

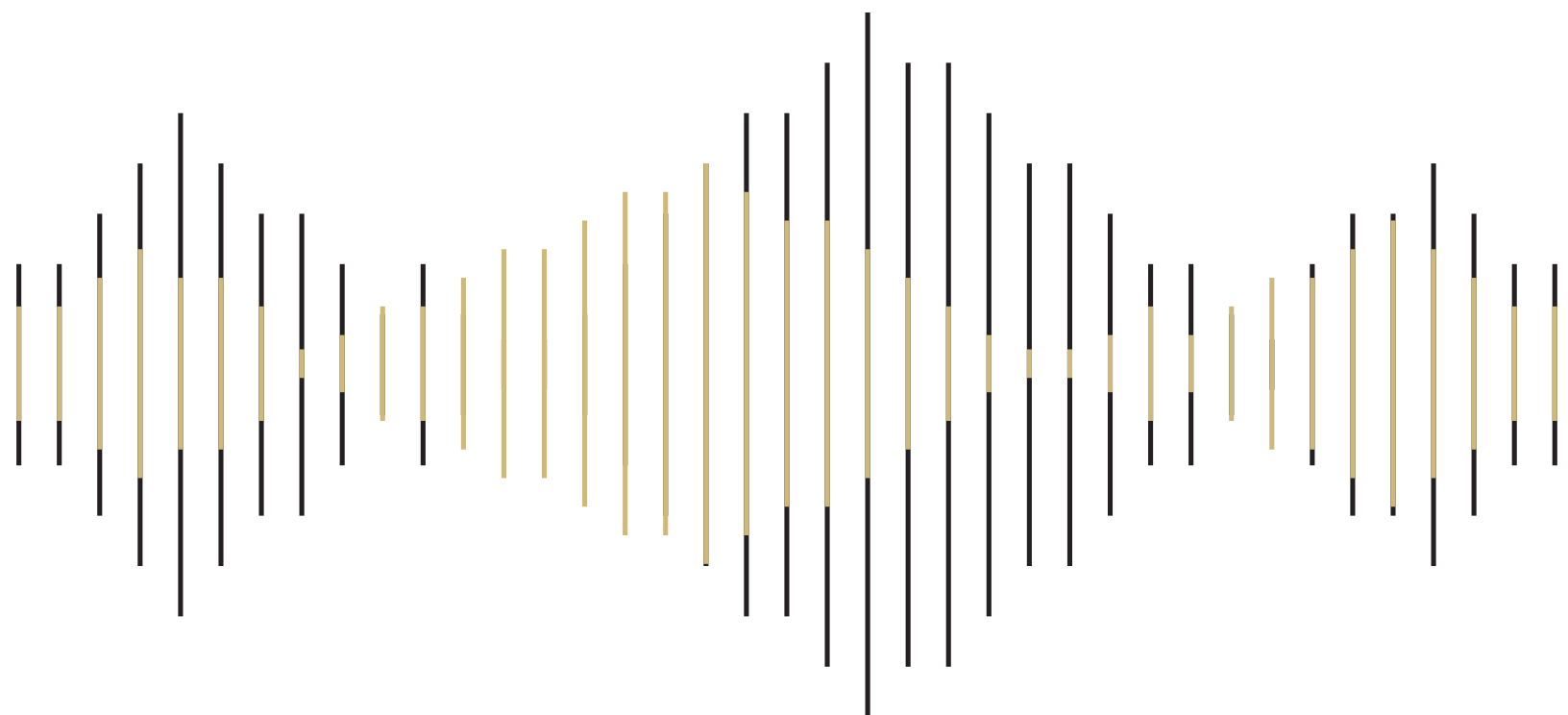
# 100 DAYS OF LISTENING

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Chancellor's  
Listening Tour Report

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**Fall 2020**





# Timeline

## July 1, 2020

My first official day on the job

## July 1-10, 2020

Equity and racial justice listening sessions

## July 20, 2020

Shared my commitments to action for equity and racial justice

## July 20, 2020

General listening sessions began

## October 8, 2020

My 100th day

## November 10, 2020

Shared my 100 Days of Listening report

TO LEARN MORE VISIT THE  
[100 DAYS LISTENING WEBSITE](#)



### A Message from our Chancellor

Dear Lynx Community,

This summer I came to Colorado to join an institution I believe in. For me, leadership starts with listening and learning. And you had a lot to say. After hearing from roughly 1,000 of you in my first 100 days here, I can say for sure: I believe in CU Denver now more than ever and am so glad to call this place home.

