or a student leadership board that has real power to weigh in on decisions. These opportunities should be open to all young people – not restricted to straight-A students or student athletes. The students should be invited to play a critical role in the organization, and not just rubber-stamp policies, but actively participate in shaping and influencing the policies that affect their school or institution. I seek out research partnerships with schools or programs that try to formalize these kinds of youth voice.

4. How did you become involved with CU Engage: Community-Based Learning and Research, and what is its mission?

Before CU Engage, there was the Institute for Ethical and Civic Engagement (IECE) that was headed by a terrific leader named Peter Simons. IECE supported and catalyzed civic engagement on campus. The institute supported some of my own research and teaching through grants when I was getting started, and I also was on the steering committee.

When Peter retired, there was discussion about situating these community engagement programs in an academic unit or department. At an R-1 university such as CU Boulder, when there's an academic home for a program, the program is more aligned to the mission of the university and can have a greater impact. The School of Education was approached about being the home, and then I was approached to be faculty director and to try to launch it. A committee came up with a conceptual blueprint for the center. It began with existing programs, but since then we've also launched several new programs.

When we inherited those programs, the primary focus was on undergraduate learning and experiences. We have continued that focus but have broadened it to include the production of research by engaging faculty and grad students as well as undergrads. It's a chance for students to connect with the community and do good, ethical work and rethink how knowledge is produced so that it emerges out of strong partnerships with young people, parents, practitioners,

people who live in neighborhoods and work in schools, and academic researchers.

CU Engage collaborates with communities, schools and organizations to address complex public challenges. Those challenges include everything from the impact of climate change, to promoting participation in local government, to educational access and inclusion.

5. You recently received the Chase Faculty Community Service Award, an honor presented annually to a faculty member who provides exceptional service to the community. Does your university work intersect with your community activities?

Yes, my work with CU Engage, my program of research and some of my volunteer work overlap. I was very happy about the award; it was an honor and very generous of the people who nominated me.

I've tried to be active on some boards of both nonprofits and educational programs that are trying to launch. That's been a focus of mine. I want to contribute by trying to share what I've learned about youth organizations and grassroots or fledgling organizations. I've also tried to get support schools to develop a strong community engagement or youth voice focus. Most of my community work is interwoven with my research or my teaching because I try to develop partnerships that bring people together to work on projects that benefit community initiatives or school programs.

CU tops $1 billion in sponsored research funding[5]

The University of Colorado achieved a record level of research funding in the 2016-17 fiscal year, with faculty meriting $1.034 billion in federal, state and local awards, based on preliminary figures.

This marks the first time the four-campus system has topped $1 billion in annual sponsored research funding, which climbed 12 percent over the previous year's total.

Most sponsored research funding is awarded by federal agencies. Systemwide in 2016-17, CU received $636.6 million in federal awards and $398 million in non-federal awards.

All four CU campuses saw overall research award increases this year. Final figures are expected later this year.

"Our faculty researchers are consistently contributing to the advancement of knowledge and improvement of lives in Colorado and across the country," said CU President Bruce D. Benson. "This record level of investment by federal, state and local entities ensures that the university continues to help the greater good."

Following are the year's totals in sponsored research funding at CU campuses, along with examples of the leading-edge endeavors that are elevating life across Colorado and the United States:
University of Colorado Boulder: $507.9 million, up 16 percent. As part of a five-year, $4.5 million cooperative agreement with NASA, CU Boulder joined a virtual institute pursuing the construction of astronomical observatories on the moon. The Department of Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences research team, known as the Network for Exploration and Space Science (NESS), will implement partnerships to advance scientific discovery and human exploration in the lunar environment. The group will conduct research in robotics, cosmology, astrophysics and the study of the sun. **University of Colorado Colorado Springs:** $10.2 million, up 28 percent. Michael Calvisi, assistant professor in the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Department, earned a $516,000 CAREER award from the National Science Foundation. The five-year award supports graduate research, undergraduate projects and outreach to secondary schools to increase interest in science, technology, engineering and math. His lab researches the control of ultrasound contrast agents, which consist of microscopic bubbles that flow through the bloodstream. **University of Colorado Denver:** $25.9 million, up 4 percent. Researchers in the College of Liberal Arts and Science and the School of Education & Human Development received over $3 million from the National Science Foundation to study ways to better prepare new teachers to teach math and science to elementary and secondary students. These research

programs address the critical need for recruiting and preparing effective STEM teachers in high-needs school districts.
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus: $490.6 million, up 8 percent. The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at CU Anschutz received $1 million from the state to establish the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Gov. John Hickenlooper, who visited the school last May to sign the legislation with co-sponsors and supporters, said he hoped it would serve as a backbone for other state partnerships working together to combat Colorado's opioid crisis.
Sponsored research funding from federal, state and local entities targets specific projects to advance research in laboratories and in the field. Research funding also helps pay for research-related capital improvements, scientific equipment, travel and salaries for research and support staff and student assistantships. CU cannot divert this funding to non-research-related expenses such as utilities, compensation, student financial aid or grounds maintenance.

A great deal of sponsored research funding is directed to departments and researchers with unique expertise, such as biotechnology and aerospace, which stimulates industry.

CU continues record-setting private support: $386.3 million[6]

The University of Colorado set a new record in fundraising this year thanks to $386.3 million in private contributions.

Reflecting an increase of $1.8 million, the preliminary figure for fiscal year 2016-17 marks the eighth consecutive year in which CU has exceeded the previous annual total, setting records each time.

"I can't overstate the value of support that CU receives from so many individuals, foundations and corporations," said CU President Bruce D. Benson. "We have a vision of CU as one of the great public universities in the world. Our generous contributors make a direct impact on enhancing the high-quality academic and research enterprises at all four CU campuses."

