Five questions for Ron Sokol and Janine Higgins[1]
[2]

The National Institutes of Health recently awarded $54 million to the Colorado Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute[3] (CCTSI) at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus. The seven-year grant from the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences will help power biomedical research and training, not just at CU Anschutz, but across the state.

The CCTSI is a research partnership between CU Anschutz, CU Boulder, CU Denver and Colorado State University. Hospital partners include Children's Hospital Colorado, UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital, National Jewish Health, Denver Health and Hospital Authority and the VA Eastern Colorado Healthcare System, as well as community organizations across the state.

The grant's principal investigators are Ronald J. Sokol, M.D., Distinguished Professor of pediatrics, and Janine Higgins, Ph.D., professor of medicine. Sokol has led the CCTSI since its inception in 2008; he and Higgins will now co-lead the institute. Together, they work toward realizing CCTSI's vision to accelerate and catalyze the translation of innovative science into improved, equitable health and patient care for all.

1. Dr. Sokol, how does today's CCTSI compare to what you envisioned 15 years ago?

Sokol: When we first got started, we did not have the organizational structure around clinical translational research that we have now. And our outreach with communities and an emphasis on health disparities and health equity are not what we envisioned 15 years ago. We were much more focused on clinical research units and patient-oriented research at the hospital. Now it has evolved to include more community-based and population-based research.

When we started, we didn't have as many partner institutions as we now have. It was more limited to CU. It now includes Colorado State University, and our hospitals play a bigger role, so that has expanded our footprint and our influence and our value to the university and to the hospital systems.

And we receive considerable support from the University of Colorado and from the hospitals. For example, when plans were being made five or six years ago to build the Anschutz Health Sciences Building, we had outgrown our facility at the Leprino Building at the University of Colorado Hospital. The university agreed to build us a new facility in the Anschutz Health Sciences Building, where we have an outpatient facility, administrative offices, core laboratory and more, consolidated into one brand new space. The university has been very supportive of our needs.
[4]

2. Dr. Sokol and Dr. Higgins, you will be co-leading the institute going forward. What will that change mean for you and for the CCTSI?

Sokol: Janine has had an increasing role in leading the institute since its beginning. She initially oversaw our Nutrition core, then quite rapidly took on more of an oversight role of our clinical research units – we call them clinical translational research centers, or CTRCs. We have four of these, where participants in research come in and are seen in person. Janine developed the position of director of operations for the CCTSI, and she has become more involved in operations over the last five to 10 years. She also plays a major role in our executive committee. It seemed like a natural for this grant renewal to more formally recognize Janine's role in those aspects.

Higgins: I've grown up as a basic researcher and moved into clinical research. For at least a decade, my goal has been to really create and enhance the infrastructure for people to do clinical research, as well as create an outstanding training environment for our younger investigators. So, for me, this was a fantastic opportunity. The CCTSI has helped me realize my career goals for the last 10 years. It encapsulates all the things that are important to me.

3. Dr. Sokol mentioned how the CCTSI partnership involves CU Anschutz, CU Boulder and CU Denver, as well as Colorado State University and the hospital partners. Are researchers generally operating independently of

one another, or are there initiatives with entities collaborating?

Higgins: It is some of both. Our CTRCs primarily support independent investigators who have their own grants or contracts for industry trials. We have national and international experts using these facilities to conduct their work. But we also have pilot grants that we support that are across institutions – where you need one partner from CSU and one from CU Anschutz, for instance, to qualify, to encourage collaborations between our different sites. There are definitely large, national, NIH initiatives that need all of these people at the CCTSI to work together.

Sokol: We have a strong emphasis on team science, which is really formalizing how we work together in teams, since science now is so specialized in so many different areas. To really move a field forward and do it in a rapid fashion when needed – such as with COVID – it takes many disciplines working together and understanding how to work together. So we have a special training program to help scientists develop teams and become more effective as team leaders.

Collaboration is really a key word these days. It's not just collaboration among investigators, it's the whole workforce that's necessary to get this work done. For instance, for clinical research studies or clinical trials, there's a group of people called study coordinators that are absolutely essential to implementing a trial. They're the ones who contact the participants, they enroll them, they schedule the visits, collect the data, assist investigators in many essential ways. They are professionals in and of themselves. It's much more than just faculty and trainees. It takes a large team in order to be proficient.