Across every listening session I heard your unwavering commitment to providing a meaningful education that paves the way for students who have worked really hard to get here. And just as strongly, you articulated your dedication to the diversity, equity, and inclusivity of our community. The passion and consistency with which the entire Lynx family talked about these issues astounded and impressed me. I had learned of CU Denver's allegiance to our mission through the interview process (and it's one of the primary reasons I fell in love with the university), but I could not have imagined how deeply these ideals are written into CU Denver's DNA. Many of you likened the institution to a teenager in that, while we have laid the foundation for opportunity, we are at an inflection point and need to decide who we want to be when we grow up.

Our location, as so many of you pointed out, is one of the best in the country, but our location shouldn't be the sole component of CU Denver's identity. Our faculty, staff, and students are wildly talented, but we need to invest in the development of our people and their careers far more than we have. And our connection to a thriving metropolitan area provides limitless opportunity for partnership and experiential learning, but we need to be more coordinated, intentional, and strategic about pursuing those relationships.

You made the point that we can't just wish success into being. Like so many of our students have had to do, you urged us to make big and tough decisions. You said we need to put a stake in the ground, focus our efforts on where we're headed, and take this university to the next level. From your collective perspective, now is the time to make those decisions.

In the following pages, I've outlined what I heard from you across 10 themes that emerged. We'll use this information as a starting point for an inclusive strategic planning process that will ultimately position us for future success. More information about that process is included in the final section of this report.

While I'm now past the first 100 days, I'm committed to continuing our conversation. I can't wait to see what we'll accomplish together.

*Michelle Marks*



# The Approach

## Overview

Over the course of my first 100 days, I heard from more than 1,000 faculty, staff, students, friends, and employers of the university through a series of informal listening sessions. I also collected input and ideas via an online form and through personal interactions and meetings. I learned so much about what is important to the Lynx community and what you hope for our future. I look forward to the many discussions and conversations still to come as we design that future together.

100 DAYS

62 listening sessions



5,000 ideas shared



1,000+ participants



OVER 185 units represented

300 faculty engaged

518 staff engaged

59 students engaged

154 friends engaged  
alumni, donors, parents, employers, community partners

## Equity Listening Sessions

These sessions were an unstructured opportunity for the campus community to share thoughts and concerns related to equity and racial justice and what we need to do collectively and personally to walk the walk.

- Engaged key stakeholder groups on campus in equity listening sessions, including: BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) faculty and staff, Center for Identity & Inclusion, Women & Gender Center, student-facing staff, and Faculty Assembly Executive Committee.
- Hosted 21 listening sessions that were open to all faculty, staff, and students.
- Shared my commitments to action [via email](#) to the campus community on July 20.
- Invited additional and ongoing feedback via an online form on my website.

## General Listening Sessions

I held informal, lightly facilitated sessions to hear directly from you about what matters most and how you hope we will continue moving CU Denver forward. In these sessions, I posed the following questions:

- Where does CU Denver have key advantages and momentum?
- What areas need further development and/or what issues do we need to address?
- Looking ahead, what do you see as our greatest opportunities?
- Suppose a headline is written about CU Denver in five years—what would you want that headline to say?
- What is one thing we could do to make CU Denver better?

## Other Introductory Meetings

In addition to 62 official listening sessions, I met informally with many other faculty, staff, students, and friends of CU Denver.

## The Themes Emerged...

More than 5,000 ideas bubbled up from the listening sessions, meetings, online comments, and informal interactions that took place in my first 100 days. There was a lot of agreement on what we do really well, where we have vulnerabilities, and the vast possibilities that lie before us. Read on to learn all about the themes that emerged and where we go from here.

# Themes That Emerged...

After listening to you—students, faculty, staff, alumni, community partners—here’s my main takeaway: you believe that CU Denver is an extraordinarily special place, and it’s time for us to get really focused on who we are, who we want to be, and what it’s going to take to get there.

