Five questions for Mari Dennis[1]

Mari Dennis joined CU system administration's Internal Audit last year as a fiscal misconduct investigator. She also is coordinator for the CU EthicsLine[2], which provides employees with a simple, anonymous way of reporting concerns or suspected misconduct. In this role, Dennis reviews each submission before identifying the appropriate campus office or official and routing the report to them for review.

"I remain available as a resource throughout the review process, providing support to the reviewer, if needed, or helping to facilitate communication with them and an anonymous reporter," Dennis said. "The CU EthicsLine platform allows me to communicate with reporters through messaging or live chat while maintaining their anonymity."

Away from work, Dennis makes the most of free time with her family, likely on the go most weekends for activities and events. She also enjoys reading, cooking, baking and gardening.

1. Before coming to CU, you worked in victim advocacy. How does that experience inform your work in investigating fiscal misconduct?

My background is in victim advocacy, where I spent 16 years working directly with crime victims and survivors, and later in leadership roles overseeing a law enforcement victim advocacy unit and a nonprofit victim services organization. In those roles, I regularly navigated complex and sensitive situations, supported people through difficult experiences and worked closely with law enforcement on investigations. I was also responsible for helping assess concerns and making sure policies and procedures were followed. That combination of experience led me to my current role and has shaped how I approach this work.

My background in victim advocacy involved supporting victims and survivors in the aftermath of crime by providing on-scene crisis support and safety planning, helping them navigate the criminal justice process and connecting them with resources to meet their needs. Over time, I transitioned into leadership positions where I supported and led teams of victim service professionals and helped to ensure programs were operating effectively and meeting the needs of crime victims and survivors.

I think that experience impacts the way I conduct investigations. I approach sensitive situations with care, listen closely, remain impartial and assess information objectively. Because victim advocacy is grounded in treating people with fairness, dignity and respect, I bring that same approach to my work, particularly when interviewing witnesses and subjects.

2. What does your role in Internal Audit entail and how does your work support the CU system?

My role in Internal Audit (IA) focuses on overseeing the CU EthicsLine system and investigating fiscal misconduct allegations. As the CU EthicsLine coordinator, I route reports submitted through the system to the appropriate offices so they can be reviewed and addressed.

When reports involve potential fiscal misconduct, they are reviewed by IA investigators to determine whether an investigation is warranted. In this role, I also track and report CU EthicsLine activity on a quarterly basis to the Board of Regents Audit Committee. I report on trends in report volume, issue categories, outcomes and reporting across campuses.

As a fiscal misconduct investigator, I conduct investigations to determine whether fiscal misconduct has occurred under Regent Policy 13.E.2[3], focusing on whether the evidence supports a finding and whether there was intent to obtain an unauthorized benefit.

This work supports the CU system by encouraging individuals to voice concerns and promoting accountability and transparency. I truly believe that when people feel heard and their concerns are addressed, it strengthens trust across the university. I find it meaningful to serve as a conduit, helping to connect people's concerns to individuals who can

thoughtfully address them.

Additionally, in my role as a fiscal misconduct investigator, I enjoy examining details, following facts and gaining an understanding of what occurred. I find reward in helping to protect university resources that ultimately support students, faculty and staff.

3. How do all employees at CU play a role in the university's commitment to ethics and compliance?

Employees play a role by simply speaking up when something doesn't seem right by being willing to raise questions and share concerns. It is all our role to maintain a culture of integrity.

Regent Policy 8.A.9[4] emphasizes this role by highlighting that employees have a shared responsibility to report known or suspected violations of policies, laws and regulations. The policy also provides whistleblower protections, meaning individuals reporting concerns in good faith are protected from retaliation. When employees take the step to report, it allows university officials to review concerns and respond in a thoughtful and appropriate way.

Concerns vary widely and are grouped into categories such as academic or research integrity, business integrity, environmental health and safety, and human resources. For example, academic or research concerns could include allegations of plagiarism or improper research practices. Business integrity issues could include possible misuse of university funds, time abuse or conflicts of interest. Environmental health and safety reports might relate to substance abuse, unsafe lab conditions or noncompliance with safety protocols. Human resources concerns can involve issues like workplace harassment, discrimination or policy violations by employees.

4. What might you say to an employee who notices something that doesn't seem right, but isn't sure whether it rises to the level of reporting?

I would encourage them to consider submitting a Guidance Request through the CU EthicsLine system. This option allows individuals to share a concern and ask for advice on how to handle a situation without filing an actual report. It's a helpful way to get guidance if someone is unsure whether to report, and they can still choose to remain anonymous.