Colorado State University was not part of our initial grant application, but came in later, and they are a wonderful partner in this type of research, including their very strong veterinary medicine program.

We really value our partnerships with CU Boulder and with Colorado State – they bring some of their students down to our campus for our education programs. There's a lot of connections to the community we gain by having all of these partners, including the hospitals (UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital, Children's Hospital Colorado, National Jewish Health, Denver Health and Hospital Authority and the VA Eastern Colorado Healthcare System) and community organizations across the state.

4. The NIH grant of $54 million over seven years[5] will power biomedical research and training across the state. What possibilities first came to mind for you when you received word of the grant?

Higgins: There's a new component of the grant that we're using to establish a mechanism to do trials within the EHR, the pragmatic electronic health record-embedded trial program. The participants are randomized and their care is embedded in the electronic health records of their usual healthcare provider so they don't have to come to CU Anschutz to be enrolled in a trial. We can potentially provide research throughout Colorado for all different kinds of diseases and medical care using this mechanism. In terms of diversity and equity, that's really important. People are going to be getting their care where they live, and we're going to be getting data from the usual provider that they already trust. So that's a really large aspect of this new part of the grant and it's super exciting.

Sokol: Some at other institutes have decentralized clinical trials; the term that's catching on to describe what others may call pragmatic clinical trials. All of these are designed to be less invasive on the participants, to have a broader ability for people to participate, to collect data that's already being collected to use in the trial. Overall, it should reduce the cost and allow us to complete the trials quicker and get answers sooner. That's the hypothesis.

Our idea is to have several of these ongoing trials and for us and other teams around the country to learn how to perform trials more efficiently, particularly regarding the diversity of and inclusion of research participants. There is a concern that if the trial is built into the electronic health record, there's certain people who either don't have good internet connections or they don't want to use the electronic health record for one reason or another. And if that's the basis for the study, how do we reach out to those populations? Frequently, they are people from marginalized communities or rural communities, and it's really important they be offered the opportunity to participate in these clinical trials.

5. How else will the grant be put to work at the CCTSI?

Sokol: We're continuing to enhance, enrich and expand many of our other programs. Some people said to me, 'So, have you decided what you're going to do with $54 million?' I say, we decided this long before we ever submitted the grant, because there's a budget and you have to stick to your budget. Everything is carefully outlined in the grant application.

We have a very large emphasis on training the next generation of researchers. There may be a national emergency in the coming years, in that there won't be enough well-trained individuals who are committed and passionate about doing the clinical translational research. It can be tough work, it can be lots of long hours, particularly for M.D.s. To become a physician scientist can be an extra challenge.

There are other scientists as well. Janine is a Ph.D. scientist. We have 15 different training and education programs to help Ph.D. scientists and others along the way, in different steps on their career paths, to encourage them to focus on translating discoveries into solving human problems. This is a major emphasis of the CCTSI and the Clinical and Translational Science Award Program nationally.

Search committee set to begin work of identifying CU Boulder's next chancellor[6]

The search for the next chancellor of the University of Colorado Boulder is underway, with CU's naming of a search firm and announcing the members of a search committee[7].

In a communication to the campus, CU President Todd Saliman thanked shared governance groups and community members for excellent nominations to the committee. "It includes highly engaged and talented individuals who reflect the quality and character of our Boulder campus, the breadth of our university and the diversity of our great state," he wrote.

The search committee will be chaired by Danielle Radovich Piper, Senior Vice President for External Relations and Strategy in the Office of the President. Judi Diaz Bonacquisti, Vice President and Senior Diversity Officer in the Office of the President, will serve as the Search Advocate (and will be a voting member). The search advocate's role is to work to ensure a fair selection process for all candidates. Angelique Foster, Assistant Vice President of Strategic Initiatives, will serve as the Search Administrator, and CU Boulder Chancellor Chief of Staff, Catherine Shea, will be the campus liaison to the search committee.

AGB Search[8], which CU has engaged for the search, provides executive search and other services exclusively for higher education institutions. The firm was founded by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges in 2010. AGB Search has a deep understanding of the qualifications and characteristics critical for an effective higher education leader at a university with the status of CU Boulder. The campus is in a strong position nationally due to academic excellence, research prowess, service to our state and beyond, athletic accomplishment, and beautiful and strategic location.

