Five questions for President Bruce Benson[1]

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This month marks Bruce Benson's 10th anniversary of becoming president of the University of Colorado, the institution where he earned his degree and which he long supported while working in business, philanthropy and civic leadership.

He is the longest-serving CU president in 65 years. With Benson at the helm, CU has notched considerable gains in enrollment, degrees awarded annually, research funding, annual fundraising, annual budget and more[4] – all at a time when state funding is down from a decade ago.

When asked, he'll reflect on the past decade, but Benson remains focused on the future and continuing in his current role.

1. What are you most proud of from your decade at CU?

First and foremost, changing the culture at the university. And by culture I mean all those things that contribute to and support our learning and research environment – how we exemplify our values and ensure our campuses live up to higher education's ideals, how we develop and deliver our academic programs, how we improve our business practices, ways we innovate and seek efficiencies, how we foster diversity, the ways we convey our contributions and value, how we promote and protect our reputation.

I'm really proud of how the university community has stepped up in so many ways to ensure that we have the kind of culture that drives our success. When I first started 10 years ago, we had people turning down grants because they didn't want to partner with others in the CU system. Early on, I heard loud and clear that people were drowning in red tape from policies and procedures. We talked about free speech and the open exchange of ideas, but we didn't always practice it. That's all changed. I see lots of great collaboration across CU. I see us working hard with the Legislature to pass bills that allow us to operate more efficiently and effectively. I see the number of policies reduced from 210 to 89. I see steady progress in diversity and the inclusion of diversity of thought in our discussions and actions.

Mostly, I see a culture that allows us to meet our mission and serve our students and state.

I'm also proud of our reputation. It wasn't the best in the years before I started, but we've made it a priority to address problems immediately. We certainly will have our share of problems with such a large organization, but it's how we deal with them that matters. I think we've also done a good job enhancing our reputation simply by telling our story better.

2. What don't people know about CU that you'd like them to know?
[5]

All the great things we do. It's staggering to see the scope and extent of our university, and just how big of an impact we make. We change individual lives through the education we provide and I see that at every commencement. But we also conduct more than a billion dollars' worth of research that improves lives, saves lives and helps society. I want people to know the great things happening with our research and teaching. It's everything from unlocking the secrets of Alzheimer's disease to students controlling satellites in the remote reaches of space. It also ranges from addressing big global problems like cybersecurity to local issues like designing better playgrounds for community schools. There are thousands of great examples.

I also want them to know the significant impact we have across Colorado. When I started, I suggested we compile a list of the programs we have in communities around the state. I expected a few dozen. Turns out we have nearly 300, which are detailed in our CU for Colorado initiative.

One of the things we've done to help spread the word is create the CU Advocates program, a network of 3,000 people who help tell our story and advocate for the university. If members of the CU community aren't members already, I would encourage them to join at CU.edu[6].

We have also been spreading the word about CU through earned, owned and paid marketing. We're in a competitive environment for the best students, faculty and staff, not to mention resources, so it's imperative that we convey our value and contributions. We're working hard at that through our All Four marketing campaign, and I think it's paying off. We've done polling and seen our approval rating increase from 68 percent to 75 percent in a short time. I expect that to rise even more.

3. What are the most important issues facing the university?
[7]

Funding is always going to be front and center. We are slated to get a significant increase this year from the Legislature, but we've had some lean years over the past decade in terms of state funding. When I started, CU got about $228 million from the state. As the recession progressed, that dropped to $144 million in 2011. We've rebounded to $194 million this year, but we're still far off where we need to be, particularly considering inflation and enrollment gains. We work hard with legislators, but their hands are tied by conflicting knots in the state constitution.

We have to control the things we can control, like operations and fundraising. We've done a great job at being more efficient. One of our big successes has been working with the Legislature over the past decade to secure nearly 20 pieces of legislation that allow us greater efficiency – it's everything from procurement to capital construction, and it makes a big difference. We've also done things like institute self-insurance, which saves millions. We have saved tens of millions of dollars over the past decade with our focus on efficiencies. In the past three years alone, we have realized $112 million in savings and cost avoidance.

We've also changed our fundraising operation, aligning responsibility with authority so that we have greater accountability. Fundraisers are now closer to the school or college they're charged with raising money for. The new structure has helped us step up our activities, and it shows. A decade ago we raised $135 million. Last year we raised $386.3 million and I fully expect we'll pass $400 million this year. Importantly, our endowment has doubled in the decade, from $640 million to $1.3 billion. We're still a long way off from where we need to be, but we're headed in the right direction.

4. What has been more valuable in your job, your business experience or your political experience?
[8]

Both are important. We're a $4 billion-plus annual operation, so it's critical that we operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. We're not a business that sells widgets, but we are a business that has to be efficient to allow us to deliver on our mission. My experience as a businessman helps me view the university through a lens of an efficient and effective organization, and act on that every day.

