CU ROTC programs commission next generation of military leaders[1]
[2]

The University of Colorado Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program recently hosted commissioning ceremonies to officially appoint 53 CU ROTC cadets and midshipmen as military officers.

The ceremonies celebrated years of academic coursework, intensive military training, leadership growth and personal dedication as graduates swore the oath of office and launched careers in the armed forces.

CU remains the only university in Colorado to host ROTC programs representing the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force, continuing a longstanding tradition of preparing future military leaders through higher education and service.

Although CU Boulder is the host campus, its ROTC detachments draw students from institutions across the region, including two other CU campuses – CU Denver and UCCS – as well as Metropolitan State University of Denver, Colorado School of Mines and others through formal crosstown agreements[3]. While they complete their academic degrees at their home campuses, students attend military coursework, leadership labs and training activities in Boulder.

Read more: Forging future leaders through service[4]

Air Force ROTC Detachment 105

The Air Force ROTC Detachment 105 commissioned 30 second lieutenants this year, continuing its reputation as one of the nation's largest and most distinguished Air Force ROTC programs.

U.S. Air Force Col. Rebecca Lange, Detachment 105 commander and professor of aerospace studies at CU Boulder, described this year's class as representing determination, development and readiness.

"Their tremendous growth as humans and professionals stands out, especially considering many of them came in during the pandemic," Lange said. "ROTC is a leadership development program, and we get to watch them transform from college students into leaders our nation can count on."

U.S. Space Force Maj. Eric Skrla, the class's senior-year instructor, said the cadets stood out for their camaraderie and willingness to grow through adversity and accountability.

"They became not just a class but a close-knit family, something I feel will serve them quite well on active duty," Skrla said. The ROTC experience at CU prepares cadets for leadership by placing them in real-world leadership roles where they are challenged to adapt, recover from mistakes and lead under pressure.

"We challenge them to redefine what they think they are capable of and, most importantly, we take away the safety rails," Skrla said. "Seeing how you react to failure and then recover from it in a controllable environment is an incredibly important and valuable learning opportunity that is rare to get at this, or any, stage of life."

For the cadre, the commissioning ceremony symbolizes far more than graduation for the cadets.

"To us, the commissioning ceremony represents their transformation from college students into leaders that our nation can count on," Lange said. "It means that four years of early mornings, the equivalent of an additional part-time job on top of everything else, and their commitment to one another was worth it."

Watch: CU ROTC Cadre Video Feature[5]

Army ROTC Golden Buffalo Battalion

The Army ROTC Golden Buffalo Battalion commissioned 11 cadets this spring.

U.S. Army Maj. Matt Chase, professor of military science and department chair, said this year's class excelled through resilience and adaptability.

"Their eagerness to improve in the face of uncertainty and adversity has helped set the class of 2026 apart from other classes I have seen," Chase said.

Throughout their ROTC experience, cadets balanced rigorous academic demands alongside military science coursework, leadership labs, physical training and field exercises.

"To achieve the balance of these sometimes-competing priorities, the cadets have had to display character, time management ability, communication skills, resilience, intellect and a myriad of other attributes and competencies," Chase said.

Chase hopes the newly commissioned officers will drive positive change within their units and communities.

"Commissioning represents an incredible commitment to service when they take the oath of the commissioned officer, displaying a willingness to serve the nation," he said.

Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps

The Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps (NROTC) unit commissioned 12 officers this year, including seven second lieutenants in the U.S. Marine Corps and five ensigns in the U.S. Navy.

According to Marine Officer Instructor and U.S. Marine Corps Capt. Brendan MacVarish, this year's class was unique because of its unusually small size and outsized leadership role within the battalion.

"This year's commissioning class had a large amount of leadership and responsibility to be the seniors for such large classes below them," MacVarish said. "They have certainly left their mark on our NROTC unit, and their impact and influence will be strongly felt for the years to come."

As the newly commissioned officers begin assignments around the world, MacVarish said he hopes they remain committed to serving others.

"So long as they continue to commit themselves to the servant-leader mindset, their impact will be a lasting one," he said.

As this year's commissioned officers embark on their military careers worldwide, they depart CU with not only degrees and rank but also the skills and values gained through sustained leadership training, academic challenge and service.

CU's ROTC programs empower graduates to lead with integrity and resilience, committed to serving country and community.

For more information on CU ROTC Programs, click below:

CU Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps[6]

CU Army ROTC Golden Buffalo Battalion[7]

CU Air Force ROTC Detachment 105[8]

Three CU community members honored with Thomas Jefferson Awards[9]

The University of Colorado has announced three recipients of the 2026 Thomas Jefferson Awards, one of the university's highest honors. The award recognizes members of the CU community who exemplify the ideals of Thomas Jefferson, including a commitment to educational excellence, broad interests, civic responsibility and the welfare of individuals.