Chancellor Philip DiStefano in September announced he plans to retire after nearly 15 years in the role and 50 years on campus. He intends to return to the faculty in the School of Education, where he began his CU Boulder career in 1974.

As with all CU chancellor searches, the process is guided by Regent Policy 3.C: Searches for Administrators and Guidelines for the Appointment of Chief Officers of the University[9].

Saliman said a timeline and details on opportunities for campus and community participation and input beyond the search committee will be announced in the coming weeks. Key milestones and campus engagement opportunities will be communicated via a web page, cu.edu/boulder-chancellor-search[10], which also allows individuals to provide feedback, ask questions, and contact the search firm with nominations.

Questions or comments should be submitted to boulderchancellorsearch@cu.edu[11].

If you would like to nominate someone to be considered for the position, please forward nominations to AGB Search: CUBoulderChancellor@agbsearch.com[12].

CU Foundation trustees celebrate CU Boulder milestones and welcome new members at fall meeting[13] [14]

The CU Foundation trustees gathered last week for their annual meeting on the CU Boulder campus.

On Nov. 9, the trustees joined President Todd Saliman, Provost Russ Moore and LASP Director Dan Baker at a reception in the Aerospace Engineering Sciences Building to celebrate the 75th anniversary of LASP – the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics.

The trustees met the following morning in the club level of Folsom Field to hear updates from President Saliman, Regent Ilana Dubin Spiegel, Vice President for Advancement Annie Baccary and CU Foundation President Jack Finlaw.
[15]

The program continued the theme of “celebrating campus milestones” with presentations on the 40-year-old Pre-Collegiate Program and the 100th birthday of Folsom Field. A highlight of the meeting was CU Foundation Board of Directors Chair Jeremy May’s presentation of a thank-you gift to Chancellor Phil DiStefano for his almost 50 years of service to CU Boulder. A milestone indeed!
[16]

President Saliman surprised Chancellor DiStefano and the trustees with the announcement of a philanthropic gift from Bruce and Marcy Benson to establish an endowed scholarship for first-generation college students in honor of Phil and Yvonne DiStefano. The Bensons’ very generous $500,000 gift to establish the endowment is designed to be matched by donors to grow the fund to $1 million. Todd and Michelle Saliman made the first matching gift and several trustees immediately came forward to offer matching gifts as well.

As is customary, new trustees were welcomed to the group at the fall meeting. The new class of trustees advanced the Foundation’s and Advancement’s goal of ensuring that the trustees represent the breadth of diversity among CU’s philanthropic supporters. Of the 10 new trustees, seven are women and five are from underrepresented minorities.

CU Foundation trustees are among the University of Colorado’s most loyal friends and most generous donors. Trustees receive stewardship experiences and opportunities to learn about the important work being done across the CU system through engagement with administrative and academic leaders, deans, faculty, staff and students. In return, the trustees become informed advocates for higher education and ambassadors for CU.

CU Foundation trustees assume no fiduciary duties and take on no volunteer assignments. The primary expectations of trustees are that they make CU one of their top philanthropic priorities and attend as many of the quarterly trustee meetings as their schedules permit.

Creative approaches for energizing rural business ecosystems: Insights from faculty[17]

Faculty across the CU campuses are making a significant impact on Colorado’s rural communities. With two-thirds of the state’s 64 counties defined as rural/frontier, these areas are rich in culture and natural beauty. However, many small businesses in these regions lack the necessary resources and strategies for pandemic recovery, particularly

micro-businesses that make up over 90% of all small businesses in these regions. Here are three examples of how faculty are working with students and community on impactful, scaled programs:

Developing enduring ties to all four corners of the state

The Rural Colorado Workshop Series has built its success through developing long-term, deep community relationships. Led by CU Boulder's Erick Mueller[18] in the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship[19] in partnership with faculty including Brad Werner, Visda Carson, Hunter Albright, Eric Bruno, Cynthia Banks, and Janet Bercovitz, RCWS offers rural Colorado small businesses and local governments practical, long-term support and interactive sessions to enable economic empowerment. The program started small and has continued to build momentum over the past nine years, helping over 800 entrepreneurs. They work in every major region in the state, including Native Entrepreneurship regions such as the Southern Ute Indian Tribe.
[20]

