AI Sprint Grant recipient aims to help nursing students strengthen their clinical reasoning [1]

Launched earlier this year, the CU system Artificial Intelligence (AI) Sprint Grant: AI for Teaching & Learning[2] is focused on improving course outcomes using AI with goals of supporting and accelerating innovative teaching practices that leverage AI to enhance student learning.

The grant is designed to provide faculty with the resources and time needed to develop and implement AI-driven pedagogical strategies for the specific purpose of increasing student performance relative to the learning goals/outcomes of a single course. The 'sprint' structure is designed to meet the pace of AI evolution, and in doing so, foster an environment of experimentation and growth with meaningful, of-the-moment outcomes toward improving student learning.

Among the faculty receiving grants earlier this year was UCCS' Kristen Vandenberg[3], Helen and Arthur E. Johnson Beth-El College of Nursing and Health Sciences, whose project is titled "Clinical Decision Validation in Advanced Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Practice." The project will implement a structured AI-supported Clinical Decision Validation Protocol within NURS 6803 to strengthen diagnostic reasoning and child/adolescent prescribing safety. Students will complete independent case analyses and then use a secure platform, UpToDate/ UpToDate Expert AI, to compare and refine their decisions.

This project builds upon prior scholarly work examining the integration of UpToDate into graduate nursing education and extends that work into AI-supported clinical decision validation. Outcomes will be evaluated qualitatively through analysis of pre- and post-calibration narratives and student reflections to identify shifts in clinical reasoning and bias awareness.

Q&A with Kristen Vandenberg

Q. What inspired you to apply for the AI Sprint Grant?

A. I have always been interested in helping students strengthen their clinical reasoning.

As an instructor, it is difficult and extremely time-consuming to provide the feedback students need on their reasoning and decision making when working with complex cases.

Including an AI-generated response to the case study from the secure platform UpToDate/ UpToDate Expert offers students a different type of input to compare and refine their decisions prior to my instructor feedback.

Q. Can you describe your project and how you hope using AI will help students achieve learning outcomes in your course?

A. I want my students to be able to use AI as a clinical reasoning tool – not to go to AI for the answers, but to be challenged to compare AI-generated clinical reasoning with their own clinical reasoning. I want them to be able to identify feedback from AI, to consider their own cognitive biases surfaced in the comparison process, and to source more detailed justification to support their decision making. Often in psychiatric nursing, we use our own experiential learning to guide our clinical decisions, and it's valuable to have more of an objective type of measurement in front of you.

To briefly describe the process: First, students review a series of case studies and verbally explain their clinical reasoning on Canvas. Next, the students put the case studies into UpToDate Expert AI to generate its clinical reasoning and compare their own reasoning to the AI-generated reasoning. This process of reflection is the core of the assignment – whether and how the AI-generated response helped them and strengthened their clinical reasoning. Finally, they redo their treatment plan based on the comparative process.

During their studies, students often learn how to provide 'textbook,' hypothetical responses to case studies. Whereas, with enough information about a patient, AI oftentimes will challenge the student's decision making in a constructive

way. For example, a student may identify the ‘perfect’ medication for a case study patient. The AI response can then point out that the student’s ‘perfect’ might be great, but it costs $500 and the case study patient earns minimum wage. This is the type of useful challenge the AI tool can offer.

Q. What ideas, research or experiences have influenced your approach to using AI in your teaching?

A. My approach comes both from clinical practice and education, which is a perspective my students value. I believe it is important that I teach students to go beyond memorizing information by thinking critically.

As a professor, I want grades, numbers, objective measurements. But as a psychiatric provider, I’m comfortable with that gray area and that’s what I like to teach my students. We are not dealing with black and white, and there isn’t often a right answer. Students are learning how to use AI as a guide while remembering their own clinical reasoning always come first.

Q. What AI tools are you using and what led you to choose those particular tools?

A. I’m using UpToDate and UpToDate Expert AI. UpToDate is a leading evidence-based clinical decision support resource that introduced the AI clinical tool, UpToDate Expert AI, in 2025. This tool is trained exclusively on UpToDate’s database of clinical evidence and expert-authored content.

Now, instead of using UpToDate to read articles, I can put in a case study and prompt it to help me work through it. Its response will pull from the literature in its database.

Part of this grant will cover student access costs for UpToDate Expert AI. In previous courses, students pay the license fee for this software in lieu of a textbook and I have presented on this at multiple nursing conferences. One goal of the project is to produce compelling evidence to support software access through the library.

Q. How will you know that your project has been successful? And what evidence will you look for to understand the impact on student learning?

