Five questions for Mark Kennedy

Less than a year after taking his post, CU President Mark Kennedy confronted a time unlike any other in university history.

“We’re navigating through five turbulent forces: The worst pandemic since 1918; a deep recession that has strangled economic activity; the most intense focus on civil rights since the 1960s; and arguably, the greatest political divisiveness since the Civil War. Further compounding these, COVID has sparked a tech-celeration that is fundamentally changing our lives,” Kennedy said.

As 2020 comes to an end, the president is encouraged by how CU has fared.

“Through it all, CU has adapted and continues to deliver on our mission in teaching and learning. We’re unlocking discoveries that help solve complex societal challenges, nurturing entrepreneurship and serving our communities,” he said.

Kennedy points to how CU led the state in moving to remote teaching on March 11 and seeking vital federal funding, outperforming peer institutions in spring enrollment, adjusting to facts on the ground and helping to advance therapeutics and vaccines that will help move CU beyond the pandemic.

As he reflects on the past nine months, a key takeaway:

“I’m greatly appreciative of the faculty and staff who made this possible.”

1. COVID necessitated pauses in three of the biggest projects across the system: strategic planning, the CU Online initiative, and the Transformation and Innovation Program. Did those pauses and other pandemic-induced hurdles hurt progress?

The system’s strategic planning process will resume at the beginning of the year toward a final presentation to the Board of Regents in July. The pause allows us to be responsive to the technological acceleration the pandemic caused. While our online initiative and Transformation and Innovation Program have had to proceed at a more measured pace to permit an intense focus on responding to the pandemic, the behaviors spurred by the pandemic affirm their necessity. They will continue to be a priority requiring increased coordinating and sustained effort in the months and years ahead.

Additionally, we’re bolstering our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion leadership across the system and have major efforts underway, fueled in part by a newly established a $5 million Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Innovation Fund to spark further progress in this area.

2. What do you expect to see for spring semester?
Campuses will begin releasing their plans for spring today. As we’ve looked at the surge that occurred over Thanksgiving and the additional surge we expect over the upcoming holiday, we’re working closely with public health authorities to chart the best balance between continuing to deliver on our mission and the health of our communities.

While I expect we’ll begin the spring semester more aligned with how we ended the fall semester than how we began, we’ll continue to keep a close eye on the facts on the ground and keep in close coordination with public health authorities. The strong partnership we’ve developed with public health officials and their development of a dial to guide actions will prove valuable.

Our campuses have elevated their testing capacity. As the vaccine rolls out, I hope that as the semester evolves, we’ll be able to incrementally move back to more normal interactions, allowing for more engagement among our students.

3. With a vaccine on the horizon, will CU have a role in its rollout?

We all welcome the hope that comes along with reports of imminent distribution of vaccines. CU Anschutz has participated in more than 40 clinical trials and studies, including clinical trials for the Moderna vaccine now awaiting FDA approval. Vaccines are essential to bringing this pandemic under control.

The vaccines will be rolled out in phases, with the prioritization and distribution ultimately directed by federal, state and local health authorities and the process will vary by vaccine. Expertise from around CU is informing our discussions on logistics, timing, communication and prioritization of recipients within federal and state guidelines.

In the first phase of the distribution, we’ll coordinate with our hospital partners at CU Anschutz; the Auraria Campus at CU Denver; and public health authorities at CU Boulder and UCCS to distribute the limited number of doses available to reach health care workers who are exposed to patients and infectious materials. As this phase evolves, doses will be prioritized to essential workers and people at higher risk of severe COVID-19 illness, including those age 65 and older.

Each campus will likely have a bigger role as we move to phase two when more doses are available. After we address the priority populations, we’ll follow with other critical populations that have frequent exposure to the public, and ultimately, provide the vaccine to the general population. Vaccine distribution will require surmounting many logistical challenges.

You’ll hear more from your campus (or from system, for system administration employees) in the coming weeks as plans become clearer and issues resolved. We understand many questions will arise, and timely and thorough communications are important. We’ll keep you apprised of progress and, again, thank you for all you do to help CU navigate this tumultuous time. Hope is on the horizon.