It is unmistakable how much our community cares about this place—and I do, too. This institution has made tremendous progress, and you expressed your interest in and commitment to building on that momentum. While our commitment is a great foundation, it is not enough to take us where we want to go next. We must envision and then paint the picture of the future we desire—and that our students and society need—and continue to develop strategically from here. The higher education landscape is complex and under increasing scrutiny by a public that is increasingly questioning the affordability and the value of a college degree. We have to communicate our value clearly, articulating what differentiates us so that our contributions simply cannot be ignored. We must set our priorities and stand behind them to propel CU Denver, this place we all love, forward into a bright and sustainable future. We’ll do this together by focusing on the themes I heard from you.

# 10 THEMES EMERGED

“Our community is a high concentration of talent, creativity, and goodwill.”  
*-CU Denver faculty member*

- 1 | Shaping Our Culture & Values
- 2 | Claiming Our Identity
- 3 | Following Through on Student Success
- 4 | Living Up to Our Highest Ideals of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion
- 5 | Leveraging Our Location for Deeper Community Engagement
- 6 | Championing Academic Quality, Relevance, & Innovation
- 7 | Leading the Way Through Research, Scholarship, & Creative Activity
- 8 | Valuing Our People
- 9 | Navigating Structural Complexities
- 10 | Securing Our Financial Future



# SHAPING OUR CULTURE & VALUES

CU Denver... a place we all belong.

You told me that CU Denver is a special place. We are scrappy. We are passionate and mission-driven. We want everyone to belong, and we like to lend a hand. We are proud of how far we have come in such a relatively short history.

But we're not perfect. I heard that not everyone feels included, that sometimes it seems like we aren't all working in the same direction, and that, under pressure to forge ahead, we don't always remember the *people* side of change. Together we will do the work to create the culture we want and embrace our values so that every person at CU Denver experiences a sense of belonging and flourishes. Everything else will follow.



## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### The Upside

- Your love for CU Denver and for each other runs deep.
- CU Denver is a “can do” campus with an entrepreneurial spirit and the ability to be nimble.
- We may not be able to do everything, but we can do anything if we coalesce around a shared vision.
- People feel like they can depend on each other and that those around them genuinely care.
- Students feel like they have a real voice on campus, and they want to be even more engaged.

### The Downside

- We tend to operate from a deficit mindset instead of one of possibility.
- Although we have an innovative spirit, it isn't always rewarded because we tend to be risk-averse.
- Lack of transparency and gaps in internal communication contribute to a culture of mistrust and siloed thinking.
- Supervisors don't always know how to set the right tone, so there are cultural inconsistencies across units that lead some people to have a less positive experience.
- Students report that it can be difficult to get involved and engaged on campus.

### You Told Me Some of Your Highest Hopes...

- That CU Denver will be a place where every voice is heard, valued, and respected.
- We fully commit to supporting the physical and mental health and well-being of the entire community.
- We continue to create spaces and opportunities where we all feel welcome and connected, like the new residence hall and learning commons, forums, Diversity Dialogues, etc.
- A Faculty Club!
- We craft a culture of innovation.

## What I'm Thinking About

Updating and reinforcing our mission, vision, and values so that everything we do aligns to them.

How we will prioritize Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as values that underly our culture in word and in action.

How our physical spaces and facilities influence our way of being together.

How we use language and symbols—in our marketing and communications, our building names, and on our campus spaces—to tell the world who we are and what we stand for.

How we bring our best selves to learn, work, and discover.



# CLAIMING OUR IDENTITY

Who do we want to be when we grow up?

Over and over I heard that we need to get really clear about our identity. That means having thoughtful discussions about who we serve, how we differentiate ourselves, and what we want to be known for. It requires coming to consensus on what it actually means to be a public urban research university in the heart of downtown Denver and leaning into that distinction as we tell our story.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### A Good Foundation

- We are so proud of our students! They are tenacious and incredibly diverse, just like the vibrant community around us.
- Our location in downtown Denver is second to none, and we are primed to take advantage of it.
- CU in the City gives us momentum and highlights our connection to the city of Denver, and we're ready to be known for more than just our location.
- Everybody loves our mascot, Milo!

### Still Some Work To Do

- We need to do more to tell our story and communicate the value of a CU Denver education, from our unique programs to our research and community impact.
- We need to differentiate ourselves from other institutions.
- We must have clarity around our identity and institutional priorities in order to make decisions about research, academic programming, immersive learning, recruiting, and more.
- We must go further than defining ourselves simply by place. The quality, diversity, and promise of our students is at our core.