This year's honorees are:

Lilia Cervantes, M.D., Director of Immigrant Research and Professor in the Department of Medicine at CU Anschutz

Art Figel, Director of Student IT Services at CU system administration

Hei-Yong Lo, Physician in the CU Medical Scientist Training Program at CU Anschutz

The 2026 Thomas Jefferson Award[10] recipients were celebrated at two receptions recognizing their extraordinary contributions to CU and the broader community. Figel was honored April 29 at 1800 Grant St., where colleagues and university leaders gathered to recognize his decades of service and civic leadership. Cervantes and Lo were honored May 1 at CU Anschutz, celebrating their transformative work in advancing health equity, scholarship and compassionate care.

Learn more about the honorees:

Lilia Cervantes

Lilia "Lily" Cervantes, M.D., is a nationally recognized physician-scientist, educator and advocate whose work has transformed health care policy and access for some of the nation's most vulnerable populations. A tenured professor at the University of Colorado School of Medicine at CU Anschutz, she has dedicated her career to reducing health disparities through rigorous research, compassionate clinical care and bold civic leadership. Her work exemplifies the highest ideals of the Thomas Jefferson Award – uniting intellectual excellence with a profound commitment to the welfare and dignity of individuals.

Driven by firsthand experiences caring for undocumented patients facing life-threatening barriers to care, Cervantes launched a groundbreaking body of research that documented the human and systemic consequences of unjust health policies. Her work directly led to a landmark change in Colorado Medicaid policy, expanding access to life-sustaining dialysis for undocumented immigrants – a reform that has saved lives, reduced suffering and lowered costs. This model has since influenced policy changes in multiple states and informed national conversations on access to care for undocumented immigrants. Beyond kidney care, she has led efforts to expand access to peritoneal dialysis, treatment of chronic conditions and other essential services, consistently translating evidence into meaningful, large-scale policy change.

Equally consequential is Cervantes' commitment to education, mentorship and community partnership. She has founded and led innovative pipeline programs to increase diversity in the health professions, mentored a generation of physician-advocates and elevated the voices of marginalized communities in shaping research and policy. Her leadership bridges medicine, public health and civic engagement, demonstrating how scholarship can drive systemic change while remaining grounded in compassion and human dignity.

Through her visionary leadership, unwavering moral clarity and sustained dedication to justice, Cervantes has reshaped systems of care and expanded opportunities for countless individuals and families. Her work stands as a powerful example of how one individual, guided by purpose and principle, can advance the public good and transform lives.

Art Figel

For more than three decades, Art Figel has exemplified the ideals of the Thomas Jefferson Award through his leadership in higher education, sustained civic engagement and deep commitment to the welfare and rights of individuals. As Director of Student IT Services for the CU system, Figel has played a key role in strengthening student-facing technology across the university, helping ensure that more than 67,000 students across CU's four campuses benefit from accessible, reliable and student-centered systems. His leadership has strengthened systemwide student IT services, modernized enterprise student systems and advanced equitable access to educational resources in direct support of student success.

Beyond his professional responsibilities, Figel has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to public service and community leadership. He has been actively involved in initiatives that foster cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, including service with community-based organizations and advisory bodies focused on equity, inclusion and opportunity, such as the Boulder Asian Pacific Alliance, the Center for Diverse Communities, Boulder County Community Action Programs and the city of Boulder's Human Relations Commission. He currently serves as chair of the board of Motus Theater, where he supports community dialogue, civic engagement and systems-level change through storytelling, arts-based collaboration and advocacy. Through his civic and nonprofit work, he has helped elevate underrepresented voices, strengthen community connections and support meaningful participation in public life.

Figel's work reflects an integration of intellectual rigor, compassion and principled leadership. Whether supporting students through institutional systems, contributing to community organizations or advancing inclusive practices, his efforts consistently reflect a commitment to the public good. His lifelong dedication to higher education, civic engagement and human dignity embodies the Jeffersonian ideals this award honors.

Hei-Yong Lo

Hei-Yong (Grant) Lo is an exceptional physician-scientist in training whose work bridges scientific discovery, humanistic medicine and community leadership. As a CU Anschutz student in the School of Medicine's Medical Scientist Training Program, he has distinguished himself through academic excellence, innovative research and a deeply reflective approach to patient care. His unique integration of the arts and sciences exemplifies the Jeffersonian ideal of intellectual breadth in service to humanity.

