Five questions for June Gruber[1]

The research of June Gruber, Ph.D., examines happiness and positive emotion, words that might bring to mind a smiling face. It's no surprise, then, when she describes her CU Boulder lab – the Positive Emotion and Psychopathology (or PEP) Laboratory[2] – as a fun, collaborative and creative space.

Positive emotion also plays a role in mental illness, which Gruber and her team also study. The work is not eternal sunshine.

A professor of psychology and neuroscience at CU Boulder, Gruber has published over 140 articles and chapters, co-authored the 14th edition of "Psychology," and edited two books: the "Oxford Handbook of Positive Emotion and Psychopathology[3]" and "Positive Emotion: Integrating the Light Sides and Dark Sides[4]."

Gruber's honors at the University of Colorado include the 2025 Boulder Faculty Assembly Excellence in Research Award, 2025 Faculty Champion of Student Support Award, 2023 Cogswell Award for Inspirational Instruction, 2022 Boulder Faculty Assembling Excellence in Teaching and Pedagogy Award, and her designation last year as a President's Teaching Scholar[5] at CU. She has also received several national early career research awards in her field.

In her free time, she finds joy exploring the outdoors with her two young sons.

1. What is the mission of your Positive Emotion and Psychopathology Laboratory, and how do you and others go about carrying out that mission?

Our research laboratory is a creative and energizing space. At any given time, our team includes a diverse mix of undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, research assistants and incredible collaborators – both here on campus and from institutions across the country and around the world.

Our work centers on understanding the role of positive emotions in psychological disorders. We explore how people experience positive feelings, how these emotions are expressed, and how they are manifested in the body and brain. We analyze facial expressions, physiological responses and emotional patterns across a wide range of mental health conditions.

In particular, we look at positive emotions among people who have lived experience of bipolar disorder, depression and other psychiatric experiences. This work is deeply meaningful to us – we're driven by the potential to uncover how positive emotions are experienced in these populations with the long-term goal to identify new treatment targets that support more balanced, fulfilling emotional lives.

We do this in in several ways. We run experimental studies in our laboratory, including a current five-year study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (with Sheri Johnson, Joshua Gowin, Kateri McRae and others) where we're bringing in young adults, between 18 and 25 – a developmental period rich in growth and opportunity, but also increasingly marked by mental health challenges.

We're particularly motivated by the rising rates of mental health challenges among college students and young people more broadly. We listen closely to what young adults tell us: What strategies are helping them manage their emotions? What's not working? Then, we follow them over two years to understand how these strategies relate to long-term mental health. Our goal is to identify the psychological tools that build resilience and protect against the onset of conditions like depression or bipolar disorder.

At the heart of our work is a deep interest in understanding how our feelings shape our mental well-being and, when our feelings are challenging for us, how they can leave us vulnerable for psychological disorders like depression, bipolar disorder or anxiety. We do this in a way that uses rigorous laboratory and experimental tools, but that can actually tell us something about their experiences in the real world. That's what excites us the most.

We have several other studies underway as well, which keeps our team energized and engaged. My wonderful graduate students (Stevi Ibonie, Cynthia Villanueva, Bryn Manns and Luiza Rosa) are looking at the role of awe and wonder on campus and in nature, our understanding of bodily sensations and well-being, emotional experience in Latine young adults, and the role of substance use in impacting emotions and mood disorders in young adults.

What draws us all to this work is the sense of purpose. We're committed to finding insights that help improve their lives and the lives of others facing similar challenges.

2. How do you define the term "positive emotion," and what is its relationship to mental health and well-being?

Positive emotions, like all emotions, are essential to what it means to be human. They give us information about the world around us, guide our goals, and shape how we interact with others. In many ways, they help define who we are.

What makes positive emotions unique is that they signal both rewards and opportunities in our lives and play a powerful role in connecting us to other people. They're often referred to as the social glue of our living world. Research has consistently shown that positive emotions are linked to better mental health and overall well-being. People who experience more positive emotions tend to be more resilient, not just psychologically, but physically – they often show stronger immune responses and are more socially connected. There's even evidence that positive emotions can enhance creativity and flexible thinking.

What I find especially interesting is that in Western culture, there's a lot of messaging that suggests we should always be happy, that we should think positively all the time, and that happiness is something to constantly chase. There's a kind of cultural script that assumes positive emotions are always good and should be maximized. Our research pushes back on this assumption.

While positive emotions are valuable, they're not inherently good in all contexts. Sometimes it's necessary – and even healthy – to feel sadness, to reflect on loss or to experience anger in the face of injustice. We've done work looking at emotions like gratitude and even embarrassment, showing that these seemingly "uncomfortable" emotions can actually serve important social and psychological functions.

