Five questions for Ravinder Singh[1]
[2]

Ravinder Singh's journey to a top leadership post in shared governance at the University of Colorado might seem an unlikely one — if only to the CU Boulder faculty member himself.

"In all candor, when I joined the Boulder Faculty Assembly in 2005, I was ignorant of what it does," says Singh, an associate professor in Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at CU Boulder. "Over the next ten years, I became involved in various faculty governance activities. I contributed to aspects of system-level policy revisions, the Retirement Vendor Review project and the annual Regent awards."

Singh credits his wide-ranging experience, ability to interact with stakeholders toward workable solutions, knowledge of regent laws and policies, and expertise in spearheading new policies and revisions to serving him in his role as Faculty Council chair, which he began in the fall. Previously on the council, he served as council vice chair and as chair for the committee on Educational Policy and University Standards (EPUS). "Throughout this process, I have worked with many wonderful colleagues serving the university in various roles," he says.

"I am proud of the Faculty Council and the campus assemblies, and I appreciate faculty, staff and student contributions to shared governance. I sincerely thank the faculty for their trust in me. It brings me immense pleasure working with the board and the administration, and it is a great honor to serve the University of Colorado. Yes, 'All Four:Colorado.'

"More perfect shared governance will require continued active participation at all levels, and mutual respect among all parties. I believe this common goal of a better University of Colorado transcends all else.

"One of the inspirations for my service is from Rabindranath Tagore, Nobel laureate, 1913:

'I slept and dreamt that life was joy.

I awoke and saw that life was service.

I acted and behold, service was joy.'"

1. How did you first become involved with Faculty Council, and how did your participation evolve?

My path began with the Boulder Faculty Assembly in 2005. My department nominated me after I received tenure. I served at the campus-level for three years chairing the Academic Affairs committee. I joined the Faculty Council[3] in 2008. It was then that I really began to appreciate the value of shared governance. As the executive body of the Faculty Senate, the council recommends actions that impact the entire system — academic and personnel policies, internal and external relations. It really serves as a vehicle for continuous improvement that unites all four campuses.

I started by the chairing the Educational Policy and University Standards committee[4]. It was a wonderful opportunity to lead vetting processes of system academic policies. Perseverance was essential in guiding complex decisions to consensus, but through collaboration with our diverse faculty and administration, I was always able to steer our committee successfully and with greater understanding of each campus. I am proud of the committee's dedication.

Other contributions strengthened my partnerships with the Board of Regents and university administration. I served on the Board of Regents Awards committee for five years and then on the Retirement Vendor Review committee, which consolidated and improved our vendor retirement plans in 2015. Most recently, I served as Faculty Council vice chair in 2015-2016.

2. How do you expect to contribute to "shared governance"?

Our university is a complex enterprise of four campuses. Smooth functioning of an enterprise of this size requires open channels for stakeholder interactions — Board of Regents, administration, and the shared governance bodies for faculty, students and staff. Stakeholders vary in professional agendas, backgrounds, cultures, personalities and

missions for each of our campuses.

As Faculty Council chair, I will oversee all council committees and work closely with all stakeholders to work toward a more perfect shared governance. I believe that is critical to the mission of our university. We must govern together because: “It enriches the learning environment for our students; it leads to excellence in research, scholarship and creative work; and it enhances our service to the community, the state of Colorado and the nation.”

The collaborative relationships I have established with stakeholders enhance my ability to lead the council’s contributions to shared governance. Likewise, these collaborations provide me with framework to effectively approach matters related to university policies.

While our differences should enrich our discussions, our mutual respect and common goal to make the university a world-class institution should bind us together. We must seize the moment to not regret lost opportunities. Unity in diversity is our strength.

I have become aware that system-level contributions often go unappreciated by campus administrators and departments, quite similarly to my lack of awareness when I first joined the Boulder Faculty Assembly. Participation in shared governance is a challenge. Busy professional lives coupled with lack of immediate gain make it hard to see the value-added. In most cases, the benefits from years of hard work are not realized for some time. The Intercampus Dependent Tuition Benefit[5] is an example. The Faculty Council advocated for improved dependent tuition benefit for several years. Just recently President Benson and campus chancellors approved a systemwide pilot program. Together, we make progress.