4. What are your impressions of how CU’s faculty, staff and students navigated the pandemic?

We’ve traveled some challenging roads together in recent months, facing a relentless stream of hurdles. All of us have had to find places in our homes to work, often in competition with family members, we’ve had to juggle ever-changing school schedules for children, contend with isolation from our families and friends, and wrestle with anxieties and fears.

The economic impact of the pandemic and resulting economic downturn has necessitated budget constraints, including furloughs or temporary pay-cuts for all those making above $60,000. I appreciate each CU employee for working so hard while receiving less during this period.

As we prepare for the next fiscal year, we’re currently planning to lift furloughs and temporary pay cuts no later than July 1, 2021. Each campus will determine the extent to which their financial conditions may permit lifting furloughs and pay cuts before then and provide paid administrative leave to recognize our appreciation.

CU has been able to navigate today’s turbulent environment because of the diligence and dedication of our faculty and staff. I am grateful for and in awe of your collective efforts and how they enable CU to continue to benefit Colorado and beyond.
5. What do you expect to see in the upcoming legislative session and in CU’s 2021-22 budget?

While Gov. Polis’s 2021-22 budget request returns higher education funding to last year’s level, it doesn’t account for the impact of inflation over the two-year period. We’re working closely with the state’s other universities to correct this.

My op-eds in The Denver Post and other publications around the state pressing the need for state financial support is just part of our sustained effort advocating for more state funding.

We’re also watching closely for movement on additional federal stimuli and will again be engaging the state’s other universities to join us in appealing to our federal delegation for pandemic aid. The result of federal funding could provide additional support directly to our students, to institutions such as CU and to the state. Additional state support in a federal stimulus bill would hopefully result in a positive response to our budget requests.

My joint editorial with UMass President Marty Meehan in a Washington, D.C., publication in September on how Washington’s inability to agree on COVID relief puts the future of higher education at risk is part of our sustained effort advocating for federal support.

We’re also advancing other initiatives, including the flexibility to allow in-state tuition for members of Indigenous tribes who called Colorado home. Our government relations team is working with other universities to advance enabling legislation in the upcoming session.

Distinguished Professors: Meet CU’s 12 newly honored faculty members

The University of Colorado has added 12 new members to its roster of Distinguished Professors for 2020. The designation is the highest honor awarded to faculty across the CU system’s four campuses.

CU Distinguished Professors are tenured faculty members who demonstrate exemplary performance in research or creative work, a record of excellence in classroom teaching and supervision of individual learning, and outstanding service to the profession, the university and its affiliates.

Earlier this year, the systemwide advisory board of Distinguished Professors recommended candidates to President Mark Kennedy, who forwarded the names to the Board of Regents for consideration and approval. The board in November voted to approve the nominees, who will be formally recognized at the regents’ Feb. 11, 2021, meeting.

Honorees for 2020 are:

Mark J. Ablowitz, Ph.D., Applied Mathematics, CU Boulder. Applications of Ablowitz’s research are formidable, ranging from the field of integrable systems, the formation of rogue waves in shallow water to lasers, as well as atomic Bose-Einstein condensates and plasmas. He works on some of the most foundational questions related to the theoretical understanding of nonlinear waves, integrable systems and inverse scattering. His work has revolutionized the mathematical understanding of nonlinear waves, providing new tools to derive solutions to nonlinear partial differential equations. His outstanding contributions have had a profound impact in optics, and numerical and computational methods. Ablowitz has authored more than 270 peer-reviewed journal publications, 70 book chapters and refereed conference proceedings in the most prestigious venues. He has authored several monographs that have rapidly become references in the field.
Penina Axelrad, Ph.D., Joseph T. Negler Professor, Smead Aerospace Engineering Sciences, CU Boulder. Axelrad’s scholarly work seeks to develop and apply new algorithms to solve practical engineering problems. The domain of most of her work is related to Global Navigation Satellite Systems (GNSS) and more specifically the U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS), with key contributions in the broader fields of orbit determination and space navigation. Beyond her distinguished research activities, Axelrad also is known for excellence in teaching and has established a pedigree of outstanding service to the university. Her efforts over nearly 30 years at CU have not only made the university a unique, strong institution in aerospace and beyond, but also have strengthened the economic competitiveness, national security and quality of life for the nation.