Learn more here.[21]

Connecting students, small businesses, and economic development partners

Students frequently want to work for startups and small businesses. While these organizations need the support, they don't have the infrastructure to take on students in a mutually beneficial way. The Bachelor of Innovation[22] at UCCS and XI[23], a local nonprofit that supports rural entrepreneurs and ecosystem builders in 53 rural counties across Colorado, are solving this challenge. They have a robust history of collaboration and economic outreach in El Paso County and the broader southern Colorado community.

Their latest proposed initiative expands their focus to aid small, micro and startup businesses in rural areas. These enterprises are typically too small to support internship programs, but they stand to gain significantly from the entrepreneurial, innovative and technological support provided by students.

The UCCS BI program has been engaged in community externships since 2008, benefiting a diverse group of over 600 students hailing from 22 different majors across four colleges. To date, they have successfully placed over 400 students into various employment opportunities, providing the scaffolding needed to ensure companies and students have a successful experience. They serve on average 60-75 Colorado companies and 200-300 students a year.

Scaled ecosystem building for rural innovators

Startup Colorado[24] originated as a collaborative effort between the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT[25]) and CU Boulder's Silicon Flatirons Center[26]. Initially funded by Anchor Point[27], and incubated in Silicon Flatirons, it has since become a successful, independent nonprofit organization, and serves as an example of a different model to spin out innovative, impactful work into our community.

Startup Colorado serves as a comprehensive statewide network that provides vital human, social and financial resources to bolster rural entrepreneurship. The organization has extended its support to more than 10,000 rural entrepreneurs, engaged with over 500 business support organizations, and enlisted the guidance of over 300 mentors and financial backers. It has contributed over $175,000 in individual scholarships and community sponsorship grants.

"CU's ability to help innovation flourish in rural parts of Colorado is critical to unlocking the 21st century engine of economic wealth creation," said Brad Bernthal, executive director of the Entrepreneurship Initiative for the Silicon Flatirons Center. "Our success in finding and empowering leaders in rural Colorado was catalytic for Startup Colorado."
[28]

Click here[29] for a podcast highlighting an example of the program's impact, "How One Carniceria Is Building for Family and Community."[29]

These initiatives are a testament to the unwavering dedication to provide tools and resources to rural Colorado leaders,

creatively support its businesses, and breathe new life into its vibrant communities. Together, they're forging a path toward a brighter future, filled with opportunity and innovation.

Stay tuned: We'll be continuing these stories in future months to share how CU campuses are innovating and supporting businesses across Colorado.

Submitted by the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative.

Build a healthy hoard with a Health Savings Account [30]

New FAMLI plan offers fresh batch of leave coverage [31]

Melatonin use soars among children, with unknown risks [32]

Inaugural Diversity Career Networking event held at UCCS [33]

Outside and CU Denver announce the Outside Lab @ CU Denver [34]

Why is my teenager so lazy? Study suggests it's physical [35]

Publication note: No CU Connections on Thanksgiving, Dec. 28 and Jan. 4[36]

CU Connections will not publish new issues on Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 23), Dec. 28 and Jan. 4.

Deadline for submissions for the Thursday, Nov. 30, issue is noon Tuesday, Nov. 21.

The final new issue before the winter holiday break will appear Thursday, Dec. 21; deadline for submissions is noon Friday, Dec. 15.

CU Connections returns after the winter break on Thursday, Jan. 11. Deadline for submissions is noon Thursday, Dec. 21.

During the holiday breaks, the website will be updated with news should events warrant.

