Regents honor exceptional achievers with annual awards[1]

The University of Colorado Board of Regents has announced the 2025 list of individuals receiving Honorary Degrees, Distinguished Service Awards and University Medals.

Upon the recommendation of the Regents Awards Selection Committee, the full Board of Regents in November approved the nominees. Each recipient has been invited to attend a campus commencement ceremony to accept an award; the dates and locations are to be announced.

Honorary Degrees recognize outstanding achievement in one or more of the following areas: intellectual contributions, university service, philanthropy and/or public service. Distinguished Service Awards recognize those persons whose achievements and contributions are particularly associated with the state and/or nation. University Medals recognize those persons whose achievements and contributions are particularly associated with the university.

The 2025 recipients are:

Honorary Degrees

Joseph American Horse (CU Boulder)

David Chang (CU Boulder)

Wilma Webb (CU Denver)

Distinguished Service Awards

Susana Cordova (CU Denver)

Stephannie Finley Fortune (UCCS)

Pat Meyers (CU Denver)

Ashok Srivastava and Lynn Waelde (CU Boulder)

Robert Wolfson (CU Denver)

University Medals

Yvonne DiStefano (CU Boulder)

Valerie Lash (CU Denver)

Gary Meggison (CU Denver)

Read more on each honoree below:

Honorary Degrees

Joseph American Horse (CU Boulder)

Chief Joseph “Joe” American Horse has lived an extraordinary life of service and leadership for the Oglala Lakota and Indigenous peoples in the Americas and around the world. A military veteran, war bonnet wearer and grandson of Chief American Horse, he has served in tribal leadership for nearly 50 years. His numerous leadership roles have included president and vice president of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, Tribal Judge, and Supreme Court Justice. He founded the Global Institute for Traditional Sciences (GIFTS) and served as director of Oglala Lakota College. Chief Joe

American Horse has also worked tirelessly to support young Lakota scholars in higher education, including fostering partnerships between the University of Colorado and the Lakota Nation.? His work helped to kickstart the Sam High Crane Memorial Endowed Fund to support the education, research and training of Native students in sciences and museum studies at CU Boulder. His leadership and dedication to education, cultural preservation and scientific advancement have achieved meaningful gains for the academic community and Indigenous peoples. ?

David Chang (CU Boulder)

David Chang, a distinguished academic and visionary leader, has made significant contributions to the field of electrical engineering and higher education. At the University of Colorado Boulder, Chang served as chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering throughout the 1980s, playing a pivotal role in securing major grants, including the NSF ERC grant for the Optoelectronics Computer Center. He recruited highly research-active faculty who helped build the department's reputation as a Tier-1 national research leader. His commitment to gender diversity among faculty was decades ahead of national trends and these faculty members have gone on to illustrious careers. From CU, he went on to national leadership roles as dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science at Arizona State University and president at Polytechnic University in Brooklyn, New York. Chang's scholarly achievements, including numerous publications and founding successful tech startups, underscore his impact on the academic and industrial communities. His commitment to advancing knowledge, fostering diversity and improving educational systems continue to demonstrate lasting impact.

Wilma Webb (CU Denver)

Wilma Webb, a trailblazing public servant and advocate, has established a legacy of leadership and dedication to public service. A Denver native, she is the first and only Black woman in Colorado to serve at all levels of government. She began as a community organizer, registering voters, helping impoverished families and advocating for equality in education. Her service continued in her role as a Colorado state representative from 1980 to 1993, the first woman to represent House District 8. As a lawmaker, she championed civil rights, education and anti-drug legislation. She was instrumental in establishing Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a state holiday and later helped launch Denver's now-traditional "Marade" on the holiday. As Denver's first lady from 1991 to 2003, she elevated the arts and arts education and co-founded the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library. Appointed by President Bill Clinton, Webb became the first woman to serve as the U.S. Department of Labor's Regional Administrator. Her extensive contributions to social justice, education and community development have earned her numerous accolades, and she remains a mentor to other leaders. ?