### You'd Like To See Us...

- Educate the community on our value and what we are doing to make their lives better.
- Approach enrollment and recruitment holistically as one unified CU Denver.
- Embrace the designations of Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI) as core to who we are.
- Articulate the value and return on investment of a CU Denver education and make that a prominent part of our messaging.
- Work more closely with CU Anschutz Medical Campus to leverage health pathways as a competitive advantage.

"I love the nontraditional student population we serve. This makes us unique, and I think we should really celebrate our students, especially those who may be adult learners, parents, [or] veterans."

-CU Denver staff member

What I'm Thinking About

Who should we be serving?

What are the key differentiators for students?

What is the hallmark of a CU Denver graduate?



# FOLLOWING THROUGH ON STUDENT SUCCESS

It's all about the outcomes.

There is no doubt that the CU Denver community is committed to students and student success. That commitment is something we share. I am so inspired by our students' determination and by the resolve of our faculty and staff to support their journey. And, as many of you acknowledged, we have work to do to ensure that every student has what they need from us. We must continue to work toward an unambiguous, student-centered approach to student success and hold ourselves accountable for delivering.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Our Momentum

- CU Denver students are determined and resilient. For many, a college education was not a foregone conclusion, but a conscious choice with sacrifices.
- Faculty and staff bring unquestionable passion and devotion to their work with students, and their engagement in student success initiatives continues to trend upward.
- Student-focused, immersive learning facilities such as City Heights, the Wellness Center, and LynxConnect up our game for students.
- Students love the opportunities for applied learning that come with our prime location.
- We are among the most affordable four-year options, an important factor in completion.

### Our Gaps

- We need to focus on increasing retention and graduation rates, especially for our Students of Color.
- Our goal should be to meet all students where they are with what they need. Many of you pointed out specific gaps for first-generation, transfer, and online students.
- We need to simplify and align our systems and processes, making them more straightforward for students to navigate.
- Students want more streamlined, personalized communication to guide them through their journey at CU Denver.

### Your Big Ideas

- We could invest in a Last Year Experience the way we invest in the First Year Experience, helping students transition out of the university in the same way we help them transition in.
- We should have an office dedicated to undocumented student services.
- Engage recent alumni as mentors for first-generation students and engage established alumni as mentors for recent graduates.
- Utilize scholarship awards and other financial aid more strategically for recruitment and retention.

“What I loved most was having the support system from my professors and instructors.”

-CU Denver alumnus

What I'm  
Thinking  
About

What will we do to close the graduation gap faced by Students of Color?

How can we take advantage of our location to give every student meaningful experiential learning opportunities?



# LIVING UP TO OUR HIGHEST IDEALS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

It's not negotiable.

Our values and core identity are centered around equity and fostering a diverse educational community. We consider these to be among our greatest strengths. However, at this pivotal moment, it is not enough for us to tout our diversity or our values and believe we have met our responsibility in addressing racial bias and equity. We know that we need a comprehensive approach on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We have a long way to go. It won't always be easy, but I am committed to making the hard decisions. If we really want to change things, we have to prioritize DEI in all its forms in every decision we make. I know now that I can count on this community to be all-in with me.



## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Our Student Body

- The diversity of our student body is one of our greatest assets and differentiators, and it must be accompanied by a focus on retention and graduation.
- As we pursue designation as a Minority-Serving Institution (HSI and AANAPISI), it has to be more than a status. We have to stand behind that distinction with investments in students.
- Students recognize the importance of DEI in becoming global citizens and leaders, and they want that relevance in their curriculum and extracurriculars.
- We need to recognize the value that our international students bring to our campus and what they require to be successful.
- There is a huge disparity in the diversity of our student body and our faculty and staff. Students want to see more faculty and staff who look like them.

### Our Faculty, Staff, and Leadership

- We still have a lot work to do in terms of recruitment and retention of diverse faculty, staff, and leadership.
- We need to focus on supports and career pathways for faculty and staff from marginalized communities.
- Our faculty and staff of non-majority identities often feel underappreciated and overtaxed for their service on DEI initiatives.