The total includes funds given through both the university and the University of Colorado Foundation, which is the primary portal for philanthropic giving to CU. Some 57,000 individuals, foundations and corporations made roughly 66,000 gifts to support student scholarships, facilities, research and more across the university.

Some examples of the impact of private support at CU during the 2016-17 fiscal year are:?
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus: Private support totaling $47.8 million is creating a traumatic brain injury institute and funding a mental health clinic for veterans. The Marcus Foundation – a philanthropic organization created by Bernard Marcus, retired co-founder of The Home Depot – committed $38 million over five years to establish the Marcus Institute for Brain Health at CU Anschutz. The institute serves military veterans with traumatic brain injury and related psychological health conditions. At the same time, in a partnership totaling $9.8 million, The Cohen Veterans Network is working with CU Anschutz to build a mental health clinic to serve veteran and military families in greater Denver with free or low-cost personalized care and integrated case management support. The network was founded by Steven A. Cohen, a hedge fund manager and philanthropist.? **University of Colorado Boulder:** A $10 million gift made this past fiscal year to the College of Engineering and Applied Science from passionate CU Boulder supporters Ann Smead and her husband, Michael Byram, is accelerating aerospace engineering on campus and strengthening Colorado's aerospace economy. With support totaling more than $15 million over time, including the most recent $10 million gift, the family aims to set CU Boulder apart from its aerospace peers and propel it to the top of national rankings by attracting the best and brightest doctoral students and outstanding young faculty in aerospace engineering. These gifts are transformational for the college, the university and the state.? **University of Colorado Colorado Springs:** A fundraising campaign for the Ent Center for the Arts was completed through a community effort to honor Chancellor Emerita Pam Shockley-Zalabak. More than 200 donors raised more than $1.5 million to name the center's main theater in recognition of her 40-year legacy at the campus, 15 years as chancellor. This recent campaign – led by CU Regent Kyle Hybl and his wife, Sally – contributed to a total of more than $20 million in private support for the Ent Center for the Arts. Set to open in early 2018, the building will house five performance spaces, a contemporary arts gallery, academic spaces and more.? **University of Colorado Denver:** The College of Arts and Media and the College of Engineering and Applied Science this year celebrated the launch of the

Comcast Media and Technology Center, a new academic facility made possible by a $5 million gift from the Comcast Corp. The multidisciplinary academic center, located in the Tivoli Student Union on the Auraria Campus, provides an opportunity to engage many audiences in collaborative activities focused on new approaches to research and development, media creation and content delivery.

Tenure list: August 2017[7]

The CU Board of Regents on Aug. 9 approved 13 appointments with tenure[8], effective Aug. 21.

University of Colorado Boulder
Janet Bercovitz, Leeds School of Business **Alison Boardman,** School of Education **Angie Chuang,** Journalism, College of Media, Communication and Information **Brendan Daley,** Leeds School of Business **Andrea Dyrness,** School of Education **Miriam Engel,** School of Education **Wendy Glenn,** School of Education **W. Glenn Griffin,** Advertising, Public Relations and Media Design, College of Media, Communication and Information **Daniel Massey,** Computer Science, College of Engineering and Applied Science **Merinda McLure,** University Libraries **Mark Opp,** Integrative Physiology, College of Arts and Sciences **Lori Peek,** Sociology, College of Arts and Sciences **John Rinn,** Chemistry and Biochemistry, College of Arts and Sciences

Bacteria have feelings, too[9]

Chancellor announces administrative reorganization[10]

Campus Conversation highlights budget and enrollment increases[11]

Dogged by the heat? There's no better time to escape to serene trails in Colorado's foothills[12]

UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital advances on list of U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals[13]

CU Connections resumes weekly publication[14]

With today’s issue, CU Connections resumes its regular weekly publication schedule for the new academic year.

A new edition appears each Thursday morning throughout the year. For part of the summer, new editions appear every other week.

Connections will not publish new issues on Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving), Dec. 21 and 28.

Deadline for submissions is noon Friday before each Thursday's publication.

Questions: Contact Connections editor Jay Dedrick, jay.dedrick@cu.edu[15], 303-860-5707.

Ahmad-Post named first Ent Center for the Arts director[16]

Smith named CU Boulder's AVC of media relations[17]

Beer awarded prestigious MacDowell Fellowship[18]

2017 Massry Prize honors Pace[19]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-ben-kirshner[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/chase_kirshner_p.jpg[3] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/kirshner-advocate-young-people-classrooms-and-communities-receives-chase-faculty-community[4] http://www.cvent.com/events/2017-chase-faculty-community-service-award-reception/invitation-cb71d3594dd0491f8f3a174c724e440f.aspx[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-tops-1-billion-sponsored-research-funding[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-continues-record-setting-private-support-3863-million[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/tenure-list-august-2017[8] http://www.boarddocs.com/co/cu/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=ANWU4Z7A4F6A[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/bacteria-have-feelings-too[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/chancellor-announces-administrative-reorganization[11] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/campus-conversation-highlights-budget-and-enrollment-increases[12] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/dogged-heat-theres-no-better-time-escape-serene-trails-colorados-foothills[13] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uchealth-university-colorado-hospital-advances-list-us-news-world-report-best-hospitals[14] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-connections-resumes-weekly-publication-1 [15] mailto:jay.dedrick@cu.edu[16] https://connections.cu.edu/people/ahmad-post-named-first-ent-center-arts-director [17] https://connections.cu.edu/people/smith-named-cu-boulder-s-avc-media-relations[18] https://connections.cu.edu/people/beer-awarded-prestigious-macdowell-fellowship[19] https://connections.cu.edu/people/2017-massry-prize-honors-pace