Video: UCCS student finds healing through theater and service[1]

At the University of Colorado Colorado Springs, student Jean Cook has found purpose through theater, music and collaboration, using the performing arts to foster resilience, healing and community.

Inspired by Colorado's culture, Cook says UCCS gave her the opportunity to grow as an artist and as a person[2] while pursuing work centered around empathy and community.

Beyond the stage, Cook continues to perform music with her mother while encouraging others to pursue creativity and overcome challenges through the arts.

Watch the video (above) to see how Cook is using performance, service and community to inspire others.

New awards recognize innovative AI use by CU faculty[3]
[4]

Avatars that engage medical students in on-demand opportunities to practice screening patients for depression or delivering difficult diagnoses. Scalable and scientifically accurate infrastructures that simulate varying climates or predict the weather. Immersive environments that offer hands-on workforce training for the next generation of cybersecurity experts.

These are just a handful of the innovative ways CU faculty systemwide are incorporating artificial intelligence into their classrooms and in their creative and scholarly work. They were among 21 projects honored at the inaugural President's AI Recognition Awards held May 5 in CU Denver's Student Commons Building. The newly minted annual awards were given to faculty for their work in two categories: Teaching & Learning[5], and Scholarly & Creative Work [6].

"I've wanted to find a way to recognize and build community around our faculty's innovative use of AI across our campuses for a while now," President Todd Saliman told faculty at the event. "I appreciate the depth, rigor and scholarly approach each of you has taken, all of which reinforce the contributions AI can bring to CU's academic enterprise when used well."

After congratulating faculty on their work, Saliman learned more about the projects during a poster session at the event.

Finalists for the 2026 AI Recognition Awards in each of the two categories were selected by separate advisory committees consisting of scholars from all four campuses. After reviewing proposals, the committees submitted their recommendations to the president, who then selected the award winners. Eligible nominees for the scholarly and creative work category include full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty and full-time research professor track faculty. Eligible nominees for the teaching and learning category include tenured and tenure-track faculty and full-time instructional track faculty. This year's award recipients received a one-time honorarium of $4,000. The 2027 call for nominations will be announced in the fall.

See below for the list of winners of the 2026 AI Recognition Awards. To learn more about the awards, visit the Office of Academic Affairs website[7].

Teaching & Learning Awards[5]

CU Boulder
Bobby Hodgkinson, M.S., Smead Aerospace Engineering
Nesrine Mansour, Ph.D., Environmental Design

Teresa Nugent, Ph.D., English
Diane Sieber, Ph.D., Herbst Program of Engineering, Ethics & Society

UCCS
Kristen Walcott, Ph.D., Computer Science
Dayna Herbert Walker, Ph.D., College of Business

CU Denver
Zhengxiong Li, Ph.D., Computer Science and Engineering
Robyn Mobbs, Ph.D., School of Public Affairs

CU Anschutz
Clint Carlson, M.S., Psychiatry Chaitanya Puranik, Ph.D., MDS, Pediatric Dentistry

Scholarly & Creative Work Awards[6]

CU Boulder
William Chapman, Ph.D., Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences Kai Larsen, Ph.D., Leeds School of Business
Esther Rolf, Ph.D., Computer Science
Keith Ulmer, Ph.D., Physics

UCCS
Byeong Kil Lee, Ph.D., Electrical and Computer Engineering

CU Denver
Ersin Dincelli, Ph.D., School of Business
Zhengxiong Li, Ph.D., Computer Science and Engineering

CU Anschutz
Aimee Gardner, Ph.D., Surgery
Arjun Krishnan, Ph.D., Biomedical Informatics
Shyam Raghavan, M.D., Pathology
Fuyong Xing, Ph.D., Biostatistics and Informatics

UCCS, CU Denver celebrate spring commencements[8]

UCCS and CU Denver celebrated their spring commencement ceremonies this past weekend.

UCCS on Friday conferred over 1,300 degrees to students from the Class of 2026 during ceremonies at the Broadmoor World Arena.

On Saturday, more than 2,200 spring graduates received their degrees at CU Denver's spring commencement.

Learn more in UCCS News[9] and CU Denver News[10].

End of legislative session brings budget clarity, success for two CU-led bills[11]

Colorado's recently ended legislative session brought certainty for the state's 2026-27 budget and its impact on CU

and other higher education institutions across the state.

The Jan. 14-May 13 session also saw the successful passage of two key CU-led bills: One will expand concurrent enrollment opportunities for high school students, while the other updates higher education statutes to achieve greater efficiencies.

In a difficult budget year, state leaders approved continued investment in higher education, providing funding that continues to cover core costs for public institutions. Lawmakers restored the mid-year operating cut of $9.5 million for higher education in the 2025-26 fiscal year; CU receives $2.6 million of that. The state limited tuition increases to 3.5%, which informed CU's rates approved[12] by the Board of Regents.

The budget also includes $135.4 million in funding statewide for capital construction and IT projects at higher education institutions. Of this amount, $19.1 million will go toward eight controlled maintenance projects across all CU campuses and the Auraria Campus.