## Equity and Racial Justice

For more information on what we are already doing to address DEI on our campus, please visit the [website](#), which outlines the commitments I made in my first two weeks after meeting with faculty, staff, and students to talk about equity and racial justice. That work includes an [Equity Task Force](#) to explore many of the requests I heard from you throughout the listening sessions:

- Curriculum that reflects a commitment to social justice and DEI
- Mandatory DEI training
- Support and resources for DEI research
- Clear HR policies about how we can recruit for diversity
- Better ways to fund DEI work on our campus, not limited by student fee restrictions
- Clearer and better ways to prevent, intervene, correct, and hold each other accountable for harm in the DEI space

“We need a conceptual shift where DEI work isn’t just being dumped on those who are affected. It has to be the responsibility of the people who have been benefiting from the injustice.”

-CU Denver faculty member

## What I’m Thinking About

What do our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students, faculty, and staff need to be successful?

What will we do to recruit, retain, and develop diverse faculty, staff, and leadership?

How will our commitment to DEI be reflected in our classrooms and our curriculum?”



# LEVERAGING OUR LOCATION FOR DEEPER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

How can we be better partners and have greater impact in our own backyard?

Many of you brought up our location in downtown Denver as a primary advantage, especially for attracting student, faculty, and staff talent and creating partnerships that have a real impact. You expressed a desire to strategically expand and coordinate our partnerships to create better outcomes for our students and the community. I heard from our partners that they, too, want to engage in deeper and more intentional ways. In order to be a preferred partner, we must listen to the needs of employers and the city and help them understand how to tap into our talent.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Location, Location, Location

- Denver is a vibrant urban center within a thriving state that continues to grow and attract business and industry.
- Students want to learn here. Faculty want to teach here. Staff want to work here.
- We have close access to a wide range of city, state, and community partners for research, fundraising, internships, work-based learning, interdisciplinary programs, and recruitment pipelines.
- Many of our alumni are doing important work in government, nonprofit, and business—they are an engine for the city and surrounding communities.
- Local students can attend without leaving home—keeping their lives while earning their degrees.

### Purposeful Partnership

- We should be more strategic about how we engage with all partners—businesses, nonprofits, governments, education partners, et al.
- The way we engage our partners shapes our identity and could either help or hinder our priorities for research, experiential learning, fundraising, recruiting, and quality academic programming.
- Partnership is a two-way street. We need to do a better job communicating our value and “what’s in it for them” to the community.
- Nearby community colleges and school districts are valuable pipelines that seem to be under-tapped.

### Future Opportunities

- We have many opportunities to develop unique interdisciplinary programs that serve a purpose for the city.
- We have room to expand CU Succeed to be a true pipeline for more students to CU Denver.
- We can build on the concept of CityCenter as a venue for connecting with the city and state to address societal issues.
- We have an opportunity to increase exposure to our campus and our work by featuring the beautiful spaces on campus for external conferences and events.

## What I’m Thinking About

Creating a strategy for engaging with the city in a more meaningful way.

How to grow and align our professional and continuing education programs with the needs of employers and our region.

What it means for CityCenter to be our “front door,” physically and virtually, and how it can make us more accessible and navigable by the community.





**A CLOSER LOOK**  
RELATED TO THEME 5

# Cultivating Alumni Engagement

I heard from a variety of stakeholders, including alumni themselves, that we should do more to stay connected to alumni. That includes developing a culture of philanthropy by engaging them early as donors, but it is so much more than that.

Many alumni live locally and are ready to connect as business owners and community members to advance our mission. Alumni, especially more recent graduates, want to connect with one another to expand their social capital as they build their careers. I heard more than once that alumni are excited about opportunities to mentor current CU Denver students.

To foster this kind of meaningful involvement by alumni, we must start by fostering their connection with the university before they graduate—by providing an outstanding student experience from pre-enrollment all the way through to post-graduation, and ideally into a lifelong journey of learning and contributing back to the CU Denver community.

“We have to be really clear and honest with ourselves about who we are and who we want to be. I think it’s an important moment in that perspective.”

*-CU Denver staff member*



# CHAMPIONING ACADEMIC QUALITY, RELEVANCE, & INNOVATION

How will we educate the students of the future to meet the needs of humanity?