Mitchell C. Begelman, Ph.D., Arts and Sciences Professor of Distinction, Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences, CU Boulder. Begelman has made influential contributions to high-energy theoretical astrophysics. His groundbreaking papers on the origins of extragalactic radio sources, primordial “quasi-stars,” and the astrophysics of black holes are seminal contributions to our understanding of and evidence for black holes. His many national awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Helen B. Warner Prize of the American Astronomical Society, an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Research Fellowship, and a Presidential Young Investigator Award. He was awarded the American Institute of Physics Science Writing Award in 1996 for the book he co-authored with Sir Martin Rees, “Gravity’s Fatal Attraction: Black Holes in the Universe”; his second popular book, “Turn Right at Orion: Travels Through the Cosmos,” was published in 2006.

Terrance E. Boult, Ph.D., El Pomar Professor of Innovation and Security, Computer Science, UCCS. Boult’s research on biometric security, vision surveillance, and statistical learning is highly prolific and impactful. He has authored more than 300 papers, brought in more than $15 million in external funding to UCCS, and holds 14 patents. His research has transformed open-world recognition and he is known as the pioneer for statistical learning, so much so that his work contributed to a $50 million launch program with the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. He is an IEEE Fellow, a world-class recognition bestowed only on the very few. Boult is exceptional as a scholar, mentor and community member. Among the most cited researchers in his field, he is highly sought as a leader and adviser for startup and local industries. Boult also is founder of the highly successful Bachelor of Innovation program at UCCS.

Jeffrey N. Cox, Ph.D., Arts and Sciences Professor of Distinction, English and Humanities, CU Boulder. A professor of English and longtime administrator who has served the university for over 20 years, Cox focuses his creative work on Romanticism, where he has shaped the contemporary direction of the field. He made massive contributions to Romantic-era scholarship and the sociable humanity of British Romantic studies. Cox served CU Boulder as director of the Center for Humanities and the Arts (1998-2006), as Associate Vice Chancellor for Faculty Affairs (2005-19), and as Vice Provost (2013-19). A successful graduate teacher, he has directed the dissertations of some of the best students to pass through Boulder’s doctoral program in English, with many of those students placed in tenure-track positions.

Robert von Dassanowsky, Ph.D., German and Film, UCCS. Founding director of Film Studies at UCCS, Dassanowsky is the leading scholar, and one of the founding visionaries, in Austrian film studies and a leading expert on Austrofascism. He is an award-winning playwright, has written for television, and serves on several festival, editorial and publication boards. An independent film producer, Dassanowsky was elected to the European Academy of
Sciences and Arts and serves as a U.S. delegate to the organization. He was named a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society (FRHistS) London, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (FRSA), is a voting member of the European Film Academy (EFA) and has served as president of the Austrian Studies Association (ASA). He is co-founder and faculty adviser of the annual UCCS Student Short Film Festival; he also mentors film student recipients of the UCCS Student/Faculty Research, Creative Works and Community Service Awards, as well as MFA Graduate-bound students.

Michelle Ellsworth, MFA, Theater and Dance, CU Boulder. Ellsworth’s 15 years of work has positioned her as the leading choreographer at the intersection of science, technology and dance. Ellsworth co-mingles these disciplines to create solutions and/or demonstrations of peculiar geopolitical and personal phenomena. Among Ellsworth’s honors are a Guggenheim Fellowship (2016), Doris Duke Impact Award (2015), a NEFA National Dance Project Grant (2014 and 2017), a Creative Capital Fellowship (2013) and a USA Artists Knight Fellowship in Dance (2012). She has received three National Performance Network Creation Fund Commissions (2004, 2007 and 2016). She is consistently mentioned as one of the most impactful faculty and her classes are listed as the ones in which students learned the most. Ellsworth is frequently requested as a thesis adviser for master’s in dance, art and film, and doctorates in Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance (IA WP), ATLAS and theater.