My political experience is more than what happens at the statehouse. It's how we make things happen. It's working with people of all political persuasions to advance CU. It's working with local elected officials like mayors, city councils and school boards.

But I think one of the things that has helped me most is being involved and engaged in Colorado and with CU over a number of years and leveraging connections that help the university, whether through fundraising, at the Legislature or working with communities around the state.

5. What would you like to be remembered for when you eventually leave CU?
[9]

In part, for changing the culture, which I touched on in the first question. But also for putting our university on sound footing, whether cultural or financial. When I started in 2008, we were headed into the Great Recession, and I'm proud of how we weathered that and came out the other end as a stronger institution.

I'd also like to be known as someone who furthered intellectual diversity, political diversity. Our Center for Western Civilization, Thought and Policy is a great example of how we have walked the walk on intellectual diversity. I expect

that will be a lasting legacy for all of CU – that we're a place that fosters free speech and lives up to the ideal as a marketplace of ideas.

CU graduate programs among the nation's best[10]
[11]

The University of Colorado's four campuses earned high marks in new lists of graduate programs compiled by U.S. News & World Report, which annually spotlights the nation's best research and teaching.

U.S. News ranks programs in business, education, engineering, law, medicine, nursing and more. Rankings are based on expert opinions about program excellence and statistical indicators that measure the quality of a school's faculty, research and students. The publication aims to provide a tool to students and parents who are comparing college programs at accredited public and private universities in the United States.

Below is a sampling of CU's rankings from the 2019 edition of Best Graduate Schools[12] (U.S. News Media Group), as made available in advance by U.S. News. Some rankings include ties with other institutions:

University of Colorado Boulder
Top 10: CU Boulder ranks second nationally for atomic/molecular/optical physics. It also is ranked for environmental law (fifth), quantum physics (sixth) and physical chemistry (10th). Many more CU Boulder schools and programs hold places on the national rankings within their fields: aerospace/aeronautical/astronautical engineering (12), applied math (14), education policy (14), physics (14), clinical psychology (16), audiology (17), chemical engineering (17), environmental engineering/environmental health engineering (17), earth sciences (19), civil engineering (23), chemistry (24), speech-language pathology (24), psychology (26), School of Education (29), College of Engineering and Applied Science (32), intellectual property law (32), biology (33), electrical/electric/communications engineering (35), English (35), mechanical engineering (35), computer engineering (36), history (38), computer science (40), political science (40), sociology (42), Law School (46), materials engineering (46), mathematics (47), economics (50) and Leeds School of Business (51 for part-time MBA schools; 65 for full-time MBA schools). Not all disciplines are ranked by the publication.
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

School of Medicine
Top 10: The school ranks fourth for pediatrics, ninth for primary care. The school ranks 32nd overall for research.
College of Nursing
The college's doctor of nursing practice is 36th; nursing master's degree, 46th. The specialty of nurse practitioner (pediatric and primary care) ranks 12th.
Colorado School of Public Health
The school is ranked 31st overall. For the first time, biostatistics and informatics is ranked (74).
University of Colorado Denver
CU Denver schools and programs that are ranked include the School of Public Affairs (34), biomedical engineering (78), the Business School's part-time MBA program (78), statistics (83), biology (98), civil engineering (107), mathematics (117), the School of Education and Human Development (124), engineering (140) and electrical engineering (144).
University of Colorado Colorado Springs
At UCCS, the nursing master's degree at the Helen and Arthur E. Johnson Beth-El College of Nursing and Health Sciences ranks 46th; the doctorate of nursing practice, 61st. Further rankings include the part-time MBA (82), clinical psychology (102), public affairs (123), physics (124), education (144) and psychology (148).
The U.S. News data come from statistical surveys sent to administrators at more than 2,012 graduate programs and from reputation surveys sent to more than 20,500 academics and professionals in the disciplines. Surveys were conducted during the fall of 2017 and in early 2018. The Best Graduate Schools 2019 guidebook may be pre-ordered online[13].

Staff Council: Survey shows strong desire for paid parental leave[14]
[15]

Nearly half of respondents to the University of Colorado Staff Council (UCSC) Work Climate Survey said they felt that paid parental leave was very or extremely important to them and 44 percent said they would likely use the benefit if it became policy.

The survey, conducted in November 2016, asked university staff employees about a variety of topics dealing with benefits, professional development and policy.

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents said they would use a tuition benefit, and Skillsoft was the most commonly used professional development tool.

UCSC discussed the survey, which will be released in its entirety in April, during the council's regular meeting March 15 at 1800 Grant St. Council members working to compile and distribute survey results have developed a short video along with FAQs that may be viewed on the UCSC website.