A. What I’ll be looking for in the success in those reflection pieces. For example, ‘Did the AI help you discover any gaps within your treatment plan?’ ‘Did it help you see any biases that you had within its treatment plan?’ If students can reflect and then be able to modify their clinical reasoning, that’s a success to me.

I will use a slightly modified version of a reflection tool I have used it many courses in Canvas. I teach a nursing reflection course to our doctoral students that focuses entirely on the reflection process.

In this course, case studies get progressively more challenging with students progressing from minimal levels to greater levels of competency by the end. This project will measure whether the use of AI improves final student competencies to outcomes prior to AI implementation.

If successful, these improved outcomes would also complement the movement towards more competency-based education in nursing.

Q. How do you envision elements of your project being adopted or adapted by instructors in other courses, either in psychiatric nursing or across nursing or even other disciplines?

A. Even with the focus at conferences on the use of AI, I’m not seeing my peers addressing clinical reasoning in the same way as me. My hope is for this project to provide a model that other educators can use to guide students into using AI. Clinical reasoning is essential within any kind of healthcare discipline. I look forward to being able to disseminate the information nationally among nurse practitioner faculty and be able to say, you can use teaching method in any setting, it doesn't have to be psychiatric.

[$50 million gift will accelerate growth of CU Anschutz Cerebrospinal Fluid Leak Program][4]

[Weather shapes bus ridership – but cost and shelters can change the equation][5]

[Board approves actions to regent laws and policies][6]

Actions to the following laws and policies were adopted by the Board of Regents at their meeting on Sept. 10, 2026: Article 3, Part A: Officers (Keep As Is) Article 3, Part B: Officers of the University (Keep As Is) Policy 3.A: Definitions of Officers of the University (Keep As Is) Policy 11.E: Leave Policies for Employees (Revision) Article 2, Part D: Regents Awards (Keep As Is) Policy 2.D: Regent Awards (Revision)
These laws and policies were scheduled for review as part of the Board of Regent's five-year review schedule[7] for regent laws and policies.

For a more detailed summary of the changes provided in the policy justifications and redline drafts, go to https://www.cu.edu/regents/rlpreview#tabs-2[8].

[Policy update: Changes to APS 5015, 5014][9]

APS 5015, the Consensual Amorous Relationships Policy[10] was updated as of July 1, 2026.

The updated policy was amended and approved by President Todd Saliman to strengthen protections, clarify disclosure requirements and more clearly distinguish conflicts in consensual relationships from behaviors that would fall under the Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking Policy (APS 5014)[11].

The Consensual Amorous Relationships Policy applies regardless of the sex or gender of the individuals involved and to all university employees (faculty and staff), regents, university affiliates, student employees and students. In situations involving spouses, civil union or domestic partners, APS 5003 - Nepotism in Employment[12] applies, not this policy.

Thank you for your feedback and engagement over the last year, as it helped inform and guide changes to the policy. Faculty and staff are encouraged to review APS 5015 and share it with their units.

APS 5014, the Sexual Misconduct, Intimate Partner Violence, and Stalking Policy (APS 5014)[11], was updated, effective Oct. 1, 2026, in compliance with Title IX for modified definitions of domestic and dating violence, sexual assault and stalking.

The policy was also updated to incorporate the Office of Ethics, Risk and Compliance[13] (OERC) as the office responsible under the policy for system employees. Valerie Simons, Vice President of Compliance and Equity and System Title VI and IX Coordinator, will be leading a systemwide working group over the next academic year to determine if further changes are warranted to the policy. For any questions, please contact valerie.simons@cu.edu[14].

In 2026, CU sees second-largest fundraising year[15]

Donors gave $558 million to CU in fiscal year 2026, investing in students, faculty, researchers, healthcare and a multitude of programs and places across the university's four campuses.

Spurred by more than 58,000 gifts from more than 31,000 donors, the year represented the second-highest total in university history and only the third time that donor generosity exceeded a half-billion dollars.

"Our donors showed once again that they believe CU provides incredible value to Colorado and its communities," said Todd Saliman, University of Colorado President. "Our donors help strengthen our state, nation and world and make an impact every day by supporting what matters to them. We're thankful for their generosity."

Gifts included more than $70 million to support scholarships and fellowships, $183 million to advance research programs, $23 million to recruit and retain faculty and researchers and $129 million for various academic priorities. Donor philanthropy is directed where donors intend their gifts to go, and CU cannot redirect dollars elsewhere.