Throughout the session, CU's State Government Relations team and the Budget and Finance Office engaged with state leaders and lobbied on several budget and legislative issues of impact to CU. CU led two key bills, passed by the legislature and awaiting the governor's signature.

House Bill 26-1078[13] expands concurrent enrollment by allowing four-year institutions to offer courses directly on high school campuses, rather than limiting them to college campuses. By removing this barrier, it significantly increases access and equity for students, especially those who may not be able to travel, ensuring more students statewide can participate in and benefit from concurrent enrollment opportunities.

The existing location-based barrier had limited student access, especially in rural and underserved areas where four-year institutions may be the only viable provider.

Ahead of the 2026 session, the State Relations team worked extensively with key stakeholders – including the Colorado Community College System, Colorado Department of Higher Education, Colorado Department of Education and Colorado Commission on Higher Education – to build support for the legislation. As the bill advanced, the team continued stakeholder engagement, secured amendments in both chambers and worked to fund the fiscal note for CDE through CU's own budget to help ensure passage during a difficult budget year. The legislation ultimately passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both chambers and no opposition.

Senate Bill 26-078[14] achieves greater efficiencies for CU and other institutions of higher education. This common-sense update to higher education statutes will modernize outdated thresholds and improve transparency. It empowers institutions to operate more efficiently while maintaining appropriate legislative oversight and protecting students from new costs. The legislation strengthens data collaboration and access to better support student success in enrollment, retention and graduation.

The bill makes a series of updates to statutes governing state institutions of higher education, including provisions related to fiscal impact information for legislative measures, definitions for electric and plumbing work, data policies and coordination, capital construction review processes, and bond requirements and procedures for CU.

Throughout the legislative process, the bill was amended in both chambers in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Higher Education, the Auraria Higher Education Center and the Governor's Office to address stakeholder feedback and operational concerns. Government Relations worked closely with partners to negotiate the final language and maintain support for the bill's key provisions.

For a full list of bills and information on those tracked by CU this past session, click here.[15]

Join CU at Denver Pride Parade[16]

The University of Colorado system office invites CU community members to join in walking as part of the 2026 Vizzy Denver Pride Parade[17], set for June 28.

President Todd Saliman, members of the Board of Regents, representatives from all four campuses and other members of the CU community throughout Colorado are scheduled to take part in the event.

To sign up to march with the CU delegation, please click here[18] or use the following link: https://forms.gle/5amU28Ef4KJ9HH996[18].

If you are planning to bring a guest, please make sure to register them during your sign-up.

Spots are limited and available on a first-come, first-serve basis, so sign up early. Registrants confirmed to march in the parade will receive a confirmation email before the event.

Questions: Nigel Daniels, nigel.daniels@cu.edu[19].

‘Super El Niño’ coming? Climate scientists weigh in [20]

Cybersecurity camps bring interactive summer experiences for middle school students [21]

CU Denver, Littleton Public Schools announce direct admissions pathway for students [22]

Inside a CU Anschutz clinical trial for a new oral GLP-1 weight loss drug [23]

Federal update: NSB Science and Engineering report, more[24]

From May 15, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on the NSB Science and Engineering Report, Humanities Grant Terminations Ruling, ED Lawsuit Dismissal Denial, NSF Suspension of Grants at UC Berkeley, DOJ Yale Medical School Violation Announcement and FDA Commissioner Resignation.

Click here to read the post.[25]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[26] page.

President Saliman named official starter of Monday’s BOLDERBoulder[27]

President Todd Saliman will serve as the Official Starter for the 2026 BOLDERBoulder on Monday, Memorial Day, the race announced last week.

As Official Starter, Saliman will welcome participants to the start line and fire the starter's pistol 96 times, sending each wave off with their own ceremonial playing of the "Call to the Post." More than 50,000 runners and walkers are expected to participate in this year's 10K race, which finishes inside CU Boulder's Folsom Field and culminates with the annual Memorial Day Tribute.

"I'm excited and honored to serve as the Official Starter for the BOLDERBoulder this year," Saliman said. "My family and I have participated in this longstanding Colorado tradition numerous times, and being part of the race this year is particularly meaningful as it coincides with the 150th anniversaries of our great state and the University of Colorado. CU is proud to be part of the unique BOLDERBoulder experience year after year."

Since 1981, the partnership between the BOLDERBoulder and the University of Colorado has become one of the defining elements of the event. Over 1.5 million finishers have experienced the race's iconic finish inside Folsom Field beneath the Flatirons.

"Todd Saliman has been an incredible partner and advocate for both the University of Colorado and the Boulder community," said Cliff Bosley, BOLDERBoulder race director. "The relationship between the BOLDERBoulder and CU Boulder has helped create an experience unlike any other road race in the world, and we are honored to have President Saliman serve as this year's Official Starter."

The BOLDERBoulder annually attracts participants from all 50 states and over two dozen countries and has been named "America's All-Time Best 10K" by Runner's World. In 2025, the race was the third-largest running event in the United States and the largest 10K in the world. For more information, visit www.bolderboulder.com[28].