Lo's scholarly contributions span biomedical research and the humanities. A prolific researcher with multiple high-impact publications, he has developed novel techniques to study RNA localization while also mentoring students and contributing to graduate education. He also is an accomplished writer and poet, using narrative and reflection to explore the emotional and ethical dimensions of medicine. His work – including his poetry collection "My patients raised me" – has helped faculty and peers better understand the lived experiences of patients and the formation of compassionate physicians.

His leadership and service have had a lasting impact on the university community. Lo founded and led efforts to integrate the M.D./Ph.D. curriculum with the School of Medicine's Trek Curriculum, mentored numerous trainees and organized collaborative academic forums that strengthened interdisciplinary learning. He also has advanced initiatives to foster inclusion and support within academic environments, reflecting a strong commitment to civic responsibility and the advancement of higher education.

Equally notable is Lo's profound dedication to the welfare and dignity of individuals. In clinical settings, he is recognized for his compassion, respect for patient autonomy and ability to connect deeply with patients and families. His work co-founding the "Connecting Our Patient Experiences" initiative further demonstrates his commitment to addressing the emotional needs of patients facing serious diagnoses. Through his scholarship, service and humanistic care, Lo embodies the values of empathy, curiosity and public purpose that define the Thomas Jefferson Award.

The Thomas Jefferson Award[10] is presented annually across the CU system to faculty, staff and/or students whose achievements embody Jefferson's ideals and contribute to the advancement of higher education and society. Award

winners – who are selected by a committee of CU faculty, staff and students – receive an engraved plaque and a $2,000 honorarium.

The next deadline for nomination submissions is Jan. 15, 2027. Please visit https://www.cu.edu/oaa/recognitions/thomas-jefferson-award[10] for award details.

Questions? Please contact academicaffairs@cu.edu[11].

Five CU faculty join ranks of President's Teaching Scholars[12]

The University of Colorado has added five new members of the President's Teaching Scholars Program[13] (PTSP), which recognizes CU faculty who skillfully integrate teaching and research at an exceptional level.

The title of President's Teaching Scholar honors excellence in and commitment to learning and teaching, as well as active, substantial contributions to scholarly work. President Todd Saliman solicits annual nominations of faculty across the four campuses for the designation, which is a lifetime appointment.

The 2026 President's Teaching Scholar designees are:
Laith Al-Shawaf, Ph.D., professor, Department of Psychology, University of Colorado Colorado Springs **Frederic Bloom,** J.D., professor, Colorado Law, University of Colorado Boulder **Jeffrey Nytch,** D.M.A., professor, College of Music, University of Colorado Boulder **Jennifer Reich,** Ph.D., professor, Department of Sociology, University of Colorado Denver **Jennifer Trujillo,** PharmD., professor and associate dean for education, Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Colorado Anschutz
Learn more about this year's designees:

Laith Al-Shawaf is a professor and co-director of undergraduate education in the Department of Psychology at UCCS. He is an internationally recognized scholar in evolutionary psychology and emotion science, noted for his ability to integrate high-level research with innovative teaching practices.

He received the UCCS campus-wide Students' Choice Educator of the Year Award (2022) and the UCCS College of Letters, Arts and Sciences Outstanding Teacher Award for online teaching (2023). His teaching approach emphasizes critical inquiry, the philosophy of science, and the connection between psychology and other disciplines such as biology and anthropology. He utilizes a variety of methods – including lectures, demonstrations and class experiments – to engage students in both online and in-person formats.

Al-Shawaf is dedicated to inclusive teaching, drawing on his background as a Lebanese immigrant to create a welcoming environment for students from diverse backgrounds. He has authored 61 peer-reviewed articles, 12 book chapters, and co-edited "The Oxford Handbook of Evolution and the Emotions" (2024). He is the recipient of numerous research honors, including the Human Behavior and Evolution Society (HBES) Early Career Award (2024) and the HBES Fellow Award (2025).

Frederic Bloom is a professor of law at the University of Colorado Law School who instructs foundational and complex legal courses, including Civil Procedure, Evidence and Federal Courts. His pedagogical approach relies on a "soft Socratic" dialogue: He assigns individual students to specialize in specific evidentiary rules or legal doctrines, fostering a sustained, semester-long conversation that encourages peer-to-peer learning. To ensure the practical relevance of these historically dense subjects, Bloom authors his own comprehensive course materials and actively researches the real-world contexts of canonical cases, which includes traveling to the original sites of legal disputes and interviewing the individuals involved.