Donors contributed generously to each of CU's four campuses, including these notable gifts:
CU Boulder received $282.1 million in philanthropic support during the last fiscal year to fund student scholarships, accelerate research, advance climate action, elevate student-athletes and strengthen community partnerships. Alumna Heidi Wagner invested $5 million to launch the Wagner Family Civic Impact Initiative, a new program designed to bridge the campus and surrounding communities through student-led engagement and problem-solving. Hosted within CU Boulder's Center for Leadership, the initiative immerses students in real-world projects alongside local partners. Students work directly on challenges and opportunities facing the Boulder community, including sustainability, mental health and workforce development. The initiative reflects the idea that challenges facing Boulder extend beyond campus boundaries and can benefit from collaborative solutions. A $500,000 gift to **CU Denver** from the Colorado Housing and Finance Authority supported a new Affordable Housing Certificate, helping build the knowledge and workforce capacity needed to respond to the region's housing affordability challenges. The Whiteman Family Foundation committed $2.125 million to the Center for Psychedelic Research, which is helping meet an emerging statewide need by providing education and training that prepares professionals to engage responsibly and effectively in the rapidly growing field of psilocybin services. The campus also helps prepare a significant portion of the region's workforce, and a $100,000 grant from Lumina Foundation supported CU Denver's Career-Connected Learning Initiative, which will help faculty intentionally connect learning outcomes to career paths. Donors' gifts to **UCCS** helped increase the campus's endowment to more than $100 million, while the campus exceeded its fiscal year fundraising goal of $16 million. Gifts included support for student scholarships, the arts, campus programs and more. One of the year's transformative gifts included a $1 million anonymous donation in honor of the UCCS Center for the Study of Government and the Individual's 25th anniversary. The endowed fund will support education initiatives that promote understanding of the American and Colorado Constitutions at UCCS and across the state. These achievements reflected years of relationship-building and generosity from donors who believe deeply in UCCS and its students. Those resources will create opportunities for generations of Mountain Lions. At **CU Anschutz**, a landmark $15 million investment from longtime benefactor Lyda T. Ludeman launched the Pioneering Research and Innovation in Science and Medicine for Women (PRISM) program at the CU Anschutz Ludeman Family Center for Women's Health Research. The gift is focused on improving women's health outcomes through clinical and translational research and accelerating how scientific discovery becomes patient care. One of its primary goals is to close gaps in understanding and treating conditions that disproportionately affect women. In its first phase, PRISM will support investigators and improve collaboration across medical disciplines.
While large gifts like these — CU received 109 of at least $1 million — make a substantial impact immediately and long into the future, every gift matters. Nine in 10 gifts were $2,500 or less, showing that donors from all backgrounds choose to invest in ways that are important to them.

Donors also signaled their vision for the future by supporting endowments and including CU in their wills and bequests. They gave $152 million in planned gifts and $59 million toward endowments, establishing additional future support for CU.

They also established 149 new endowments last fiscal year, bringing the total number of endowments benefiting CU to

approximately 3,900, with a collective value of $2.9 billion. A small percentage of each endowment is distributed each year to the CU program it supports, while the remainder of its value is invested to provide support for decades to come.

Election reminder: University guidelines affect political campaign activity, expression[16]

Editor's note: CU employees interested in learning more about the 14 statewide ballot initiatives that will be on the Nov. 3 Election Day ballot should check out the Colorado Bluebook[17], generated by the nonpartisan staff of the Colorado General Assembly.

With the Nov. 3 general election approaching, the University of Colorado reminds employees of guidelines regarding political campaign-related activity and expression.

A variety of state and federal laws and regulations govern political expression, activity and conduct in the university workplace. Application of the law depends on the particular facts of the situation, and legal counsel should be consulted when questions arise. However, the following guidelines may be used when trying to determine whether particular conduct is appropriate in the university setting.

General principles:
Employees have the right as private citizens to freedom of expression and participation in the political process. University employees should be clear that they are not representing the position of CU when they express their personal political views. The university remains neutral on all political campaigns, except in cases where the University Board of Regents, as allowed by law, specifically determines otherwise. Private political activities must be conducted on personal time and without using university resources (computers, copiers, email addresses, promotional materials).
Employees should refrain from the following activities while at work:
Sending or forwarding emails from university-hosted email accounts in support of or in opposition to candidates or ballot initiatives. Using university office supplies (including computers, copiers and fax machines) to create or disseminate campaign materials. Making calls on university phones in support of or opposition to a political candidate or ballot initiatives. Using university computers to make monetary contributions to political campaigns.
In general, employees may engage in the following activities while at work:
Discussing political issues and political campaigns with one another while on break. Placing a bumper sticker on a personal vehicle. Participating in campaign-related activities on personal time.
Because university email addresses are generally public and published on various websites, employees may receive electronic mail messages on their university-hosted email accounts from candidates and campaigns. Such emails are not illegal. The university cannot know or block every campaign- or candidate-related email account. Installing restrictive spam filters would have limited success with such messages, which originate from many different sources. It is important to remember, however, that the transmission of such emails to you does not constitute University of Colorado endorsement of any candidate or campaign. Employees should refrain from using university email accounts to forward candidate- or campaign-related messages for the purpose of expressing opposition to or support for the relevant candidate or campaign issue.

