Five questions for Kirsi Aulin[1]

CU Boulder Ombuds Director Kirsi Aulin arrived on campus in 2016, coming from the ombuds office of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Today is Ombuds Day[2], as marked by the International Ombuds Association, but CU Boulder got a jump on the celebration last month, when Aulin helped the campus commemorate the 50th anniversary of her office[3].

“The 50th anniversary of the ombuds office is a significant event for CU Boulder. It means that generations of campus leaders have supported ombuds work and understand its value,” Aulin said. “This is a remarkable commitment from the campus as well as a remarkable achievement for the ombuds who came before us, and on whose shoulders we stand.”

Away from work, Aulin enjoys spending free time with her family and her two dogs, Nutmeg and Nikko.

“In the winter, there is nothing better than getting up on a mountain and skiing in some fresh powder,” she said. “I also enjoy baking, painting in oil, listening to a wide variety of music, and reading murder mysteries.”

1. What is the role of an ombuds office in a university setting?

We are an independent service embedded in the university, and our work is always informal and consultative. We have a dual mandate: We help individuals who reach out to our office, and we give feedback to the university about patterns and trends on campus so leaders can address them more effectively.

Here at CU Boulder, we serve anyone with a CU Boulder-related concern. In a confidential consultation, we help people understand their options within the university. We are impartial, which means we do not take sides in conflicts. Accordingly, we are in a unique position to truly help people strategize and analyze the options available to them from a neutral perspective.

2. Which concerns brought to your office are unique to different groups – faculty, staff and students – and which are common to all?

The most common issue people need assistance with is interpersonal communication. All groups also seek help navigating administrative processes and understanding university expectations.

Concerns that are unique to undergraduate students are: navigating academically related issues such as appeals, honor code violations, and retroactive withdrawals. Graduate students most commonly contact us regarding adviser relationships or problems with their program of study. Staff are often seeking assistance with supervisory relationships. Faculty are most often concerned about relationships and collaborations with colleagues.

3. Do you find there are misperceptions about what your office can and can’t do for members of the campus community?

One common misperception is that our office is a last resort and that people are supposed to exhaust all other alternatives first. This is not true! While we welcome everyone, we prefer people meet with us early on. If we can discuss a problem with someone before it snowballs, there are usually more desirable options available to them. No issue is too big or too small!

4. What are the steps that someone contacting the office and your staff go through when addressing an issue?

We work by appointment[3], and anyone can schedule a virtual or in-person appointment by calling our office at 303-492-5077.

A consultation is a collaboration between the ombuds and the consultee. The ombuds listens to their concerns and then explores options available at CU Boulder. Options may include direct services from the ombuds office, things the

consultee can do themselves or services offered by other CU Boulder units. The consultee is then free to choose the option they prefer. Our direct services include communication coaching, conflict coaching, reviewing appeal letters, informal mediation, providing feedback to the university and strategizing.

5. How did you arrive at doing work as an ombuds and what do you enjoy most about it?

I had a career as a psychotherapist and had never actually heard of ombuds until a colleague sent me a recruitment notice. I enjoyed being a therapist and had no plans to leave the field; however, the ombuds position brought together both the skills of a therapist and the charge to work toward fairness and justice. I was absolutely thunderstruck! I did not know a job existed that brought together these two areas that are near and dear to my heart.

Fairness and justice have been a passion of mine since childhood. As a matter of fact, caring about them have been a family tradition. My family helped instigate the Finnish quest of independence in the late 19th and early 20th century. Once Finland became independent, my family helped build the justice system and the new democratic government. These values were ingrained in me as a child by my grandparents who were part of the independence movement, who fought in the war of independence, and who sacrificed much to achieve an independent democratic country.

University of Colorado campuses drive $10.8 billion in economic impact[4]

The University of Colorado generated an economic impact of $17.2 billion across the state during the last fiscal year, results of the system's vital mission to provide outstanding teaching, research, community engagement and health care.

The figure comes from a new study presented in preliminary draft form at Wednesday's meeting of the Board of Regents Finance Committee. The Business Research Division of CU Boulder's Leeds School of Business reports that $10.8 billion of the total economic impact stemmed from the four CU campuses, with another $6.5 billion contributed by the two CU-affiliate hospitals – UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital and Children's Hospital Colorado – at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus.

The study looked at the 2022-23 fiscal year, when CU directly employed 43,255 faculty, staff and student workers earning $3.6 billion in salaries and benefits. The university operated on $5.2 billion in revenue, of which $1.7 billion was tied to sponsored programs and other restricted fund activity.

CU is among the state's Top Five largest employers.

Besides employing thousands, CU helps drive Colorado's economy by buying from local vendors, attracting investment, educating the local workforce and delivering research discoveries.

Economic impact figures include employee and student worker earnings, operating expenditures, construction, research, and spending by students and visitors. The study did not include the impact of alumni, retirees, football and technology transfer.

A powerhouse for discovery, CU collaborates in a research triangle that includes universities, businesses and federal laboratories. CU's research expenditure activities alone had a $3.2 billion impact last year.

Science writers amass at CU Anschutz, CU Boulder [5]

Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative aims to strengthen CU's startup power[6]

A re-energized CU system-based initiative aims to better connect and amplify the robust work in all phases of entrepreneurship taking place on all four campuses.

The Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative has set goals of supporting CU's innovative culture, boosting collaborative connections, and empowering faculty and staff engagement, and student success. The effort is based in the Office of Academic Affairs and led by Michael Lightner, vice president, and Ashley Tillman, director of the initiative.

"We've witnessed the profound impact of innovation and entrepreneurship opportunities on student outcomes and Colorado's economy," said Massimo Ruzzene, vice chancellor for research and innovation and dean of the institutes at CU Boulder. "Our goal is to ensure every student experiences innovation and entrepreneurship through courses, academic programs, research or experiential learning."

During the 2021-2022 academic year, CU launched an initiative to catalog existing innovation and entrepreneurship (I&E) assets across the CU system and explore potential for growth. The process showed that CU has a robust ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship, with more than 140 programs across the four campuses.Click here to read the report.[7]

UCCS hosts the only bachelor's of innovation degrees[8] in the country. CU Denver is pioneering the only master's in entrepreneurship[9] of its kind in the state. In 2019-2020, CU Anschutz-based CU Innovations[10] startups raised $170 million and garnered more than 50 industry deals. In 2021, Venture Partners at CU Boulder[11] had a record-breaking year with 20 new startups based on CU technology with $2.1 billion in capital raised. The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) honored CU Boulder with an Innovation & Economic Prosperity Award in 2021.

The assessment of the success taking place across all four campuses led to the second phase of the Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative to help embolden the work being done on all four campuses.

Tillman said one goal is to capitalize on the CU system's geographic proximity to a world-class startup community along the Front Range. Geographic advantages of the Front Range include expert mentorship, wealth creation associated with emerging companies, and attractive employment opportunities for students.

I&E also prepares individuals for desirable jobs. Research shows that having an entrepreneurial mindset boosts educational attainment and performance, is crucial for creating new businesses, and is valued by employers. I&E helps students gain entry to the informal networks that power entrepreneurial communities.

With the CU team having interviewed more than 80 I&E community members from the four campuses, and with an eye on becoming the top public institution for I&E, three initial focus areas were identified:

1. **Lead the U.S. in innovations that address significant societal challenges.** Empower faculty, students and staff to lead groundbreaking innovations and ventures.

2. **Support a vibrant I&E ecosystem.** Evolve and develop strategies and policies to promote collaborative, interdisciplinary, real-world-focused research that generates impactful intellectual property, including patents and royalties, while acknowledging the effort required for successful commercialization.

3. **Ignite student success and opportunity through entrepreneurship and innovation.** Ensure every student touches I&E through courses, academic programs, research and/or experiences.

To do this work in a way that elevates the richness, diversity and creative power of CU students, faculty and staff, we are asking for your feedback and response to two questions:
If you have not yet been contacted by the I&E team, what I&E work are you involved in that you would like to share?
From your experience, what's needed to expand I&E education and practice on our campuses?
Let us know your thoughts by emailing ashley.tillman@cu.edu[12].

LinkedIn Learning's new Role Guides lay out learning paths for career advancement [13]

With CU Boulder as hub, quantum leaders develop workforce roadmap [14]

UCCS engages faculty and universities nationwide in cybersecurity education [15]

Can EV owners help pump power back to the grid? [16]

College of Nursing, Campus Community Health hosting flu shot clinic Oct. 18[17]

Ennis joins Research & Innovation Office to boost diversity, equity and inclusion impact [18]

GOCA welcomes Armstrong as new director [19]

Braun reflects on 30-year CU career [20]

New $10 million center at CU Boulder to begin space weather research[21]

Colorado's COVID hospitalizations are rising again following summer dip[22]

'I wasn't crazy': Wisconsin women hope painful disease gains more attention[23]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/five-questions-kirsi-aulin[2] https://www.ombudsassociation.org/annual-ombuds-day[3] https://www.colorado.edu/ombuds/[4] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/university-colorado-campuses-drive-108-billion-economic-impact[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/science-writers-amass-cu-anschutz-cu-boulder[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/innovation-entrepreneurship-initiative-aims-strengthen-cu-s-startup-power[7] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/2023_innovation-entrepreneurship-rpt.pdf[8] https://innovation.uccs.edu/[9] https://business.ucdenver.edu/lp/entrepreneurship[10] https://www.cuanschutz.edu/cu-innovations[11] https://www.colorado.edu/venturepartners/[12] mailto:ashley.tillman@cu.edu[13] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/linkedin-learning-s-new-role-guides-lay-out-learning-paths-career-advancement[14] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/cu-boulder-hub-quantum-leaders-develop-workforce-roadmap[15] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/uccs-engages-faculty-and-universities-nationwide-cybersecurity-education[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/can-ev-owners-help-pump-power-back-grid[17] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/college-nursing-campus-community-health-hosting-flu-shot-clinic-oct-18[18] https://connections.cu.edu/people/ennis-joins-research-innovation-office-boost-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-impact[19] https://connections.cu.edu/people/goca-welcomes-armstrong-new-director[20] https://connections.cu.edu/people/braun-reflects-30-year-cu-career[21] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/new-10-million-center-cu-boulder-begin-space-weather-research[22] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/colorado-s-covid-hospitalizations-are-rising-again-following-summer-dip[23] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/i-wasnt-crazy-wisconsin-women-hope-painful-disease-gains-more-attention