Five questions for Ron Sokol[1]

Since 2010, the Boettcher Foundation's Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Awards Program has provided powerful lines of support to young researchers across the University of Colorado and beyond. This year will see the assembling of a seventh cohort of Boettcher Investigators.

The foundation's program so far has awarded over $5 million to CU's 22 current Boettcher Investigators[2]. This year, because the Boettcher Foundation[3] has deemed the program so successful, each annual award is increasing from $225,000 to $235,000, covering up to three years of biomedical research.

Again leading CU's systemwide review panel will be chair Ronald Sokol, M.D., a faculty member at the University of Colorado School of Medicine at the Anschutz Medical Campus and Children's Hospital Colorado since 1983.

Competition is strong among potential investigators, who must be early in their careers and pursuing research with the potential to improve the understanding, treatment and prevention of human disease.

"I think this type of public-private partnership really is necessary to move science forward," Sokol says of the Boettcher Foundation program. "We are in an unprecedented era in our ability to study human diseases at a level never before reached in the history of man.

"We actually need a much greater workforce of investigators to translate these data and ideas into better human health. This is not the time to be starving our up and coming researchers in terms of supporting their training and career development. We should have more funding rather than less for young investigators – which is the situation we're in these days at the federal government level."

1. What are some of the obstacles that typically stand in the way of an early career scientist securing funding?

The biggest obstacle that's emerged over the past decade has been the relative decrease for funding for young investigators. With the growth of research, there's actually a growing need for more investigators, but the pot of money to support them, by buying power, has actually shrunk.

Research and careers depend on getting funding from agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is the largest for biomedical, or the National Science Foundation (NSF) for other physical sciences research. The NIH budget has been flat or decreased, which results in the loss of purchasing power of at least 30 percent over the past decade.

One of the biggest challenges is to keep young investigators in the field by providing adequate training and launching their research careers. If there's insufficient grant funding, they may get discouraged and find another career path. Right now, there's a great deal of concern that the pipeline of young, energetic, passionate investigators may get cut short without the necessary funding to get careers jump-started.

Another challenge is finding good mentoring for junior faculty. As the current workforce ages, if we don't repopulate with younger investigators, there's a concern that mentoring will also fall off.

Finally, there's the challenge of having adequate job positions available. If there's inadequate funding from agencies, then institutions won't be able to open new jobs to recruit into.

2. This year's will be the seventh cohort of the Boettcher Foundation Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Award investigators. It's a brief history, but are you beginning to see the effects of investment in these early career scientists?

I think without question there's a major effect on many careers. When the panel reviews applications, we are talking the cream of the cream of the crop. We'll select five individuals from the entire University of Colorado system – still a very small number, considering all the emerging young investigators across all our campuses. We could easily award

twice as many grants.

For those who have received these awards at a critical point in their career, receiving over $200,000 allows them to accelerate their research, to expand their research much more effectively, and to become that much more competitive for that next step of securing more long-term funding.

But it isn't all about getting grants. These investigators are studying critical areas of science and biomedical research, addressing important diseases for children and adults. The investigators are the best and brightest at our university.

Virtually every one of the Boettcher Investigators has been successful since they've received the Boettcher funds. I think there' s no question that providing these funds not only helps them launch their career and get them set in the academic position they're in, but it also sends a message that we're very invested in their careers and want to provide them as much support as we can. I believe it also breeds gratitude and loyalty.

Having said that, these are among the brightest faculty, so other universities are going to compete with us and try to recruit them away. Sometimes we can't compete on a level of local funding with other private universities. Thus, the Boettcher Foundation Webb-Waring funds enable us to keep the best young faculty on our staff.

3. Are there aspects of the Boettcher Foundation Webb-Waring Biomedical Research Award Program that are unusual or unique compared to other granting efforts?

The emphasis on translational research. That means the idea, whether it be basic science research or clinical research, has to eventually translate into helping people – treating or preventing a disease or achieving better understanding of a disease. It must translate into some benefit to patients. That's a very wide spectrum of research.

Another unique aspect is how the Boettcher Foundation works collaboratively with the universities to develop the award criteria and the mechanism for the funding, and make improvements in the program each year.

There's enormous prestige associated with being a Boettcher Investigator. All of these individuals are all involved in teaching as well as performing research themselves. This is a special group of early stage investigators.

4. What kind of feedback have you received from the Boettcher Investigators over the years?

I receive numerous unsolicited testimonials from them, emphasizing how critical this support was, having the extra funds to get their research moving at a much more rapid pace or to expand the nature of their research so they're not limited in their approach. The opportunity to answer questions and obtain data early on in your research allows you to apply for much larger grants sooner that can sustain your research program.