A common misconception is that nothing will be done if a concern is reported. In reality, every report submitted is reviewed and routed to the appropriate office for follow-up within 24 hours. Depending on the complexity of a matter, some cases can take an extended amount of time to review and address, and specific details about the resolution of a case are not always shared due to confidentiality. However, each report is taken seriously and addressed as appropriate.

Another misconception that some individuals have is that they worry that their identity will be exposed, even if they choose to remain anonymous. The CU EthicsLine is hosted by a third-party provider, which helps protect privacy. The system does not gather identifying information for those who select anonymity when submitting a report. Even within IA, we don't know who anonymous reporters are. And because the system does not ask for identifying information for anonymous reporters, we have no way of knowing identities.

5. What is one takeaway about ethical responsibility in the workplace that you can leave us with?

If I could leave one takeaway, it would be that everyone plays a role in creating an ethical workplace.

If something doesn't feel right, I would encourage people to speak up in whatever way feels most comfortable. This could be discussing concerns with a direct supervisor or a professor or utilizing one of the other campus reporting options. The CU EthicsLine is another valuable resource that the university provides, especially for those who are unsure where to report or prefer to stay anonymous.

CU marches toward long-term sustainability goals with shrinking footprint[5]

CU's impact on the state of Colorado and beyond – as an institution of higher education, a research and innovation hub, a healthcare leader, an employer, an economic engine, a workforce developer, a statewide resource and much more – is indisputable and profound. But there's one area in which CU's impact is diminishing. And that's a good thing.

As outlined in the latest systemwide Sustainability Report[6], which is produced biennially with a focus on the built environment across CU's four campuses, the university continues to make progress toward its long-term goal of carbon neutrality. For decades, sustainability has been central to CU's capital planning, facilities management and operations. Systemwide, CU emphasizes renovation, space optimization and deferred maintenance over new construction, having invested approximately $1 billion over the past decade to improve facility performance and reduce long-term emissions. This work, coupled with the university's alignment with local and state goals, is paying off.

Overall, CU is achieving measurable reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and energy use intensity, with three of the four campuses having already met or exceeded the state's interim GHG reduction benchmarks when emissions are normalized by building area. Energy consumption is lower systemwide thanks to energy performance contracting and efficiency retrofits, and investments in renewable energy initiatives such as solar projects promise additional progress. Gains in other areas such as water consumption, waste diversion and transportation are also highlighted in the report.

"We're doing good work … and yet, we recognize that we can and must do more," President Todd Saliman writes in the report's introduction. "Core to our mission … is our service to the people of our state – and to the state itself. This means doing all we can to grow and strengthen the systems and resources that allow Coloradans to thrive, while working to reduce our impact on the environment and preserve our state's natural treasures."

In 2024, Saliman formed a systemwide working group to determine additional ways to advance sustainability across CU and inform the university's strategic planning.

The report highlights initiatives and efforts on each campus, including:
CU Boulder's large-scale decarbonization planning, which includes geothermal feasibility studies and district energy plant modernization, as well as its launch of the SPIKE Center for Sustainability Education to embed sustainability across the curriculum. UCCS' expansion of its largely student-led Office of Sustainability, strengthening programming via the UCCS Farm, Green Action Fund projects and campuswide engagement initiatives that combine education, food security and waste reduction. CU Denver's first dedicated sustainability professional, hired in 2024 and focused on campus-specific carbon, energy, water and waste targets, accelerating progress across the Auraria Campus. CU Anschutz's expansion of its formal Green Labs and waste diversion programs, which have reduced energy, water and material use in research-intensive facilities.
CU's 2025 Sustainability Report is available online at https://www.cu.edu/doc/sustainability-report-2025finalpdf.[6]

Now serving: Your new benefits plan year starts July 1 [7]

Three CU campuses receive state's new Basic Needs Campus Designation[8]

Three University of Colorado campuses are among those receiving the state's new Basic Needs Campus Designation, which recognizes campuses leading the way in supporting the essential needs of students so they can succeed in college and beyond.

CU Boulder, UCCS and CU Denver are members of the first cohort of higher education institutions to receive the

Comprehensive Designation as announced June 9[9] by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE).

The Basic Needs Campus Designations highlight institutions that have made a strong, coordinated commitment to addressing student needs such as food security, housing stability, mental health support and access to critical resources. Designations are awarded at two levels, Cornerstone and Comprehensive, based on the depth and breadth of services provided, and the institution's demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement.

Institutions earning the Comprehensive designation demonstrated a fully integrated, campus-wide approach to basic needs, including cross-departmental coordination, data-informed strategies and robust partnerships with community organizations.