So rather than aiming for constant positivity, we advocate for what we call "**emotional diversity" – a** balanced emotional life that includes positive emotions, yes, but also makes room for more difficult feelings. All emotions have something to teach us, and well-being isn't about avoiding the hard ones – it's about learning to navigate the full emotional spectrum with flexibility and awareness. This includes negative feelings, too.

3. The importance of that balance suggests one of the books you have edited, "Positive Emotion: Integrating the Light Sides and Dark Sides." Are there dangers of being too happy?

Yes. There really can be too much of a good thing when it comes to positive emotion. And that's one of the central ideas in our work: that positive emotions, while often helpful and adaptive, can also have a darker side when experienced in excess or in the wrong context.

Positive emotions are great motivators – they help us get up and go, they encourage us to pursue goals and connect with others. But when those emotions become too intense, they can impair our judgment. We see that people who experience very high levels of positive emotion may be more likely to overlook risks or ignore warning signs in their environment. That lowered inhibition can lead to impulsive decisions, like driving too fast, taking physical risks or engaging in behaviors that might feel good in the moment but can come with serious consequences later on.

We also find that overly intense positive emotions can actually harm our social relationships. Sometimes when we're feeling a little too positive, we're not really able to stay attuned to the people around us. And that can affect our ability to be close, to connect and really be there for them.

In some cases, people struggle to regulate these high-arousal positive states. They tell us they can't come down from or get stuck in an emotional "high gear," and we've seen how this kind of emotional intensity can be a marker for mood instability. It can even be a risk factor for developing or worsening symptoms of bipolar disorder, particularly the

manic or hypomanic phases.

So yes, positive emotions are generally helpful – but only when experienced in balance with other emotional states. That's really the key: emotional balance and flexibility. Well-being isn't about maximizing happiness at all costs, it's about knowing when and how different emotions serve us and being able to move fluidly through them.

All of this is to say that there really is a sense of too much of a good thing.

4. How do you go about mentoring others and why is mentoring important to you?

Mentorship is truly one of the most meaningful and rewarding parts of my job. I feel incredibly lucky to support students as they explore big questions about human psychology, and to help shape the next generation of scholars, clinicians and mental health professionals. To me, it's a privilege to walk alongside them on that journey. I feel really lucky.

In our lab, we take a mentee-centered approach. We try to strike a balance between the "who" of science as we do the "what." Who are the people in our lab? How are they doing? Are they feeling supported, valued and empowered in the work they're doing?

We've spent a lot of time developing transparent lab agreements and expectations. Every student fills out a written agreement. We individualize their prioritized goals for the semester. We make sure the experience I'm able to provide them connects to their personal goals, because every student comes in with different strengths, different goals, different needs.

Another big piece for us is trying to practice what we preach. We study mental health and well-being, so we strive to make our lab environment one that actually supports those things. That includes fostering a sense of community, finding time for social connection and supporting each person's unique work-life balance. I want students to know that they can be engaged in meaningful science and prioritize their well-being.

5. What does it mean to be named a President's Teaching Scholar at CU?

The words that come to mind are "humility" and "invigorated." I've admired the President's Teaching Scholars for years, so to be named among them feels both surreal and deeply meaningful.

What excites me most about this opportunity is the platform it offers to amplify the work we're doing around mental health. I'm hoping this role can help bring more science-based tools and resources to students, faculty and staff on campus. There's such a hunger right now for evidence-based approaches to well-being – whether you're a student navigating stress, a faculty member supporting others or someone trying to create more emotionally healthy classrooms and communities.

I see this as a chance to bridge the gap between the science we do in the lab and the everyday lives of people in our CU community. If I can help bring those insights into classrooms, offices and conversations in ways that are practical and accessible, then that's exactly how I'd like to contribute.

Apply for summer 2025 Tuition Assistance Benefit[6]

Faculty must choose their contract payment schedules by July 11 [7]

Down to the wire: Open Enrollment ends at 5 p.m. Friday [8]

University of Colorado ranks among Top 20 U.S. universities for granted patents [9]

The University of Colorado has secured the No. 18 position on the National Academy of Inventors (NAI) 2024 Top 100 U.S. Universities Granted U.S. Utility Patents list,[10] reinforcing CU's standing as a national leader in research, innovation and real-world impact.

With 114 patents across its campuses — 71 from CU Boulder, 44 from the CU Anschutz Medical Campus and one from CU Denver, and including 104 recognized by the NAI — CU has solidified its role in advancing technology and fostering industry collaboration.