One investigator said that this funding allowed him to hire an extra technician in his lab. That enabled him to perform an analysis and jump-start the pace of getting the work done which led to an important discovery – something he would have had to put off for several years.

5. Congratulations on your recent Career Teaching Scholar award from the Department of Pediatrics, acknowledging outstanding contributions to pediatric education. What lies on the horizon in this field today?

In pediatrics, we now realize that many adult diseases have their origins either prenatally while in the womb, or in the first few years of life. This is one of the exciting areas in pediatric research these days, how the underpinnings of high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, heart disease and other chronic ailments may start very, very early in life. Some call it fetal or childhood programming of adult diseases. The genetic and related reasons for these relationships are undergoing intense investigation. The challenge is, how can we predict and how can we intervene early in childhood to prevent these chronic illnesses that account for much of adult morbidity and mortality?

Workshops, networking draw capacity crowd for women's symposium at UCCS[4]

Staff Council in a questioning mood[5]

How do staff members use professional development opportunities? How are they paid for? What are the benefits the university provides and how would a staff member prioritize their importance? Are staff members content with their jobs and the benefits available to them?

These are a few of the questions that the University of Colorado Staff Council (UCSC) might include in a workplace survey it plans to roll out later this year. Council members want to better assess staff member wants and needs so that the council can better advocate for employees.

"The survey will be used to determine our agenda and goals and to help develop action items that can be forwarded to upper administration," said Denise Thomas, council chair.

Questions will be based on topics that include professional development, benefits and other issues, including the inconsistencies of policies and the way benefits are addressed across the campuses down to the departmental level. Council also wants to assess whether university and classified staff are aware of the benefits offered to them and whether employees are satisfied with what is available.

In other business:
Veronica Paradise, University of Colorado Denver Staff Council chair, asked UCSC to consider allowing professional research assistants (PRAs) to serve as voting members of UCSC. Only the CU Denver council allows PRAs to be members because the position carries a faculty classification, but PRAs are not represented as members on faculty governance organizations.
UCSC previously had discussed the possibility of allowing PRAs to be members but determined that the needs of staff members are so different from those of PRAs that the organization could not effectively advocate for PRAs. UCSC also was reluctant to changes its bylaws, which would be required to allow members other than university or classified staff on the council. UCSC members said that while they understand the frustration, PRAs should be represented by the appropriate governance body – Faculty Council.

Thomas said she has talked with John McDowell, chair of the Faculty Council, and others in administration and hopes the discussion will lead to a resolution of the issue.
Council heard the results of tabulations for the winners of the annual Service Excellence Awards, which honor outstanding volunteer service by university and classified staff to the university and to community, civic and professional organizations. Awardees – one person from each campus and system administration – will be honored during the All Staff Council Conference on April 8 in Colorado Springs. Each of the recipients will receive the award, a plaque commemorating the event and a $1,000 prize.

Dalai Lama reschedules visit to CU-Boulder for June 23[6]

Coleman Institute calling for conference proposals[7]

The Coleman Institute Conference on Cognitive Disability and Technology[8] is the only event of its kind in the field of cognitive disability, and is known for sharing contemporary knowledge of best practices in the field and cultivating relationships between public and private entities.

The open call for proposals for this year's event, set for Oct. 6 in Broomfield, has been extended through March 25.

The Coleman Institute has held 15 nationally recognized conferences. In 2015, over 750 attendees representing 38 states and eight countries registered for the annual conference. Attendees include self-advocates, family members, legislators, academics, students, service providers, engineers, software developers and industry leaders.

Successful proposals will demonstrate new and emerging technologies for use by people with cognitive disabilities and their families, present original research or synthesize research findings in cognitive disabilities, demonstrate innovative practices, and/or analyze public policies. Proposals will be competitively reviewed and not all proposals will be accepted due to the limited number of breakout presentation slots. The Coleman Institute may offer a presentation format different from that initially proposed by the author(s) (e.g., poster presentation instead of breakout presentation). Eligible parties to submit proposals include self-advocates, direct service professionals, provider or advocacy organizations, academics, students, profit and non-for-profit organizations.

For more information about topic areas, proposal guidelines and a direct link to the application, visit www.colemaninstitute.org/institute-annual-conferences/2016-conference[8].

Notices of acceptance will be sent out April 26. For more information, please contact the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities at www.colemaninstitute.org[9].

Diverse Learners Awareness Week set for April[10]

Recipients of a CU system Diversity and Excellence Grant[11] are planning the first in what they hope will become an annual series of activities spotlighting the different ways in which people learn.