The Basic Needs Campus Designation reflects CDHE's broader focus on improving student outcomes by addressing the real-life challenges students face while pursuing a credential. Research shows that basic needs insecurity directly impacts retention rates, with 79% of students who stop out citing basic needs challenges or financial issues as primary reasons for leaving.

What the campuses are saying:

CU Boulder: "This designation is a culmination of years of investment in building strong, student-centered support systems," said Hannah Wilks, assistant dean of students. "CU Boulder has worked hard to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing basic needs, and this recognition reaffirms our commitment to creating equitable, supportive environments on our campus and across Colorado – sharing best practices and helping all students thrive." Read more in CU Boulder Today.[10]

UCCS: "Building a culture of care is central to who we are at UCCS," said Alex Baker, dean of students. "This designation recognizes our collective commitment to supporting the whole student by ensuring access to the resources and services that help students persist, thrive and feel like they belong here. We are proud to be among the inaugural institutions receiving Colorado's Comprehensive Basic Needs Campus Designation and remain committed to creating a campus community where every student has the opportunity to succeed." Read more in UCCS News.[11]

CU Denver: "Supporting students' basic needs is not separate from student success – in fact, it is essential to it," said Genia Herndon, associate vice chancellor for student affairs. "This designation reflects CU Denver's ongoing commitment to ensuring students have the resources, support and sense of belonging they need to persist, thrive and achieve their educational goals." Read more in CU Denver News.[12]

Learn more about CDHE's Basic Needs Campus Designation.[13]

NASA selects LASP mission to study how Earth and space weather connect [14]

UCCS researchers and team pave the way for magnetic quantum computers [15]

CU Denver signs direct admissions agreement with St. Vrain Valley Schools – its fifth with a nearby school district [16]

Beta blockers: Why people are turning to an old drug for high-stress moments [17]

Federal update: Letter requesting Uniform Guidance comment period extension, more [18]

From June 18, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on Letter Requesting Uniform Guidance Comment Period Extension, H-1B Visa Fee Temporarily Reinstated, and New ED Interagency Agreements.

Click here to read the post.[19]

From June 12, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on H-1B Petition Fee Block and NIH Proposed PI Award Cap.

Click here to read the post.[20]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[21] page.

Eggert named interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences [22]

Kirby appointed UCCS Faculty Athletics Representative [23]

Feinstein appointed Ergen Family Endowed Chair in Pediatric Outcomes Research [24]

The New Race to Find Treatments for Measles[25]

University of Colorado Denver students visit Mayo through study abroad programme[26]

In Boulder, Folsom Field Returns As A Magical Concert Venue[27]

Links

[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-mari-dennis[2] https://www.cu.edu/ethicsline[3] https://www.cu.edu/regents/policy/13[4] https://www.cu.edu/regents/policy/8[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-marches-toward-long-term-sustainability-goals-shrinking-footprint[6] https://www.cu.edu/doc/sustainability-report-2025finalpdf[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/now-serving-your-new-benefits-plan-year-starts-july-1[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/three-cu-campuses-receive-state-s-new-basic-needs-campus-designation[9] https://mailchi.mp/dhe.state.co.us/careerconnected26-13781721?e=399f0ddc03[10] htt
ps://www.colorado.edu/today/2026/06/23/colorado-recognizes-cu-boulders-basic-needs-program-new-designation[11] https://news.uccs.edu/2026/06/11/uccs-earns-basic-needs-campus-designation/[12] https://news.ucdenver.edu/cu-denver-receives-states-inaugural-basic-needs-campus-designation/[13] https://cdhe.colorado.gov/basic-needs[14] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/nasa-selects-lasp-mission-study-how-earth-and-space-weather-connect[15] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-researchers-and-team-pave-way-magnetic-quantum-computers[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-denver-signs-direct-admissions-agreement-st-vrain-valley-schools-its-fifth-nearby-school[17] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/beta-blockers-why-people-are-turning-old-drug-high-stress-moments[18] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-letter-requesting-uniform-guidance-comment-period-extension-more[19] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-61826[20] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-61226[21] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[22] https://connections.cu.edu/people/eggert-named-interim-dean-college-arts-and-sciences[23] https://connections.cu.edu/people/kirby-appointed-uccs-faculty-athletics-representative[24] https://connections.cu.edu/people/feinstein-appointed-ergen-family-endowed-chair-pediatric-outcomes-research[25] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/new-race-find-treatments-measles[26] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/university-colorado-denver-students-visit-mayo-through-study-abroad-programme[27] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/boulder-folsom-field-returns-magical-concert-venue