To see highlights and find out more about the survey, visit www.cu.edu/ucsc-work-climate-survey[16]

In other business at last week's meeting, UCSC members:
Were informed that the Boulder Campus Staff Council has endorsed a proposal drafted by UCSC's parental leave committee, which has recommended that the university provide at least six weeks of paid parental leave for both university and classified staff. The Boulder council drafted a letter to the Board of Regents saying that the current lack of a paid leave "comes at a cost" to the university. "Women's workforce advancement and income, staff's economic security, and the university's ability to retain and recruit talented employees are all negatively impacted by the lack of a comprehensive and inclusive paid parental policy," wrote the council in the letter. Continued a discussion regarding financial institutions that offer programs focused on employees of educational entities that help defray closing costs for a home purchase or other home-related incentives. A Boulder council committee is compiling a list of the companies that provide such programs. Discussed holding a meeting at least yearly with the Faculty Council to facilitate communication between the two governance entities, compare goals and agendas, and promote collaboration. Agreed to make the communications officer position a permanent and executive position for UCSC. Nick Lockwood served in the newly created role this year. Nominations for the position, as well as the other officer positions of vice chair, treasurer and secretary, are currently being accepted. Election results will be announced in April. Learned about the Colorado State Employee Assistance Program (C-SEAP), which addresses "personal problems and workplace issues faced by state employees and employers." Matt Steinkamp, director, discussed the numerous services offered by the organization, including confidential counseling, workplace skills coaching, mediation, and emergency financial assistance. The organization also provides webinars and on-site workplace training. To find out more information about C-SEAP, visit https://www.colorado.gov/c-seap[17] Discussed UCSC's next event, the All Staff Council Conference in Boulder on April 13. During the conference, Service Excellence Awards will be given to four staff members – one from each campus and system administration – who have provided outstanding voluntary service to their campus, the university and community/civic/professional organizations.

Ganahl visits Faculty Council to discuss shared governance, diversity of thought[18]
[19]

Regent Heidi Ganahl was a guest of the Faculty Council at its regular meeting March 15 at 1800 Grant St.

She described her 2016 campaign for regent at large and first 14 months in the role as "quite an adventure."

"I enjoy every day of it. The board meetings are tough sometimes," she said with a laugh. "Other than that, it's a lot of

fun."

Ganahl, who chairs the board's finance committee, said affordability for students remains a key concern of hers. "We're always looking at improving graduation rates and understanding what gets students across the finish line," she said. "One way of keeping costs down is to graduate in four years." Another focus for Ganahl: women's issues. "It's a very interesting time to be involved in that conversation."

The Republican from Superior also has spoken often of diversity among faculty and students, and free speech and diversity of thought. She said she is working with student leader Marcus Fotenos on the Free to Be Coalition to "encourage feisty, collaborative debate at CU." The group is involved with presenting an April 2 debate[20] between former Mexican President Vicente Fox and Brexit architect Nigel Farage.

Coming from the business world, Ganahl said she still is acclimating to the concept of shared governance.

"I thank you for your patience," she said. "I think everyone on the board has a good heart and wants to do well, but sometimes it's hard to come in from the outside world and learn how everything operates."

Ganahl encouraged faculty members to contact her[21] with input and suggestions.

In other business at last week's Faculty Council meeting:
CU Staff Council Chair Nancy Moore was a guest, telling the council that she and Faculty Council Chair Ravinder Singh had discussed shared issues such as the tuition benefit and paid parental leave that are of interest of faculty and staff alike. She said Staff Council supports the Faculty Council's work on development of an anti-bullying policy that's currently under consideration. She invited Faculty Council members to attend Staff Council meetings and said faculty should feel free to contact her[22] with thoughts. Felicity O'Herron, chief human resources officer and associate vice president of Employee Services, said her office is looking into fertility treatment benefits, which the Faculty Council Women's Committee recently formally expressed interest in. She said Kaiser Permanente currently makes available the benefit, and that her office is researching potential costs and the prevalence of the benefit at other corporate and higher education employers. Michael Lightner, vice president for academic affairs, updated the council on the ongoing review of Regents Laws and Policies. A second draft of Article 5 now is available on the review website[23].

Climate Change and Health Symposium spotlights CU opportunity to collaborate on emerging global issue [24]

Rain or snow? Humidity, location can make all the difference[25]

UCCS to offer Air Force ROTC on campus in fall 2018[26]

Submit your questions for the March Campus Conversation [27]

CU School of Medicine Colorado Springs Branch honors outstanding physician teachers[28]

A century later, CU officially remembers Buchanan[29]

Group's goal: Create a healthy campus culture [30]

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