Distinguished Service Awards

Susana Cordova (CU Denver)

Susana Cordova, a distinguished alumna of the University of Colorado Denver, has dedicated her career to improving educational outcomes. Growing up a student in Denver Public Schools (DPS), she went on to earn a master's degree from CU Denver. Her 30-year career in education began as a bilingual teacher in DPS and continued in roles as assistant principal, principal, director, chief academic officer, chief schools' officer and deputy superintendent. As the first Latina superintendent for DPS, she led significant improvements, including an 8% increase in graduation rates for African American students and a 10% improvement for Latino/a students. Cordova's current tenure as Colorado's first Latina Commissioner of Education has been marked by her advocacy for equity and excellence. She has championed early childhood education, securing increased funding and expanding preschool access to underserved communities. Her leadership in DPS and the Colorado Department of Education has focused on breaking historical patterns of inequity and supporting multilingual students. Cordova's commitment to educational leadership, curriculum development and classroom instruction has made a profound impact on students and educators alike.

?**Stephannie Finley Fortune** (UCCS)

Stephannie Finley Fortune's passion for public service served her well in her career in public policy, government, community development and business. She served in the White House as a member of George H.W. Bush's advance team and on Capitol Hill working for Congressman Scott McGinnis. She later served as chief of staff for Colorado Lt.

Gov. Jane Norton. At the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, she held roles as director of State Government Relations and executive director of University Partnerships and Advocacy. Fortune's leadership was instrumental in securing the $120 million City of Champions award for Colorado Springs and the Memorial Hospital lease with UCHealth. Her community involvement included roles with the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, United Way, the Colorado Springs Conservatory and as an elected member of the Colorado Springs City Council. Fortune received numerous accolades, including the 2009 and 2012 Person of Influence awards from the Colorado Springs Business Journal and the Girl Scouts Woman of Distinction award. Fortune posthumously received the UCCS Alumni and Friends award in 2024 as recognition of her volunteerism and philanthropy that created community pathways to higher education through mentorship and workforce readiness programs. Since her death from cancer in 2023, her service and leadership is greatly missed, and her legacy won't be forgotten.

?Pat Meyers (CU Denver)

Pat Meyers, a distinguished University of Colorado Denver alumnus, has held multifaceted leadership roles in the military, public, private and nonprofit sectors. His career spans law, politics and the restaurant industry. After serving honorably in the U.S. Navy from 1978 to 1984, Meyers earned a bachelor's degree from CU Denver and a law degree from the University of California. In the private sector, he was extremely successful and entrepreneurial, helping to launch innovative restaurant chains that got their start in Colorado, including Quiznos and Smashburger. Government life included serving as chief of staff to Gov. John Hickenlooper and leading the state's COVID-19 Innovation Response Team, securing essential medical supplies during the pandemic. His efforts earned him the Colorado Governor's Citizenship Medal in 2021. As the chief economic recovery officer and executive director of the Office of Economic Development and International Trade, Meyers played a critical role in Colorado's economic recovery, emphasizing workforce development and rural vibrancy. His philanthropic efforts through the Meyers Family Foundation have established scholarships at CU Denver and CU Boulder, supporting first-generation and BIPOC students. Meyers' ongoing engagement with CU Denver, including guest lecturing and mentorship, continues his commitment to education and public service.

?Ashok Srivastava and Lynn Waelde (CU Boulder)

Since meeting as Ph.D. students at the University of Colorado Boulder, Ashok Srivastava and Lynn Waelde have built a life together while also distinguishing themselves with service and contributions to CU, to academia and to the scientific community.

Ashok Srivastava (CU Boulder)

Ashok Srivastava, a CU Boulder alumnus with a doctorate in electrical engineering, has had a remarkable career in AI and data science, holding leadership roles at NASA and Verizon, and is currently senior vice president and chief data officer at Intuit. He also has served on the CU Boulder College of Engineering's advisory council and the CU Foundation Board of Directors, and is a current member of the CU Foundation trustees. He serves on a committee for the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine on a Congressionally mandated study on Emerging Trends in Aviation Safety[2]. Ashok is a Fellow of the IEEE[3], the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS[4]), and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA[5]). His philanthropic support for CU Boulder reflects his deep commitment to students, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Lynn Waelde (CU Boulder)