CU Denver is rooted in the idea that education should meet the needs of society. That commitment to providing quality, relevant, and innovative programs remains strong at CU Denver. Through this commitment I heard the clear desire from both faculty and students to improve the student learning experience through advances in pedagogy, a focus on faculty development, and flexible modalities that meet the needs of adult and working learners. To do this, we must support our faculty to build new education models and work with employers and leaders outside CU Denver to ensure we have programs that align with economic demands in our city and state.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Key Advantages

- We recognize the value and importance of quality teaching and academic rigor and want to be known for it.
- Students have robust opportunities for high-impact experiential learning including internships, undergraduate research, and creative activities.
- We have expertise and momentum in online learning that we don't want to let go of.
- There is excitement around unique program offerings that set us apart.
- We successfully pivoted to remote learning in response to COVID-19 and continue to learn from that experience to advance our teaching.

### Areas of Opportunity

- We should work more closely with employers to understand their talent needs so that we can be an effective pipeline.
- We can do more to expand online programs, digital pedagogy, and our use of technology to add value in the classroom.
- Keeping up will require that we invest in professional development for faculty to learn new and innovative ways of teaching and to adopt new education models.
- Many of you spoke to meeting the needs of more learners by modularizing our curriculum through microcredentials, stackable degrees, and certificates.
- Interdisciplinary programs are a great opportunity for us to showcase our impact and connect with the community.

“We are elite without the elitist attitude.”

-CU Denver faculty member

**What I'm Thinking About**

What will our graduates need to lead and face the challenges of the future?

How should we support continued faculty development as a part of our culture?

Do our current evaluation metrics reward faculty for innovation?

Which programs are primed for innovative approaches such as microcredentials and stackable degrees?

What technologies do we need to invest in to meet the needs of faculty and students who are involved in teaching and learning in multiple modalities?



# LEADING THE WAY THROUGH RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP, & CREATIVE ACTIVITY

Are we positioned to be problem solvers for our community and the world?

I heard your passion around research, scholarship, and creative activity and the ways CU Denver's application of knowledge has a real, tangible impact—locally and globally. This work matters as an engine of economic mobility and innovation. But you also shared with me a number of factors that have inhibited the growth of our research enterprise. As a faculty member myself, I recognize the critical nature of that enterprise to recruiting and retaining faculty talent. If we want to take CU Denver to the next level, a thriving and forward-thinking research engine must be at the center of our university. I look forward to working with you to determine how we create an entrepreneurial ecology within which to grow our research, scholarship, and creative activities.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Strengths

- We are a research university in the heart of downtown, which offers many interdisciplinary research opportunities to the benefit of our city and state.
- The [Presidential Initiative on Urban Research](#) gives us great momentum.
- Our connection to CU Anschutz offers a unique competitive advantage and could catalyze our efforts with faculty recruitment and interdisciplinary research.
- The breadth and unique combination of our schools and colleges pose an opportunity for innovative research across disciplines.
- The faculty have built a strong undergraduate research program to drive the university forward.
- The way in which we integrate research and creative activity and teaching for applied learning has been very successful.

### Challenges

- We have not created a culture, nor have we implemented policies, that prioritize and catalyze research.
- We don't have clear research priorities or brand identity.
- Our start-up packages are not competitive.
- Research administration is under-resourced for our campus.
- Our physical footprint limits the amount of lab space available for new research.
- We aren't investing enough to recruit and support graduate students with tuition benefits, health insurance, stipends, etc.
- We do not have a history of pursuing funding for endowed positions nor named spaces, the funding for which would help subsidize the growth of our research enterprise.

“Three key things that fuel our competitive advantage as it relates to research, scholarship, and creative activity:

1. Our connection to CU Anschutz and the bigger, interdisciplinary space around health;
2. The setting and opportunities for research presented by the urban environment in Denver; [and]
3. The diversity of our community.”

-CU Denver faculty member

What I'm Thinking About

How should our location impact our research agenda?

Should we develop and be known for signature research areas?

What do we need to do to attract and retain talented research faculty?

How do we better tell the story of CU Denver's impact?



THEME

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# VALUING OUR PEOPLE

This place works because of you.

Your collective opinion is that our people are one of CU Denver's greatest advantages, and I wholeheartedly agree. I was inspired by the praise that faculty and staff offered one another for being unambiguously dedicated to our students and unselfishly quick to support colleagues. Many of you shared the challenges that have come with navigating simultaneous crises over the last six months, while doing your best to balance it all with work. We must do even more as an institution to invest in and recognize the value of the people who make us great at what we do.



## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### At Our Best

- CU Denver has passionate faculty and staff who go above and beyond to serve students and the institution.
- Our faculty and staff have tremendous pride for our mission and for the progress we have made.
- Our COVID response demonstrated that we can be innovative and highly adaptable under pressure.
- We have momentum around supporting the physical and mental health and well-being of each member of our community.
- We attract incredible talent to work at the university.

### Not Meeting Expectations

- Many staff members noted the lack of career pathways and opportunities for advancement.
- We need to do a better job of promoting a culture of work-life balance. People are stretched thin.
- We need to provide support for all types of faculty—tenure and non-tenure track faculty, instructors, and lecturers—and recognize the value of all of their work.
- If we believe in employee growth, we need to invest in professional development. Supervisor training should be a priority.
- Organizational structure, titles, and promotion pathways are inconsistent and unclear.

### Your Ideas About What We Should Do...

- Recognize and respond to the strain currently affecting us all—it impacts productivity and how we show up to our work.
- Value staff service the way we value faculty service.
- Increase pay for chronically underpaid faculty and staff.
- Adopt change management strategies.
- Invite more input from faculty and staff.
- Hire a high-level Culture Champion / Chief People Officer.

What I'm  
Thinking  
About

How are we supporting  
the health and well-being  
of our employees?

Do our employees  
feel valued and  
appreciated?

Are we offering  
fair and competitive  
pay?

What types of professional  
development and training do people  
need to excel in their work?



# NAVIGATING STRUCTURAL COMPLEXITIES

It won't always be easy,  
but can we make it easier?

Universities are complicated organizations, which for us is compounded by our intricate relationships with CU Anschutz, Auraria Campus, and the University of Colorado System. It is multifaceted—from student support and employee engagement to fiscal accountability and everything in between. As you described it, I heard a mix of frustration, untapped potential, and confusion. I heard about the time and energy it takes to manage the complexities of these relationships. I want to work with you to realize the benefits of these partnerships and minimize the aggravation. I'll need your best ideas to make that happen.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### CU Anschutz

- There are benefits to our consolidation with CU Anschutz—our health pathways, research collaboration, and operational efficiencies—and we could do more to maximize those opportunities.
- Some consolidated service units are beyond capacity trying to meet the needs of two very different campuses, and there is often stress over funding for shared resources.
- In making decisions about our own systems, policies, processes, and programs, we have to be cognizant of the impact on each campus. Sometimes it seems like CU Denver's needs come second.
- Operational processes can be inefficient and cumbersome, working well for one institution, but not both.

### Auraria Campus and AHEC

- Are we competitors? Are we neighbors? Are we partners?
- Financially, there are efficiencies in our tri-institutional arrangement with the Auraria institutions and AHEC.
- Shared services, buildings, and programs present a challenge when each institution has different goals, needs, and philosophies.
- We are uniquely positioned for innovative collaborations with tri-institutional partners on Auraria Campus, and it will require a certain amount of trust on all sides.

### CU System

- What works best for us may be different than what works for the other campuses, but sometimes we are constrained by operational systems and policies dictated by the System. It impacts our communications, recruiting efforts, technology decisions, and many other areas.
- We should improve coordination with the other campuses and share resources where it makes sense.

## What I'm Thinking About

How can we take fuller advantage of our consolidation with a world-class medical and health sciences campus, in terms of education and research partnerships?

Are the shared administrative functions across CU Denver and CU Anschutz serving our needs, and where do we need to adjust?

What opportunities exist to leverage the Auraria Campus to create a stronger community for our students and to support our collective goal of helping more students get into and through college?

How can we increase our collaboration with the other CU campuses, while further differentiating our institutional brand?



**A CLOSER LOOK**  
RELATED TO THEME 9

# Transcending the Silos

At the same time as we look to hone our strategic partnerships with CU Anschutz, Auraria, and the CU System, we must look internally at the way our own systems and structures function either to support or slow down our progress. I heard about both the benefits and the challenges of our decentralized nature. While decentralization can allow us to move more quickly at the school or unit level, it also reinforces siloed thinking and has led to the creation of redundant and inefficient processes, duplication of efforts, and lack of clarity around decision-making authority and organizational structure.

I heard from you that you want increased collaboration between schools, colleges, and central service units to reach common goals. You want to remove the artificial obstacles that we have erected throughout the student journey, which may have been easier for us, but not for students. Let’s break down the silos and work together to build our future.

“We are also very disparate. We have different ways of managing, supervising, service orientation, and technology. By letting people decide what they want, it has actually created more inefficiencies across the board.”