Wendy B. Kohrt, Ph.D., Geriatric Medicine, CU Anschutz. Kohrt is a highly productive and accomplished School of Medicine faculty member with outstanding scientific and professional achievements. In addition to her appointment as professor of medicine, Kohrt is the CWHR Nancy Anschutz Chair in Women’s Health Research, associate director of the Center for Women’s Health Research, director of research for Geriatric Medicine, and associate director of research for the VA Geriatric, Research, Education and Clinical Center. She is an internationally recognized expert in exercise physiology, women’s health, aging and hormone deficiency. She was selected in 2016 to be chair of the executive and steering committees of a $180 million national research consortium, funded by the NIH, investigating the effects of exercise across the age spectrum. As an educator, Kohrt is an inspired mentor to postdoctoral fellows and trainees and a model for her peers.

William R. Penuel, Ph.D., Education, CU Boulder. Penuel is a professor of Learning Sciences and Human Development in the School of Education and the Institute of Cognitive Science. Prominent in the field of Learning Sciences and Education more broadly, he has been elected as Fellow of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Fellow of the International Society for Design and Development in Education, and Fellow of the International Society of the Learning Sciences. He recently was elected to the National Academy of Education, an honor generally reserved for more senior scholars. Penuel’s scholarly writing traverses a wide range of audiences and ideas, with two research methodologies that have recently gained prominence – Research-Practice Partnerships and Design-Based Implementation Research – at the center. These approaches to research have been adopted by private foundations and government agencies as a strategy for engaging practitioners and researchers in the design and investigation of research problems that arise from practice.

Cora Randall, Ph.D., Atmospheric and Oceanic Studies, CU Boulder. A member of the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics, Randall is an exceptional researcher working in the dynamics of the middle atmosphere with a long history of scientific accomplishments. She rewrote understanding of stratospheric ozone depletion in the Arctic by showing that the prevailing wisdom around the causes of this decline were not correct, and that another mechanism was actually the underlying cause. Her work has been transformative in improving our understanding of the mechanisms behind ozone loss. Randall is a national leader in space-based monitoring of our planet and a
Carol M. Rumack, M.D., Radiology and Pediatrics, CU Anschutz. After a career of over 40 years in the School of Medicine, Rumack continues to exemplify the best of leadership, teaching, mentorship and innovation in education. She is a role model clinician in the Department of Radiology, specializing in pediatric radiology, and internationally recognized as an educator and leader in the field. As the associate dean of the Graduate Medical Education program, she is responsible for the accreditation of approximately 110 training programs and more than 1,200 residents and fellows in what constitutes one of the largest GME programs in the nation. Her pioneering work in neuro-ultrasoundography in newborn infants has improved the health of infants and children worldwide. She is the author of the seminal textbook in the field, “Diagnostic Ultrasound,” now in its fifth edition. She was honored by the American Association for Women Radiologists in 2006 with the Marie Curie Award.

Katharine N. Suding, Ph.D., Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research, CU Boulder. Previously an undergraduate researcher and postdoctoral researcher at CU, Suding became a faculty member in 2013 and assumed the directorship of the NSF-funded Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) program. Thanks to her participation as a lead scientist, a role she began 20 years ago, the program is now the longest continuously NSF-funded research program at CU. The LTER is a flagship multidisciplinary effort that has contributed to over 1,100 research articles on the climate, biology, geology and ecology of the Front Range, and has provided over $25 million in support to CU environmental research efforts. Her area of expertise includes the science of restoration, community, and ecosystem ecology. The restoration research attempts to apply ecological knowledge in a proactive way by assembling communities requested or needed by society.

With these 12 new designees, CU has recognized 118 Distinguished Professors since the program’s establishment in 1977.