Lynn Waelde, who earned her doctorate in psychology at CU Boulder, is a leading expert in stress disorders and mindfulness. Her work has made a significant impact on diverse health and mental health issues, including using mindfulness to treat stress disorders, disaster recovery and veteran support. She is a professor emeritus at Palo Alto University and an adjunct clinical professor at Stanford University. She founded the Inner Resources Center, training over 3,000 clinicians globally. Her philanthropic support for CU Boulder embodies her dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for students and demonstrates her values of caring about students, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Robert Wolfson (CU Denver)

Robert Wolfson, M.D., MSHA, is a model of unwavering dedication, mentorship, generosity and inspirational resilience in the face of challenges. Having earned degrees from CU Boulder and the CU School of Medicine, he completed his surgical residency at CU before practicing for a decade at St. Anthony Hospital. After being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, Wolfson transitioned from a successful career as a general, thoracic and vascular surgeon to academia and health care administration.? He earned an MBA and a master's in health administration from CU Denver, where he later became a highly regarded professor, teaching courses in health care systems and strategic management. Wolfson's dedication to education and mentorship has left a profound impact on hundreds of students. His impact extends beyond the classroom as well: ?He has been a dedicated volunteer at Halcyon Hospice and the St. Anthony Hospital Trauma Survivors Network, and his financial generosity led to the creation of the Health Administration Research Consortium at CU Denver, supporting health care research and student involvement. ?

University Medals

Yvonne DiStefano (CU Boulder)

Yvonne DiStefano has dedicated over five decades to the university community. As CU Boulder's first lady alongside her husband, Philip DiStefano, who served as chancellor for 15 years, her active involvement in university events made her a beloved figure. Her leadership, compassion and dedication have been evident since she embarked on a career as a kindergarten and third-grade teacher. DiStefano's impact continued to grow through her volunteer work and support for CU Boulder students. Since 1974, she has been a tireless advocate and supporter of the School of Education, taking on numerous philanthropic and volunteer roles.? Her advocacy for the Guardian Scholars program, which provides essential support to students who have experienced foster care, has included her hosting Thanksgiving dinners and attending graduation ceremonies, bolstering a sense of community and belonging. As a key figure in the Chancellor's Parent Leadership Society, DiStefano has eased the transition to campus for new students and their families. Her enthusiasm for CU Athletics is evident through her support for and participation in the Buffalo Belles. DiStefano also has played a crucial role in CU fundraising campaigns and was a founding member of the Women Investing in the School of Education (WISE) initiative. ?

Valerie Lash (CU Denver)

Valerie Lash, a distinguished alumna of the University of Colorado Denver, is fiercely committed to education, health care and community service. A nontraditional, first-generation student, Lash earned her bachelor's degree in communication from CU Denver. As the Imaging Director at Centura Health, she has significantly advanced medical imaging and patient care. ?Her dedication to CU Denver is evident through her service on the Alumni Board, where she has fostered strong alumni connections and supported international students, and through her profound philanthropic efforts. She has donated over $2 million to the Communication Scholarship Fund, enabling at-risk students in CU Denver's Communications Department to complete their degrees. Her contributions have also supported the Community Health Education and Retention Scholarship, which boasts a 100% graduation rate. ?An active participant in study abroad programs, she has served as a mentor to international students. Her current service as a member of the CU Foundation trustees showcases her steadfast support of the CU system.

Gary Meggison (CU Denver)

Gary Meggison, a distinguished alumnus of the University of Colorado Denver, has dedicated over two decades to advancing the College of Engineering, Design, and Computing. Having earned degrees in Civil Engineering and Business Administration from CU Denver, he has gone on to serve in leadership roles including chair of the Engineering Leadership Council and membership on the Construction Engineering and Management Advisory Committee. ?He brings insight and perspective from his career in the construction industry, where he has held top positions, including president of the Associated General Contractors of Colorado. He devotes time and expertise to the CU Foundation, where he served as a trustee and the Board of Directors Committee Chair for the Finance Committee. His philanthropic efforts are notable, with significant contributions to scholarships and programmatic support. A lead gift from Meggison and his wife, Kathy, established the Construction Engineering and Management degree programs at CU Denver. ?His strategic insights have been instrumental in developing these programs, which have shown significant growth. Meggison's unwavering commitment to CU Denver, his leadership in the industry and his generous

support of the university's mission continue to make a lasting impact.

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