I do wish there were more incentives and acknowledgment available. I admire and respect all those serving on various council committees and campus assemblies. The best reward is feeling that I have served our university in a significant way.

3. What issues are high on the agenda for Faculty Council this year?

Important issues on the Faculty Council agenda include: academic freedom and freedom of expression, diversity and inclusion, dependent tuition benefits, faculty development and mentoring, governance transparency, ongoing partnership in regent laws and policies review, impact of future policy revisions on personnel time, retirement plan investments, and FCQs.

While some of the issues are unique to the faculty, others impact our staff, students or both. I look forward to working with staff and student governance leaders Denise Thomas and Marcus Fotenos. We are all in this together.

4. What is the focus of your work in Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology at CU Boulder?

The central dogma of biology has fascinated me since the 1980s. The flow of genetic information, simply put, is about how DNA makes RNA and RNA makes protein. I have extensive experience in RNA biology and have made seminal contributions to this field. I received my doctorate for graduate work at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, which involved discovery of an RNA five-prime cap structure and its unique mechanisms of synthesis; yes, RNAs wear caps and have tails, too. As a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, I focused on how RNA-binding proteins turn genes on/off — i.e. regulate precursor mRNA splicing. Part of this was a wonderful collaboration with my longtime friend Dr. Juan Valcarcel.

Professors Tom Cech and Leslie Leinwand then hired me in the department of MCD Biology at CU Boulder.

I have made important scientific research contributions in the fields of RNA biology, development, gene regulation, and genome-wide high throughput analysis. One important aspect of RNA regulation is that it controls sex determination and its mis-regulation leads to ovarian tumors in Drosophila — the fruit fly. Geneticists call fruit flies “little humans with wings.” About two-thirds of the known human disease genes have been extensively studied in Drosophila. Let’s thank Thomas Hunt Morgan for capturing the white-eyed mutant fly.

More recently, I have shown unexpected functions and mechanisms for three splicing regulators — U2AF, SXL and PTB — using genetic, computational and high-throughput approaches to study gene regulation. The University of Colorado Boulder is indeed an extraordinary place to carry out RNA biology work.

5. How do you enjoy spending your time away from work?
[6]

Spending time with my family and friends is an important part of time away from work. Outdoor activities keep me entertained. I routinely spend my weekends biking, jogging and doing yoga. I love to hike and camp over the summer. In the winter, you can find me driving my sons to the ski slopes.

I am avid reader of different genera. Some of my favorites and why:
“The Intelligent Investor” by Benjamin Graham — helped my contributions to the Retirement Vendor Review committee. “A Brief History of Time” by Stephen Hawking, “Relativity” by Albert Einstein and “The God Particle” by Leon Lederman — constant reminders about the rigor of science. “The Story of My Experiments With Truth” by Mahatma Gandhi, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey, “Who Moved My Cheese” by Spencer Johnson and “How to Win Friends and Influence People” by Dale Carnegie — each shaped my abilities to interact with and learn from diverse people.
When I need a break, Hollywood and Bollywood films and television provide necessary entertainment for my entire family. My sons keep me up to date — we watch “The Office,” “Parks and Recreation” and the film “The Big Short.” A few of my personal favorites: “Sholay,” “3 Idiots,” “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner,” “Harry Potter,” “Star Wars” and “Charlie Rose.”
[7]

CU Denver’s Bianco named Timmerhaus Teaching Ambassador[8]
[9]

An associate professor at the University of Colorado Denver who works to pave the way for students of color to become future teachers has been named the University of Colorado’s Timmerhaus Teaching Ambassador.

Margarita Bianco, Ed.D., teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in special education, educational psychology and urban community teacher education at CU Denver’s School of Education and Human Development.

During the two-year appointment, CU’s Timmerhaus Teaching Ambassador[10] serves as an advocate for K-12 and higher education, for scholarly approaches to teaching and learning, and for establishing environments that promote access and success from all sectors of the diverse population in Colorado and beyond. The ambassador leads presentations and workshops about education and learning to audiences including state lawmakers, the CU Board of Regents, educators, the media and the general public.

“Dr. Bianco exemplifies the highest quality that CU faculty members bring to educating our students and serving communities with outreach across Colorado,” said CU President Bruce D. Benson. “She’ll make an outstanding advocate for CU and higher education in this public role, which honors the tremendous legacy of Dr. Timmerhaus.”