Schrader honored with Faculty Council Distinguished Service Award[29]
[30]

Jeffrey Schrader, Ph.D., last week was honored with Faculty Council's annual Distinguished Service Award.

Schrader[31] received the award from Faculty Council Chair Jorge Chavez during the governance group's final meeting of the academic year, May 14 at 1800 Grant St.

The Faculty Council[32] Distinguished Service Award recognizes contributions to CU faculty through participation in faculty governance, particularly through activities in Faculty Council and its committees.

"Faculty Council leads to teamwork," Schrader said. "It's valuable to join colleagues pooling knowledge and skills to formulate strategies for the governance of the university. The expertise from the four campuses and the CU system office produces thoughtful conversations and solutions."

Schrader, associate professor of art history in CU Denver's College of Arts & Media, chaired the council's Personnel and Benefits Committee 2022-25.

"My experiences in Faculty Council have been informed by watching the other members during meetings," Schrader said. "Their instructive remarks have guided my time in Faculty Council's Personnel and Benefits Committee.

"Moreover, the committees on Faculty Council[33] encompass a range of activities. The members bring insights from different campuses and backgrounds, thereby yielding productive outcomes across the University of Colorado system."

Schrader is a past recipient of the CU Denver Faculty Assembly Award (2023-2024), as well as awards for excellence in service (2024) and teaching (2022) for tenured and tenure-track faculty in the College of Arts & Media.

Celebrating Hanenberg's legacy of service to UCCS[34]

CU Boulder sees 11th startup reach $1 billion unicorn status [35]

Why fireflies shine their lights at the same time – and why it might lead to new technologies [36]

How wildfires can build healthier forests (with UCCS associate professor Christine Biermann)[37]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/video-uccs-student-finds-healing-through-theater-and-service[2] https://lovecolorado.com/stories/i-love-people-here-are-artsy-accepting-unique[3] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-awards-recognize-innovative-ai-use-cu-faculty[4] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/ai-recognition-awards1_group_05-21-2026.jpg[5] https://www.cu.edu/oaa/cu-system-ai-recognition-award-ai-teaching-and-learning[6] https://www.cu.edu/oaa/cu-system-ai-recognition-award-ai-scholarly-and-creative-work[7] https://www.cu.edu/oaa/recognitions[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-cu-denver-celebrate-spring-commencements[9] https://news.uccs.edu/2026/05/15/uccs-celebrates-spring-class-of-2026/[10] https://news.ucdenver.edu/in-photos-spring-graduates-celebrate-meeting-their-moment-at-commencement/[11] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/end-legislative-session-brings-budget-clarity-success-two-cu-led-bills[12] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/regents-vote-approve-tuition-fee-and-compensation-adjustments[13] https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/HB26-1078[14] https://leg.colorado.gov/bills/SB26-078[15] https://fastdemocracy.com/shared-bills/?sharing-bill-list-id=wjcHe0Zd4r2L&data=05%7C02%7CRebecca.Massey@cu.edu%7Ce93735bbe17f4892f56008deb0464050%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C639142012935023358%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ==%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=IWxeOQGA9jR98OS8MtNn6XfHlE7q+86swsDb7BKK91o=&reserved=0[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/join-cu-denver-pride-parade[17] https://denverpride.org/events/vizzy-denver-pride-parade/[18] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeSB4NtfvPnOkQKqPxHj9arkkZg6cYFsWQouWSCKV85rNBCEg/viewform[19] mailto:nigel.daniels@cu.edu[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/super-el-ni-o-coming-climate-scientists-weigh[21] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cybersecurity-camps-bring-interactive-summer-experiences-middle-school-students[22] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-denver-littleton-public-schools-announce-direct-admissions-pathway-students[23] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/inside-cu-anschutz-clinical-trial-new-oral-glp-1-weight-loss-drug[24] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-nsb-science-and-engineering-report-more[25] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-51526[26] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[27] https://connections.cu.edu/people/president-saliman-named-official-starter-monday-s-bolderboulder[28] http://www.bolderboulder.com[29]

https://connections.cu.edu/people/schrader-honored-faculty-council-distinguished-service-award[30]
https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/schrader_faculty_council_award_chavez_preferred_horiz_05-21-2026.jpg[31] https://artsandmedia.ucdenver.edu/cam-areas-of-study/about-visual-arts/faculty/faculty-details/Schrader-Jeffrey-UCD2878[32] https://www.cu.edu/faculty-senate-faculty-council[33] https://www.cu.edu/faculty/committees-faculty-council/about-committees[34] https://connections.cu.edu/people/celebrating-hanenberg-s-legacy-service-uccs[35]
https://connections.cu.edu/itn/cu-boulder-sees-11th-startup-reach-1-billion-unicorn-status[36]
https://connections.cu.edu/itn/why-fireflies-shine-their-lights-same-time-and-why-it-might-lead-new-technologies[37]
https://connections.cu.edu/itn/how-wildfires-can-build-healthier-forests-uccs-associate-professor-christine-biermann