State lawmakers set to consider next year’s higher ed budget

The Colorado Legislature’s Joint Budget Committee (JBC) on Monday officially begins considering funding for higher education in the 2021-22 fiscal year, forecasts for which continue to be clouded by the impact of the pandemic. Todd Saliman, senior vice president for strategy, government relations and chief financial officer, previewed the state’s budget process for the Faculty Council during its Dec. 3 meeting, which was held remotely. The meeting also featured State of the University remarks by President Mark Kennedy.

Saliman noted that it’s still very early in the state’s budgeting process, which began with last month’s budget request by Gov. Jared Polis. Following Monday’s briefing for the JBC, a full briefing with higher education leaders is scheduled for Jan. 11.

The governor’s request reinstates funding that was cut once the pandemic hit earlier this year, taking CU and other higher education institutions back to 2019-20 fiscal year levels of state support.
“The challenge is that it still doesn’t get us back to where we would have been, and we of course have inflationary costs,” Saliman told the council. State revenue is stronger than many had expected, Saliman said, and potential federal relief funding could help as well, though nothing is yet certain. “There are more questions than answers at this point.”

Among those questions: changes to compensation. The governor’s budget request called for flat funding for state employees, though the JBC in theory could call for increased pay. “For us, in terms of compensation, we usually follow the state’s lead,” Saliman said.

In his address, President Kennedy took stock of the implications of “five formidable forces”: the pandemic, the ensuing recession, unrest over social injustice, political divisiveness and tech-celeration, the rapid increase in reliance on technology for work and education.

“I am in awe of the collective efforts that everybody has put forth, and how they enable CU to rise to these challenges and continue to benefit Colorado, the Rocky Mountain region and beyond,” Kennedy said. “I fully recognize the toll the stress of the pandemic has taken on you, your loved ones and the entire CU community. People are working harder than ever. Faculty are adapting to course delivery methods that are more demanding, not less, as is the popular misperception.”

For more on the president’s State of the University, see today’s CU Connections Spotlight[1].

In other business at the Dec. 3 Faculty Council meeting:
Theodosia Cook, chief diversity officer for the CU system, led an update on a planned diversity climate survey. The last such systemwide survey in fall 2019 had a 14% response rate; stakeholders are discussing which survey vehicle to use next, when best to launch it and how to effectively market it to the university community. Cook also reminded the council of the systemwide CU Social Justice Summit[11], set for Feb. 5. CU Treasurer Dan Wilson updated the council on the university’s Faculty Housing Assistance Program[12]. The benefit consists of two loan programs available to tenure and tenure-track faculty: a shared-appreciation loan (30 years) of up to $100,000, which is essentially free of interest; and a loan guarantee, where CU acts as an additional party in a loan from lender to home buyer, guaranteeing the loan up to $100,000. A third-party program launched earlier this year[13] is available to CU employees for down-payment assistance.

Faculty Council Committee Corner: LGBTQ+[14]

The Faculty Council LGBTQ+ Committee has been charged with considering concerns of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender faculty, including: (1) assessing the cultural climate of the university as it pertains to opportunities for LGBTQ+ faculty for academic advancement, productivity and appropriate compensation; (2) making recommendations for creating an academic environment that fosters the academic success of LGBTQ+ faculty; (3) working to assure fairness in the recruitment and retention of LGBTQ+ faculty; and (4) developing support networks and recommending policy to address the needs of LGBTQ+ faculty.

Over the past several years, the LGBTQ+ Committee has advocated for and achieved inclusion of transgender-health-related services in university insurance coverage, coordinated CU’s sponsorship of and representation in Denver’s PrideFest, and co-hosted multiple intersectional symposia in collaboration with the EMAC (Ethnic and Minority Affairs) Committee, now CREE (Committee on Racial and Ethnic Equity). Additionally, the LGBTQ+ Committee has advocated for inclusive practices/policies in multiple programs and departments across the CU system.

This year, the committee is working toward greater workplace inclusivity for transgender and gender-diverse
faculty throughout the CU system. Workplace inclusivity includes a spectrum of practices from encouraging the use of correct gender pronouns to ensuring access to gender-neutral bathrooms to incorporating gender inclusivity in hiring and promotion policies. The Stanford Social Innovation Review outlines steps social organizations can take to improve workplace culture for transgender employees in “Trans-forming’ the Workplace to Be Transgender Inclusive” https://ssir.org/articles/entry/trans_forming_the_workplace_to_be_transgender_inclusive.