*-CU Denver staff member*



**A CLOSER LOOK**  
RELATED TO THEME 9

# Harnessing Data & Technology

There is a clear desire to better utilize data and technology as we design and build our future. I heard you say that we are moving in the right direction, but we have a way to go before we are consistently making data-informed decisions and thinking about our technology needs from a more holistic perspective.

Our tendency has been to think about data and technology in our silos rather than putting in the time and effort to make coordinated decisions. This has led to redundancies, inconsistencies, and unforeseen issues as we try to purposely connect systems and data.

We have an opportunity to be strategic and innovative in our use of data and technology, to elevate both within our planning processes. This could lead to a more useful CRM, much-needed automation, personalization of online services (if we invest in our technology infrastructure), and a realization of Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness (OIRE) and Office of Information Technology (OIT) as true partners in every aspect of our work.



THEME  
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# SECURING OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Let's consider all the possibilities.

In nearly every listening session, I heard concerns about our financial future. And it's true: there are many unknowns as we navigate social and economic effects of the pandemic and major disruptions that have jarred higher education to its core. We don't know how much we can rely on state and federal funding. We are heavily tuition-driven, and we will need to have a more strategic position on enrollment management. We need to continue to invest in our students, our mission, and our people. To build back even stronger after this pandemic, we need to get our priorities in order, think about new streams of revenue, and make hard decisions, which we will do together.

## SUMMARY OF WHAT I HEARD

### Opportunities

- Our incentive-based budget model sets us up for success if we leverage it correctly.
- Strategic investments in scholarships and institutional aid and keeping tuition and fees low could help our bottom line and support first-time enrollment and retention.
- As we embrace our identity and align to a shared mission, vision, and values, we have the opportunity to consider how adjustments to our enrollment mix affect the budget.

### Threats

- Downward trends in state and federal funding leave gaps that we need to fill with other sources of revenue.
- Shifts in enrollment leave us vulnerable if we don't develop other funding streams.
- Without continued transparency about our financial situation and our budget, we can't make the best decisions about our future.
- A siloed approach to budgeting that doesn't take into consideration the whole of the university and our shared goals is counterproductive. We need a shared commitment to the fiscal health of the university.

### What If...

- We leverage our local partnerships for innovative revenue-generating opportunities?
- We seize this unique time in history to deeply engage our donors in supporting our mission, especially alumni who are eager to give back?
- We name every school or college thanks to donor gifts?
- We consider innovative ideas about how we keep learners engaged over time, such as a subscription model for education?

## What I'm Thinking About

How to maintain our momentum and continue to invest in our priorities given budget constraints.

How a truly strategic approach to undergraduate and graduate enrollment can help us shore up our future.

How to continuously improve upon our incentive-based budget model.

How to best position ourselves to up our game in philanthropy and increase revenue from new and existing sources.



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# Next Steps & Strategic Planning

Thank you for your honest, open appraisal of our situation. Your input over the last 100 days has given me the opportunity and foundation necessary to assess where we are today and where we need to focus our efforts from here.

While many of you said how proud you are of CU Denver's progress, nobody said we're finished. Nearly everybody said we have to go to the next level—we just need to determine what that is.

We're going to build on these themes through a strategic planning effort from now until the end of May that will chart CU Denver's future. Your valuable input will help focus our planning process and spur even more creative and innovative thinking.

During this time of immense struggle across our world, I understand that right now may seem like a difficult moment to imagine the future. However, you all shared with me that now, more than ever, the world needs a university that is affordable and measures itself on inclusivity, not exclusivity. Our students and our community need CU Denver to be that university, woven into the fabric of the city, strengthening social and economic mobility for families, expanding diverse talent pipelines for employers, contributing solutions to societal problems through research, incubating ideas that become new businesses, and advancing culture through creative work.

But we have to determine the strategies to get there, and that's exactly what we'll do together.

## Strategic Planning Timeline

- To ground and guide our efforts, we'll spend December through mid-January defining and refining our mission, vision, values, and the key characteristics for which we'd like CU Denver graduates to be known.
- From late January through mid-April, a number of working groups will convene to focus on specific topics that have grown out of my 100 Days of Listening.
- From there, we'll bring together the final products from each working group to form a cohesive and bold strategic plan. We expect to complete that by late May.

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