Bianco joined the CU Denver faculty in 2006. She previously served as an adjunct professor at CU Boulder and worked for more than 20 years as a K-12 classroom teacher in public and private schools in the U.S. and overseas.

She is the founder and executive director of Pathways2Teaching[11], an innovative pre-collegiate program that encourages high school students of color to enter the teacher workforce as a way of addressing educational inequity.
[12]

“I am the first person in my family to graduate from high school and go to college,” Bianco said. “It is because of professors like Dr. Timmerhaus who demonstrated unwavering dedication to their students that I am where I am in my

own career trajectory – and why I share the same passion for teaching, the teaching profession and dedication to my students.

“As the Timmerhaus Teaching Ambassador, I am honored to represent the enterprise of teaching and learning at the University of Colorado to communities throughout our state and beyond.”

The Timmerhaus Teaching Ambassador award honors the memory of professor Klaus Timmerhaus, a member of the faculty of chemical and biological engineering at CU Boulder from 1953 until his retirement in 1995. Timmerhaus received many honors, including being named to the National Academy of Engineering and being selected to the first group of President’s Teaching Scholars at the university. An active and enthusiastic advocate of teaching, Timmerhaus provided a bequest to support designated faculty members in promoting discussion of education throughout Colorado.

“Klaus was a first-generation student himself while in college," said Mary Ann Shea, director of the President's Teaching Scholars Program. "He was devoted to education for Colorado students. The Ambassador Award honors his legacy and generous gift. Professor Bianco will ably carry on his tradition.”

Faculty from across the four-campus CU system are eligible to be honored with the ambassadorship, which includes a $25,000 award per year for up to two years. Bianco steps into the role served the past two years by CU Boulder’s Noah Finkelstein, Ph.D.
[13]

Bianco received the CU Denver campuswide Excellence in Teaching Award in 2012. Among her many other honors are the Floyd G. Hudson Outstanding Service Award, Council for Learning Disabilities, 2015; the Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities Professional of the Year, 2015; the School of Education and Human Development Excellence in Teaching Award, 2012; and the CU faculty recipient of the Rosa Parks Diversity Award, 2011.

Read more: Five questions for Margarita Bianco (2013)[14]

Diverse Learners Awareness Week returns[15]
[16]

Diverse Learners Awareness Week[17] returns for a second annual lineup of events celebrating the variety of ways in which people learn.

The systemwide event is partly supported by a Diversity and Excellence Grant and has been planned in collaboration with the CU Boulder Diversity and Inclusion Spring Summit. The week, which begins Monday and continues through Feb. 24, features a slate of events, most of them free, at CU Boulder and CU Denver.

“Last year we learned that our community is definitely interested in ways of making our classroom spaces more inclusive, specifically with regards to accessibility,” said Alaina Beaver of CU Boulder’s Office of Information Technology and co-founder of the event. “The week raised awareness of the concept that everyone learns differently. If we can recognize diversity in that way, we’re on the right path.

“The focus this year will be on how to build skills that will make an inclusive classroom environment – and an inclusive CU – a reality. We’re shifting from awareness to skills.”

This year’s theme of “Diversity in the Classroom” focuses on building skills to help establish inclusive spaces for all learners. Sessions are designed to be hands-on, providing specifics on such topics as organizing a classroom for diverse learning, language and etiquette for interacting with others, and de-escalation techniques to be used if tension arises.

The lineup includes a performance by theater group Affinity Arts that will model discussions about diversity, a keynote presentation by Robert McCrurer at CU Denver, an inclusive recreation event with disabled climbers on the CU Boulder campus, and a performance by world champion slam poet Andrea Gibson on topics of diversity.

Also scheduled is a Café Pedagogique event on Thursday evening at Twisted Pine Brewery in Boulder, which follows the Feb. 23 CU Boulder Diversity and Inclusion Spring Summit. The event is limited to 50 participants; the $15 entrance fee will go toward a student scholarship for CU Boulder Disability Services. Attendees will receive dinner and a limited-edition tote bag with additional surprises.

See the full schedule here[18]; registration is encouraged.