The LGBTQ+ Committee is focusing specifically on inclusivity in gender-based leadership initiative this academic year. We aim to influence campus-wide policy regarding leadership trainings to ensure they are inclusive of transgender and gender diverse faculty both in advertising and in content. We advocate for explicitly including transgender and gender nonconforming faculty in advertising for leadership training in order to 1) recruit more transgender and gender nonconforming faculty for leadership training and 2) publicly signal support for transgender and gender diverse faculty. We also will act to incorporate inclusivity training for those leading leadership initiatives and for the incorporation of diversity inclusivity and equity in all aspects of training new leaders across the university.

We call for programs and departments across CU to make it known if greater workplace inclusivity is a goal/need, so that we together can make CU a more inclusive workplace.

Members of the LGBTQ+ Committee:

Ed Cannon, Co-Chair
CU Denver, Education and Human Development

Troyann Gentile, Co-Chair
CU Denver, Education and Human Development

Carey Candrian
CU Anschutz, Medicine

Sean Iwamoto
CU Anschutz, Medicine

Danielle Loeb
CU Anschutz, Medicine

Lisa Flores
CU Boulder, Communication

Steven Frost
CU Boulder, Media, Communication and Information

Morgan Seamont
CU Boulder, Center for Inclusion and Social Change

Sandy Ho
CU Colorado Springs, College of Education
CU Denver professor facilitates task force looking at CU Boulder community policing policies

Sick leave will expand to all CU employees starting Jan. 1

The Colorado Legislature this year passed the Healthy Families and Workplaces Act, requiring employers to provide paid sick leave to employees at a rate of one hour of sick leave for every 30 hours worked.

Taking effect Jan. 1, 2021, this policy won’t affect employees already covered by the University of Colorado’s sick leave policy. Instead, this expanded coverage will largely affect part-time employees who average fewer than 20 hours per week.

Because many part-time employees have varied schedules, the university has opted to calculate the new sick leave coverage at roughly .034 hours per hour worked, instead of having one full hour accrue only after 30 hours have been clocked.

Employees covered by the new sick leave policy will be able to carry up to 48 hours of sick leave from one fiscal year to the next. Review of leave balances and any adjustments will be conducted during the regular employee leave sweep process.

Additionally, employees will only be able to use 48 hours of sick leave within one fiscal year, regardless of how much leave they have banked.

All employees already covered by CU’s regular sick leave policy will be unaffected by these changes and carryover and usage limits.

Resources to track and use leave

Many employees who have not been leave-eligible before now will likely be unfamiliar with the process of checking their leave balance and using their leave. Likewise, supervisors who only have worked with non-leave-eligible direct reports may be unfamiliar with the review and approval process.
This webpage and FAQ will address many of the most common questions, and existing guides and resources can help employees navigate the leave request and approval process in the My Leave timekeeping system: My Leave Basics, My Leave for Supervisors, My Leave for Supervisors (Skillsoft course), My Leave Frequently Asked Questions, Administrative Policy Statement on Leave (Note: The CU Board of Regents will vote to approve leave policy changes in January, to align CU’s policies with state law.) However, these guides aren’t one-size-fits-all. Not every CU department uses My Leave to track employee time. If you have any questions not addressed by these user guides and FAQ, please reach out to your campus HR office.

As this change takes effect, additional information and resources will be available for employees and supervisors on the My Leave webpage.

Marin Stanek named CU Boulder’s chief information officer

Colorado economy to gain jobs in 2021, but fall short of full recovery

NIHR seeking input from adults on resilience response to COVID-19

Make It Matter Awards for fall 2020 respond to COVID-19

Free webinar to reflect on past, present, future of COVID-19

McCabe, Lehnert named AAAS fellows

McAllister edits ‘The Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature’

Mills authors new book, ‘The World Colonization Made’