His instructional methods emphasize accessibility and critical thinking, and he regularly provides student feedback

through open office hours, voluntary midterms and individualized assignment reviews. Through this methodical approach to course design, he maintains consistently high student evaluations and has been recognized with the law school's Teacher of the Year award numerous times during his tenure.

Bloom's scholarship primarily focuses on the structure, jurisdiction and methodology of the federal courts, yielding publications in prominent academic journals such as the Stanford Law Review, Michigan Law Review and University of Chicago Law Review. He has also authored and co-authored casebooks and teacher manuals for Civil Procedure and Evidence. Within the university setting, his service contributions include multiple terms as the associate dean for faculty affairs and research, extensive work on the campus-wide Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee evaluating tenure and promotion cases, and serving as the long-time faculty adviser for the Colorado Law Review.

Jeffrey Nytch is a professor of composition and entrepreneurship at the CU Boulder College of Music. He is recognized as a pioneering national thought leader in arts entrepreneurship education.

Throughout his 16-year tenure as director of the Entrepreneurship Center for Music, he fundamentally transformed how music students prepare for their careers, most notably by developing an innovative Certificate in Music Entrepreneurship in partnership with the Leeds School of Business. His pedagogy is highly engaging and empathetic, utilizing active learning, interactive "games" and a dynamic presentation style that students praise for making dry topics – like taxes for freelancers – deeply relevant and accessible.

An accomplished composer whose works have been performed at major venues such as Carnegie Hall, Nytch successfully models a dual-career trajectory, passing his real-world expertise to his students through unparalleled mentorship that has led to numerous student-launched businesses and New Venture Challenge victories. His teaching has been recognized with the 2025 Frank Moyes Award for Entrepreneurship Education and the 2020 Sharon T. Alpi Award for Innovative Pedagogy. Letters from students and faculty describe him as an adaptable, profoundly impactful educator with an exemplary record of service and continuous and ongoing pedagogical growth.

Jennifer Reich is a professor of sociology and the director of the University Honors and Leadership (UHL) Program at CU Denver. She is an internationally recognized scholar known for her award-winning research on gender, families and vaccine hesitancy, which has made her a highly sought-after public intellectual.

As an educator, Reich exhibits superlative classroom engagement and a commitment to intellectual rigor. Her pedagogy is deeply student-centered: She integrates high-impact practices and active learning into her curricula, skillfully translating her rigorous qualitative research methods into accessible, empowering lessons for her students. Whether teaching advanced graduate seminars or introductory honors courses, she is celebrated for her ability to foster an environment of intellectual excitement and discovery, demanding excellence while consistently meeting diverse students where they are.

Beyond the classroom, Reich's qualifications are distinguished by her transformative programmatic leadership and unparalleled dedication to mentorship. Recognizing that honors programs can often be elitist, she radically overhauled the UHL program to prioritize accessibility and inclusion, creating the highly successful Honors Scholars Program and expanding pathways for transfer, working and first-generation students.

Her deep commitment to student and faculty success is further evidenced by her receiving the 2023 Feminist Mentoring Award from Sociologists for Women in Society, reflecting her tireless support of scholars at all career stages across the country. By combining academic excellence with an anti-oppressive pedagogy and a profound dedication to equity, Reich consistently empowers marginalized students and colleagues alike.

Jennifer Trujillo is professor and associate dean for education at the University of Colorado Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. A highly distinguished educator, she is recognized for her outstanding classroom engagement and student-centered pedagogy.

She intentionally designs her courses using active learning and high-impact practices, such as incorporating “choose your own adventure” math modules and having students use and interpret continuous glucose monitors to experience the realities of diabetes management.

Trujillo’s transformative educational leadership extends well beyond the classroom. She has spearheaded comprehensive curriculum redesigns to reduce cognitive overload, successfully launched a remote Doctor of Pharmacy pathway, championed generative AI integration and trained faculty on implementing inclusive, equity-minded patient case designs.

Beyond her instructional design, Trujillo possesses a profound commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning and unmatched dedication to mentorship. She has mentored dozens of students, pharmacy residents and junior faculty members, empowering them to pursue academic careers, publish research and assume leadership roles.

Her sustained excellence is reflected in consistently outstanding teaching evaluations and numerous accolades, including the 2024 Excellence in Teaching Award, the 2023 Faculty Member of Distinction Award and her 2025 appointment as a Senior Fellow in the Academy of Medical Educators.

Time and Labor go-live date moving to Feb. 28, 2027[14]

The University of Colorado Time and Labor project[15] is moving to a new go-live date of Feb. 28, 2027, providing additional time to ensure a smooth and successful transition for all employees.