CU-Boulder's Alaina Beaver, Office of Information Technology, and Jill Sieben-Schneider, Disability Services, are using the $3,000 grant for Diverse Learners Awareness Week[12], set for April 18-22. The lineup will include keynote speaker Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.[13], conference-like sessions and roundtables, film screenings, technology expo, interactive demonstrations, visual performances and more.

"We wanted to find an opportunity to celebrate everything the campus had been doing in regard to accessibility," Beaver said. "We felt a weeklong event would provide an excellent outreach opportunity for a variety of interested parties across the campus." The target audience will include the entire CU community and the general public.

Proposals may be submitted via the event website.[14]

"We hope to build on the chancellor's call for inclusive excellence[15]," Beaver said. "We also want to capitalize on the conversation in education at large about the increased focus on accessibility. There's a growing awareness among the IT community that accessibility is extremely important in higher education."

Valerie Ann Hamilton-Brodie of Disability Services also is part of the team leading the event.

"Another important thing to think about, as far as disability, is that it's a category you can come into at any point in life," Hamilton-Brodie said. "It's important that we not only look at it in terms of someone's identity, but how somebody enters it."

Organizers are seeking volunteers to help during the week, professionals and educators in the field who may want to present, and students who might showcase their scholarly work related to ways of diverse learning.

For more information, see the website: http://www.colorado.edu/accessibility/dlaw[16].

New endowed chair supports excellence in emergency medicine[17]

Chancellor seeks regent input for strategic plan revisions [18]

Ninth annual dinner honors generous donors [19]

Kang named vice chancellor for infrastructure and safety[20]

CU-Boulder announces four finalists for law dean[21]

In memoriam: Michael Hackman[22]

Kane wins prestigious Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellowship [23]

Save the date: Grant retirement celebration, April 29 [24]

CU in Focus: Price of Higher Education - cost contributors and financial assistance[25]

Todd Saliman, vice president and chief financial officer, CU System will provide insight to student financial assistance at the CU campuses, how tuition can be reduced relatively significantly based on income, need and merit. He will also take a close look at some of the factors contributing to rising costs at CU, such as the STEM disciplines. More details and registration, see CU Advocates[26] program.

Dog Sled Race Party[27]

Join us to celebrate Iditarod race day.

Watch the live start of the running of the Iditarod at noon
New this year – it's Family Fun Day, the CU Boulder Museum of Natural History will be on-site with dog and Alaska themed activities. Fiske Planetarium from CU Boulder will also be joining us with their portable planetarium
Get your picture taken with live wolves courtesy of Colorado Wolf Adventures
Meet dogs from all walks of life with North Star Husky Rescue, Centennial Schutzhund Club, Rocky Mountain Cocker Rescue and Paws4People
Make dog and race themed crafts
Learn about the Iditarod while visiting the different check-point stations and filling out the map for a prize

Scurry on over for this racey wildlife experience!

In partnership with the CU Museum of Natural History and the Starlab Planetarium, courtesy of Fiske Planetarium at the University of Colorado Boulder.

To respect the safety of our patrons and vendors we ask that you please keep your dogs at home.

More info: http://southdenver.cu.edu/events/event/iditarod/[28]

TRANSforming Gender Conference[29]

CU Boulder's Gender and Sexuality Center is pleased to announce the tenth annual TRANSforming Gender Conference, which will be held on the CU Boulder campus March 10-12, 2016.

The Conference is free and open to the public, and will be held at the CU-Boulder Center for Community. Organizers and co-sponsors are committed to addressing equality, support, visibility, and scholarship for transgender, gender non-conforming, and intersex people.

This year keynote speakers include Jennicet Gutiérrez, an advocate for undocumented transgender people; Cece McDonald, a national leader in the civil rights transgender movement; Tiq Milan, national spokesperson for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation; and Kim Milan, co-founder of The People Project, a movement to empower queer and trans people of color and allies.

In addition to our keynote speakers, the conference will feature presentations that highlight the experiences of transgender people of color, including a panel on queer and trans* people of color, legal resources for immigration and asylum, and sessions for educators and professors on inclusive teaching practices. Session presenters will also address topics such as transfeminism, being an ally to transgender people, and ways providers can be more trans- and intersex-inclusive.

At the conference, we will celebrate recent policy victories, such as the University of Colorado's recent addition of gender confirmation surgery to the University's health care insurance benefits. And we will honor the lives of the many transgender people we have lost through intimate partner and other forms of violence and discrimination.