University employees should always be aware that, as public employees, their activities may be subject to heightened scrutiny by the media and members of the public. Accordingly, they should take care to ensure that their private activities do not compromise their ability to carry out their official duties or compromise the university's neutral position on candidates and ballot issues.

Campuswide commitment and action earn CU Boulder international sustainability award [18]

Saponas family donates?home to UCCS for chancellor residence, university engagement [19]

Federal update: Postponement of duration of status rule, more [20]

From Sept. 18, this update from CU Federal Relations and Counsel includes information on Postponement of Duration of Status Rule, IPEDS ACTS Survey Rationale Release, and DOJ In-State Tuition Lawsuits.

Click here to read the post.[21]

For the latest communications and federal memos, please visit the CU System Federal Updates and Actions[22] page.

Messersmith named director of CU Anschutz Cancer Center [23]

Penner to lead CU Boulder Innovation & Entrepreneurship Initiative [24]

CU Boulder Advancement celebrates inaugural Excellence Award recipients [25]
[26]

CU Boulder Advancement recently came together for its annual All-Staff Meeting to connect, celebrate and look ahead.

A highlight of the day was the presentation of CU Boulder Advancement's first-ever Advancement Excellence Awards, recognizing staff members whose outstanding contributions contribute to the division's goals and exemplify the shared values of joy, collaboration, excellence and impact.

The awards provided an opportunity to celebrate the inaugural recipients while recognizing the dedication, talent and collaboration of the entire CU Boulder Advancement team.

Colorado has 6th-lowest rate of kindergarteners vaccinated against measles [27]

Basalt's new housing development could help some residents stay in their community[28]

25 years after 9/11, steel from the destroyed twin towers lives on in Colorado – and all over the world[29]

Links
[1] https://connections.cu.edu/spotlights/ai-sprint-grant-recipient-aims-help-nursing-students-strengthen-their-clinical-reasoning[2] https://www.cu.edu/oaa/cu-system-sprint-grant-ai-teaching-learning[3] https://johnsonbethel.uccs.edu/people/card_nsgfaculty/vandenberg_kristen[4] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/50-million-gift-will-accelerate-growth-cu-anschutz-cerebrospinal-fluid-leak-program[5] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/weather-shapes-bus-ridership-cost-and-shelters-can-change-equation[6] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/board-approves-actions-regent-laws-and-policies[7] https://www.cu.edu/doc/rlp5yearreviewplanpdf[8] https://www.cu.edu/regents/rlpreview#tabs-2[9] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/policy-update-changes-aps-5015-5014[10] https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5015[11] https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5014#tabs-2[12] https://www.cu.edu/ope/aps/5003[13] https://www.cu.edu/compliance[14] mailto:valerie.simons@cu.edu[15] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/2026-cu-sees-second-largest-fundraising-year[16] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/election-reminder-university-guidelines-affect-political-campaign-activity-expression[17] https://leg.colorado.gov/initiatives/ballot-information-booklet-blue-book[18] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/campuswide-commitment-and-action-earn-cu-boulder-international-sustainability-award[19] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/saponas-family-donates-home-uccs-chancellor-residence-university-engagement[20] https://connections.cu.edu/stories/federal-update-postponement-duration-status-rule-more[21] https://www.cu.edu/blog/government-relations/federal-government-update-91826[22] https://www.cu.edu/office-government-relations/federal-relations/federal-updates-and-actions[23] https://connections.cu.edu/people/messersmith-named-director-cu-anschutz-cancer-center[24] https://connections.cu.edu/people/penner-lead-cu-boulder-innovation-entrepreneurship-initiative[25] https://connections.cu.edu/people/cu-boulder-advancement-celebrates-inaugural-excellence-award-recipients[26] https://connections.cu.edu/sites/default/files/cu_boulder_advancement_people_edit_for_page_09-24-2026.jpg[27] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/colorado-has-6th-lowest-rate-kindergarteners-vaccinated-against-measles[28] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/basalt-s-new-housing-development-could-help-some-residents-stay-their-community[29] https://connections.cu.edu/itn/25-years-after-911-steel-destroyed-twin-towers-lives-colorado-and-all-over-world