“This initiative was successful last year and is now part of OIT’s three-year strategic plan,” Beaver said. “I’m excited for this year’s offerings and I think in years to come this event will only continue to build. I would love to see Diverse Learners Awareness Week become a model event for other institutions across the country to promote inclusivity and accessibility – that would be a huge win for CU.”

Campus talks detail Public Service Loan Forgiveness program[19]

[20]

For many, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program represents a tantalizing prospect. If you are in the right job with the right loans and the right repayment plan, your student loan balance can be forgiven after 120 payments.

During the “Student Loans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness” talks coming to each University of Colorado campus as part of Flash Forward: A CU Financial Event,[21] from Feb. 27 to March 10, faculty and staff will have the opportunity to learn more.

Becky Thelen, a housing and financial counselor with Boulder County Housing and Human Services, will present the hourlong talk, which details the federal loan forgiveness program along with topics like repayment options and remedies for default.

“There’s a lot of free help out there that people aren’t aware of. It can be very beneficial to get out of debt, to improve credit and to buy homes,” said Thelen, who will provide details on resources available statewide.

The federal loan forgiveness program[22] started in October 2007. It is open to employees of government organizations at any level – federal, state, local or tribal – and 501c3 nonprofit organizations. That represents a wide swath of the workforce – from teachers to policemen and beyond.

The first wave of public employees prepared to see their loans forgiven will begin in October 2017. At that time, borrowers will be able to fill out an application for loan forgiveness. In most cases, any forgiven loans are considered taxable income by the IRS. This is not the case with Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

“That’s a big bonus,” Thelen said. “Public Service Loan Forgiveness is an incentive for borrowers to either go into public service work or stay employed in public service work, even though their salaries might be lower.”

For those just starting their public service careers, Thelen recommends taking the time to ensure they have direct loans and set up a qualifying payment program.

“I will say 50 percent of the people we meet with do have things lined up correctly and the other 50 percent don’t,” Thelen said. “What that means is that any payments they’ve made in the past don’t count toward (the program).”

As a HUD-approved housing counseling agency, Boulder County Housing and Human Services began to focus on student loan counseling in the waning days of the foreclosure crisis, as it became increasingly apparent that heavy

student loan debt was hampering people's ability to get mortgages and other loans.

People are often surprised to find out how student loans calculate into mortgage qualifications, Thelen said. Mortgage lenders typically use 1 percent of the student loan balances or the actual payment – whichever is greater.

Thelen recently met with someone with $150,000 in student loans who was looking to buy a home. She had a payment that was affordable, about $250 a month. However, lenders would calculate 1 percent of that loan, $1,500, into her mortgage qualification.

"In her case, she wouldn't qualify for a mortgage because of this. She was pretty devastated," Thelen said. "People are being taken by surprise by that one."

Register for this and other talks at Flash Forward: A CU Financial Event[21].

College marks 100th anniversary with $50 million music+ campaign[23]

Big names from NASA, the NFL and the screen join 2017 Conference on World Affairs [24]

University communications and marketing reorganization to improve collaboration and effectiveness[25]

Amazon designer brings industry experience to classroom[26]

Student's research in methadone clinics connects heroin, opioids[27]

Service Excellence Awards: Nomination deadline extended[28]

The University of Colorado Staff Council (UCSC) is soliciting nominations of classified and university staff employees for the annual Service Excellence Awards. The nomination deadline has been extended to 11:59 p.m. Friday, Feb. 17.

UCSC is pleased to recognize and reward staff members who have provided outstanding and sustained volunteer service to their campus or the university system, as well, as to community/civic/professional organizations during the past three years.

Active involvement in staff events, community engagement opportunities, committee work, social advocacy projects and diversity initiatives will contribute to a nominee's application.

The Service Excellence Award is presented to one qualified individual from each campus and system administration,

and includes a $1,000 cash award to be presented at the All Staff Council Conference on April 14 in Colorado Springs. Each of the four recipients will be invited to the ceremony, along with his/her nominator, supervisor and one additional guest.

Please visit the UCSC Service Excellence Award web page[29] for more information on the award criteria and nomination process.

All nomination forms must be received electronically by 11:59 p.m. Friday, Feb. 17.

Scheeres, Spalart elected to National Academy of Engineering [30]

Bernard joins University of Colorado Cancer Center[31]

Jansson receives award from Society for Reproductive Investigation[32]

Harvey chosen for Faculty at Work profile[33]

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