Co-sponsors of the tenth Annual Transforming Gender Conference include The Open Door Fund, Out Boulder, First United Methodist Church, CU Faculty Council's LGBTI Committee, and the following departments at CU-Boulder: CU-Student Government, Office of Victim Assistance, Wardenburg Health Center, Art and Art History, Writing and Rhetoric, ATLAS, Theatre and Dance, Philosophy, School of Education, Center for Values and Social Policy, Residence Hall Association, Peace and Conflict Studies, Women's Resource Center, Cultural Unity and Engagement, Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Women, Chancellor's Advisory Committee on Gender and Sexuality, Anthropology, Sociology, Communication, Communication Graduate Student Association, Women and Gender

Studies, and the LGBTQ Studies Certificate program.

To register for the conference and view the full schedule, please visit http://www.colorado.edu/gsc/transforming-gender-conference-0[30]

In The 'Moonshot' Against Cancer, Where Does Colorado Stand?[31]

UCCS opens the doors to new Recreation and Wellness Center[32]

After review of campus space, CU-Boulder experimenting with new study spots[33]

Participant screening underway for free weight-loss program[34]

Interested in participating in a free weight-loss program?

The CU Anschutz Health and Wellness Center is seeking volunteers for a new weight-loss research study looking at the role of beef intake for weight loss and weight maintenance.

The study will last about six months. Participants will participate in a 16-week State of Slim weight-loss program free of charge and receive monetary stipends to be used to purchase State of Slim-friendly protein foods. Participants will receive body composition scans, lab work and wellness assessments at no charge and will have access to the Anschutz Health and Wellness Fitness Center during the study.

You may qualify for this weight-loss research study if you:
Are between 18-50 years old Are overweight or obese (BMI 27 or higher; check your BMI at http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm[35]) Are willing to participate in weekly group weight-loss classes for 16 weeks and attend four study visits over a six-month period at CU Anschutz Are not vegetarian Are not diabetic Are not allergic to red meat or other common protein sources
For more information, please call 303-724-9198 or email wellness.research@ucdenver.edu[36].

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-ron-sokol[2] http://www.cu.edu/bfww/all-cu-awardees-2010-2014[3] http://boettcherfoundation.org/webb-waring-biomedical-research/[4] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/workshops-networking-draw-capacity-crowd-women-s-symposium-uccs[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/staff-council-questioning-mood[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/dalai-lama-reschedules-visit-cu-boulder-june-23[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/coleman-institute-calling-conference-proposals[8] http://www.colemaninstitute.org/institute-annual-conferences/2016-conference[9] http://www.colemaninstitute.org/[10] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/diverse-learners-awareness-week-set-april[11]

http://www.cu.edu/office-academic-affairs/awards-grants/diversity-excellence-grants[12] https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.colorado.edu/accessibility/dlaw&sa=D&ust=1455561637086000&usg=AFQjCNGxkFlPkIv-jGCa7-VhUi4iNLzCIg[13] https://www.google.com/url?q=http://staff.washington.edu/sherylb/bio.html&sa=D&ust=1455561637088000&usg=AFQjCNEtXi9E1KqyyGA73bEQtjoBFRrOVQ[14] http://www.colorado.edu/accessibility/dlaw/get-involved[15] https://www.google.com/url?q=http://www.colorado.edu/studentsuccess/inclusive-excellence&sa=D&ust=1455561637086000&usg=AFQjCNHfmjM6_jY2Kd7W-WywQSUFSBG1JA[16] http://www.colorado.edu/accessibility/dlaw[17] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-endowed-chair-supports-excellence-emergency-medicine[18] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/chancellor-seeks-regent-input-strategic-plan-revisions[19] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/ninth-annual-dinner-honors-generous-donors[20] https://connections.cu.edu/people/kang-named-vice-chancellor-infrastructure-and-safety[21] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cu-boulder-announces-four-finalists-law-dean[22] https://connections.cu.edu/people/memoriam-michael-hackman[23] https://connections.cu.edu/people/kane-wins-prestigious-alfred-p-sloan-research-fellowship[24] https://connections.cu.edu/people/save-date-grant-retirement-celebration-april-29[25] https://connections.cu.edu/events/cu-focus-price-higher-education-cost-contributors-and-financial-assistance-1[26] http://www.cu.edu/cuadvocates/[27] https://connections.cu.edu/events/dog-sled-race-party[28] http://southdenver.cu.edu/events/event/iditarod/[29] https://connections.cu.edu/events/transforming-gender-conference[30] http://www.colorado.edu/gsc/transforming-gender-conference-0[31] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/moonshot-against-cancer-where-does-colorado-stand[32] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/uccs-opens-doors-new-recreation-and-wellness-center[33] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/after-review-campus-space-cu-boulder-experimenting-new-study-spots[34] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/participant-screening-underway-free-weight-loss-program[35] http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm[36] mailto:wellness.research@ucdenver.edu