The adjustment reflects a commitment to delivering a stable, fully integrated solution for CU employees and acknowledges the scale and complexity of the work underway. The additional time will support thorough system testing, improved coordination across project activities and campuses, and stronger overall readiness.

“I appreciate the teams across CU who raised the need for additional time and have remained focused on delivering a solution that will serve our employees well,” said Lisa Landis, associate vice president of Employee Services. “Their work and commitment are critical to ensuring we launch with a system that is stable, effective and ready to support our campuses from day one.”

What this means for you
The Time and Labor system will now go live Feb. 28, 2027. The new biweekly payday schedule for nonexempt employees will begin Feb. 28, 2027. Current timekeeping and payroll processes remain the same until go-live. Additional training, resources and reminders will be shared ahead of the transition.

In alignment with this change, the payday schedule update for nonexempt employees will also shift to coincide with the Feb. 28 go-live.

Additional resources and timelines about the transition can be found on the Payday Schedule Change webpage[16].

Where Boulder meets CU: A legacy of connection inspires new $5M civic impact initiative [17]

New certificate aims to strengthen early childhood workforce [18]

Engineering what it means to breathe: CU Denver's living lung model is changing the future of care [19]

CU Anschutz School of Medicine introduces three-year M.D. program to address cost, physician shortages[20]

Federal update: NSF and NSB leadership, more[21]

From May 8, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on NSF and NSB Leadership, USCIS Physician Vetting Guidance, DOJ Lawsuit on In-State Tuition for Undocumented Students, and DOJ UCLA Title VI Violation.

Click here to read the post.[22]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[23] page.

CU Connections shifting to summer publication schedule[24]

CU Connections will begin its summer schedule after the May 28 issue, shifting to biweekly publication.

New issues are scheduled for publication on the following dates (subject to change):
June 11 June 25 July 9 July 23 Aug. 6
Weekly publication will resume with the Aug. 20 issue.

Throughout the season, the site will be updated with news should events warrant.

If you have a news item or story suggestion you'd like to pass along, please send to connections@cu.edu[25]. To be considered for publication, submissions are due by noon Friday prior to the following week's issue.

Bloom named chair of Computer Science Department [26]

Walensky to keynote ColoradoSPH 2026 Convocation Ceremony [27]

CU Boulder announces inaugural Community Belonging Award recipients [28]

NASA to back CU Boulder MiniMag project that will revolutionize magnetic field measurement in space[29]

I’m a neurologist. Here are 6 ways to keep work stress from fueling headaches.[30]

What’s going on with mixed signals from the economy? These experts say there is a deeper undercurrent of struggle and debt[31]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/cu-rotc-programs-commission-next-generation-military-leaders[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/air_force_oath_photo_1_crop_05-14-2026.jpg[3] https://www.colorado.edu/afrotc/crosstown-universities[4] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/forging-future-leaders-through-service[5] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnq-iu0lYx4[6] https://www.colorado.edu/nrotc/[7] https://www.colorado.edu/arotc/[8] https://www.colorado.edu/afrotc/[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/three-cu-community-members-honored-thomas-jefferson-awards[10] https://www.cu.edu/oaa/recognitions/thomas-jefferson-award[11] mailto:academicaffairs@cu.edu[12] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/five-cu-faculty-join-ranks-president-s-teaching-scholars[13] https://www.cu.edu/ptsp[14] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/time-and-labor-go-live-date-moving-feb-28-2027[15] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/time-labor[16] https://www.cu.edu/employee-services/time-labor/payday-schedule-change-nonexempt-employees[17] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/where-boulder-meets-cu-legacy-connection-inspires-new-5m-civic-impact-initiative[18] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-certificate-aims-strengthen-early-childhood-workforce[19] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/engineering-what-it-means-breathe-cu-denver-s-living-lung-model-changing-future-care[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-anschutz-school-medicine-introduces-three-year-md-program-address-cost-physician[21] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-nsf-and-nsb-leadership-more[22] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-5826[23] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[24] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-connections-shifting-summer-publication-schedule-1[25] mailto:connections@cu.edu[26] https://connections.cu.edu/people/bloom-named-chair-computer-science-department[27] https://connections.cu.edu/people/walensky-keynote-coloradosph-2026-convocation-ceremony[28] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cu-boulder-announces-inaugural-community-belonging-award-recipients[29] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/nasa-back-cu-boulder-minimag-project-will-revolutionize-magnetic-field-measurement-space[30] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/i-m-neurologist-here-are-6-ways-keep-work-stress-fueling-headaches[31] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/what-s-going-mixed-signals-economy-these-experts-say-there-deeper-undercurrent-struggle-and-debt