Using data from the United States Patent and Trademark Office,[11] the NAI's annual ranking highlights institutions actively transforming research into patented, real-world innovations.

Bryn Rees, associate vice chancellor for innovation and partnerships at CU Boulder,[12] emphasized the importance of collaboration in advancing research and commercialization.

"The innovations that result from our university's research, especially federally funded research, have tremendous potential to transform lives, create new industries and create economic impact," Rees said. "We're committed to ensuring these inventions are well-resourced so they can mature from the lab to the market."

At CU Boulder, 53% of the campus's patents have been licensed commercially, signaling CU's strength in technology transfer and industry collaboration.

Two standout patents from CU Boulder and CU Anschutz have each laid the foundation for promising new spinout companies. Both startups have exclusively licensed their respective technologies, participated in CU's startup support programs and attracted private investment to bring their innovations to market:
PrecisionTerra[13] and CU Boulder professor Jade Morton developed inter-frequency signal aiding for tracking satellite navigation signals (U.S. Patent 12117539). The company won the 2025 New Venture Challenge[14] (Deep Tech category). SpyGlass Pharma[15] and CU Anschutz faculty member Malik Kahook developed an ophthalmic implant system for drug delivery (U.S. Patent 11,903,874).
With each patent granted and startup launched, CU reinforces its position as a cornerstone of Colorado's innovation economy and a leader in national technological leadership. CU's dedication to turning research into action ensures continued progress for local communities and global industries.

"This is essential not only for economic development in key industries like biotech, aerospace, quantum and sustainability, but also for ensuring the U.S. workforce stays on the cutting edge and continues to produce the industry leaders of tomorrow," Rees said.

COLTT 2025: Call for proposals, registration now underway[16]

For nearly three decades, the Colorado Learning and Teaching with Technology (COLTT) Conference has brought together educators, technologists, administrators and industry experts from across the state and beyond to explore innovative practices and the latest advancements in education.

The 27th annual edition of COLTT is set for July 30 and 31 at CU Boulder. Attendees can look forward to two days of hands-on workshops, networking and sessions designed to challenge and inspire teaching and learning in both traditional and virtual environments.

The call for proposals for COLTT 2025 is now open[17], with the deadline extended to Friday, May 16. This year's theme, "Shaping our Future Together," invites dynamic presentations in 90-, 50- or 20-minute formats. Organizers are seeking engaging sessions that reflect the diverse and evolving landscape of educational technology. Prospective presenters can find submission guidelines and topic ideas on the COLTT website and are encouraged to submit proposals that will spark discussion and share effective practices with a broad audience.

Highlighting this year's conference is a special plenary panel, "AI from Campus to Career: Preparing Students for a Shifting Educational and Workforce Landscape." In lieu of a single keynote speaker, the panel will feature a trailblazing product creator, workforce market analyst, and ethicist, all moderated by a leading AI education strategist. This multifaceted discussion promises to offer valuable insights into the role of artificial intelligence in education and the workplace. Stay tuned for the announcement of our distinguished panelists.

Registration for COLTT 2025 is now open[18]. Secure your spot for this vibrant gathering at the CU Boulder campus and join colleagues from across the region for two days of unbridled learning, collaboration and innovation. Visit the COLTT website[19] to register and learn more about this year's conference.

Federal transition updates: FY26 Reconciliation, president's proposed discretionary budget request, NSF F&A Cap, more[20]

From May 5, this update from CU Federal Relations includes information on FY26 Reconciliation, Board of Regents Meeting Update, CU Biomedical Research Comment Submission, NSF Director Resignation, ED Federal Loan Updates, Colorado Delegation Visits to Campuses and Recent Capitol Hill Visits.

Click here to read the post.[21]

From May 2, this federal government update from CU Federal Relations contains a summary of the president's proposed budget request.

Click here to read the post.[22]

Also from May 2, this federal government transition update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes news on NSF F&A Cap, NOAA Cooperative Institutes, Executive Order on Sanctuary Jurisdictions, Department of Education DCL on Accreditation Options, NIH Initiative on Prioritizing Human-Based Research Technologies, Senate Hearing on Biomedical Research Programs, and NEH Lawsuit.

Click here to read the post.[23]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Transitions Updates[24] page.

Campus releases latest Sexual Assault and Related Harms Survey results[25]

The CU Boulder Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) released results[26] from the 2024 Sexual Assault and Related Harms Survey in April. OIEC surveyed all students last fall, with 28% of undergraduate students and 29% of graduate students responding. This is the third time the OIEC has conducted the survey, the first two being in 2015 and 2021. Five main categories were measured: sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, intimate partner

abuse and sexual harassment.