Smalyukh selected as Optica Fellow[37]

Curry, of NASA's MAVEN mission, joins LASP [38]

Ambrose to present Distinguished Research Lecture [39]

The future of food is banking on climate-resistant seeds like the ones grown in Boulder[40]

New therapy aims to cure back pain without drugs, surgery[41]

Startups, universities selected for accelerator focused on space domain awareness[42]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-ron-sokol-and-janine-higgins[2] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/becca_lab_five_questions_sokol_higgins_11-16-2023.png[3] https://cctsi.cuanschutz.edu/[4] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/p23796_00_anschutzscience_printmedium1_five_questions_sokol_higgins_11-16-2023.jpg[5] https://news.cuanschutz.edu/cctsi/university-of-colorado-anschutz-medical-campus-receives-54-million-from-nih[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/search-committee-set-begin-work-identifying-cu-boulder-s-next-chancellor[7] https://www.cu.edu/boulder-chancellor-search/search-process/cu-boulder-chancellor-search-committee-members[8] https://www.agbsearch.com/[9] https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fclick.communications.cu.edu%2F%3Fqs%3Dc93f9139fce5b3800df1cf40caf94b7b251554778ff20bb0672703a447d646bd0afab8ea03af2908d1670eb0aaca848564c832b417bec5db&data=05%7C01%7Cdedrick%40cu.edu%7C121e741331374bfb34f408dbe63c0a55%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C638356917766957153%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=VXJh9XOeRmgZPs%2FTH2IA09%2Bbxo%2Bkh12%2F%2Bhl3tARoIfY%3D&reserved=0[10] https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cu.edu%2Fboulder-chancellor-search&data=05%7C01%7Cdedrick%40cu.edu%7C121e741331374bfb34f408dbe63c0a55%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C638356917766957153%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=akagGkjLME7Y7rXpwfgjUylGZgunisAQvz22keXMrJk%3D&reserved=0[11] mailto:boulderchancellorsearch@cu.edu[12] mailto:CUBoulderChancellor@agbsearch.com[13] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-foundation-trustees-celebrate-cu-boulder-milestones-and-welcome-new-members-fall-meeting[14] https:

//connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/use_this_lede_todd_group_trustees_cu_foundation_trustees_11-16-2023.jpeg[15] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/use_this_room_shot_foundation_trustees.cc_.002.jpg[16] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/use_this_artpiece-distefano_cu_foundation_trustees_crop_11-16-2023.jpeg[17] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/creative-approaches-energizing-rural-business-ecosystems-insights-faculty[18] https://www.colorado.edu/business/leeds-directory/erick-mueller[19] https://www.colorado.edu/business/deming[20] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/photo-2023-04-30-18-42-45_1_0_rural_entrepreneurs_photo_1_11-16-2023.jpg[21] https://www.colorado.edu/business/deming/community/demystifying-entrepreneurship-rural-colorado-workshop-series[22] https://business.uccs.edu/programs/undergraduate/innovation[23] https://www.exponentialimpact.com/[24] https://startupcolorado.org/[25] https://oedit.colorado.gov/[26] https://siliconflatirons.org/[27] https://www.anchorpointfoundation.org/who-we-are/[28] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/picture2_rural_entrepreneurs_photo_2_11-16-2023.jpg[29] https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fstartupcolorado.org%2Flisten-how-one-carniceria-is-building-for-family-community%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cashley.tillman%40cu.edu%7Cfd3dbd0b6e8d4ce0133908dbc05850ff%7Ce889e28f74d447f287e853732cbbe7ec%7C0%7C0%7C638315257804378201%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=6bMke0pVHquSXopaDzQz87SAlmgjmM2IFUwRWw2Tcsk%3D&reserved=0[30] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/build-healthy-hoard-health-savings-account[31] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/new-famli-plan-offers-fresh-batch-leave-coverage[32] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/melatonin-use-soars-among-children-unknown-risks[33] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/inaugural-diversity-career-networking-event-held-uccs[34] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/outside-and-cu-denver-announce-outside-lab-cu-denver[35] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/why-my-teenager-so-lazy-study-suggests-it-s-physical[36] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/publication-note-no-cu-connections-thanksgiving-dec-28-and-jan-4[37] https://connections.cu.edu/people/smalyukh-selected-optica-fellow[38] https://connections.cu.edu/people/curry-nasa-s-maven-mission-joins-lasp[39] https://connections.cu.edu/people/ambrose-present-distinguished-research-lecture[40] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/future-food-banking-climate-resistant-seeds-ones-grown-boulder[41] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/new-therapy-aims-cure-back-pain-without-drugs-surgery[42] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/startups-universities-selected-accelerator-focused-space-domain-awareness