While a few of the main categories saw rates increase slightly from 2021 to 2024, the rates for four of the five remained significantly lower than in 2015. The slight increases from 2021 were not unexpected given multiple factors, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic. Data shows that the pandemic-related factors, such as campuses going remote, stay-at-home orders and general trends toward less socialization, contributed significantly to the large decreases in rates seen in the 2021 survey.

Compared to AAU peer institutions that collected data pre- and post-pandemic, CU Boulder saw lower rates of sexual assault and a larger decrease since before the pandemic. AAU peer institutions saw pre-pandemic rates of sexual assault for women decrease from 32% before the pandemic to 24% in 2024, compared to CU Boulder's decline from 28% pre-pandemic to 18% in 2024. For CU Boulder, that means the campus saw a 36% reduction in sexual assault rates for undergraduate women from 2015 to 2024, compared to a 25% reduction among AAU peers.

Read more in CU Boulder Today[27].

UCCS Downtown hosts Spanish class for legal professionals [28]

CU Denver's engineers are innovating a smarter transportation future [29]

What is addiction, and how can we stop it? [30]

Moin receives Quantum Research Translational Seed Grant [31]

Ewin named vice chancellor for marketing and communications [32]

Voss launching into retirement [33]

Anxious about the world? Cow cuddling or bee buzzing might help ease your stress[34]

Twin CU Denver sisters develop tool to help users outsmart phishing scams[35]

Colorado Springs gallery to display candy-stills piece by Felix Gonzalez-Torre[36]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-june-gruber[2] http://gruberpeplab.com/junegruber.php[3] https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190653200.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780190653200[4] http://www.amazon.com/Positive-Emotion-Integrating-Light-Sides/dp/0199926727/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1395624520&sr=8-1&keywords=light+and+dark+sides+gruber[5] https://www.cu.edu/ptsp[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/apply-summer-2025-tuition-assistance-benefit[7] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/faculty-must-choose-their-contract-payment-schedules-july-11[8] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/down-wire-open-enrollment-ends-5-pm-friday[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/university-colorado-ranks-among-top-20-us-universities-granted-patents[10] https://academyofinventors.org/top-100-us-universities/[11] https://data.uspto.gov/home[12] https://www.colorado.edu/researchinnovation/innovation-partnerships[13] https://www.colorado.edu/venturepartners/startup-portfolio/precisionterra-inc[14] https://www.colorado.edu/nvc/2025/04/24/trailblazing-ideas-and-entrepreneurial-spirit-reap-rewards-2025-nvc-finals[15] https://news.cuanschutz.edu/ophthalmology/drug-delivery-platform-spyglass-for-glaucoma-patients[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/coltt-2025-call-proposals-registration-now-underway[17] https://energyconferencenetwork.swoogo.com/coltt25/8157466[18] https://energyconferencenetwork.swoogo.com/coltt25/begin[19] https://energyconferencenetwork.swoogo.com/coltt25/7868204[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-transition-updates-fy26-reconciliation-president-s-proposed-discretionary-budget[21] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/cu-federal-relations-update-5525[22] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-update-presidents-proposed-discretionary-budget-request[23] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-transition-update-5225[24] https://www.cu.edu/federal-transition-updates[25] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/campus-releases-latest-sexual-assault-and-related-harms-survey-results[26] https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.colorado.edu%2Foiec%2Fdata%2Fsurvey-projects%2F2024-cu-boulder-sexual-assault-related-harms-survey&data=05%7C02%7Cdedrick%40cu.edu%7C4bcea622903647c40c9108dd8c199b11%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C638820763775692697%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=RwSYE4zMz6tWVXLYlldMD1CzzcyGpxCaz%2B32ECWvB7A%3D&reserved=0[27] ht
tps://www.colorado.edu/today/2025/04/14/campus-releases-latest-sexual-assault-and-related-harms-survey-results[28] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-downtown-hosts-spanish-class-legal-professionals[29] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-denver-s-engineers-are-innovating-smarter-transportation-future[30] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/what-addiction-and-how-can-we-stop-it[31] https://connections.cu.edu/people/moin-receives-quantum-research-translational-seed-grant[32] https://connections.cu.edu/people/ewin-named-vice-chancellor-marketing-and-communications[33] https://connections.cu.edu/people/voss-launching-retirement[34] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/anxious-about-world-cow-cuddling-or-bee-buzzing-might-help-ease-your-stress[35] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/twin-cu-denver-sisters-develop-tool-help-users-outsmart-phishing-scams[36] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/colorado-springs-gallery-display-candy-stills-piece-felix-gonzalez-torre