

### **Financial Aid**

- Financial aid is a top priority in the Division of Strategic Enrollment and Student Success and across the university because we know that our students' ability to pay for their education is one of the greatest enablers of their success.
- It's also important to keep in mind that financial aid is one of the most complex and nuanced areas in any university, requiring an in-depth understanding of how it is awarded, disbursed, applied to students' accounts. That is why in February 2022, we commissioned a study to determine strengths and potential gaps in financial aid so that we could shore up our practices and better serve our students.
- We have developed and continue to enhance our financial aid strategy and practices, and this is ongoing work. What we've done:
  - This year, we began packaging in the first week of March 2023, and we continued to package every week since then.
  - We have hired top leaders specializing in financial aid who will bring dedicated expertise to this unit.
  - We have invested in queue management technology that enables students to join a queue for more convenient wait times. And, in fact, our wait times are minimal at the moment (six to eight minutes on average). Wait times will always be longer in the first few weeks of school, which is to be expected and is true at all universities, but we are continuing to look at technological and staffing solutions to improve service delivery.
  - We are refining our practices between central administration and the schools and colleges, and that work is continuing. We have also stood up a cross-unit committee focused specifically on scholarships to more effectively disburse scholarship awards. For context, we already awarded more than \$9 million in scholarships this semester to approximately 4,000 students. We also intend to better leverage our new scholarship technology platform that we've implemented to better serve our students.
- The work is not done, but we are committed to continuous improvement in this area, and we are absolutely administratively capable of administering financial aid.

### **Student Mental Health**

#### **Overview:**

- Mental health is a top priority of the Division of Strategic Enrollment and Student Success (SESS) and the entire university.

- Our students currently have 24/7, 365 access to mental health services via our new virtual partner TELUS Health. This additional resource was put in place to give our students more access and more options to complement Counseling Center staff weather against current and future staffing challenges.
- Our Counseling Center is also serving our students well and reporting low to no wait times.
- In the Counseling Center, we are nearly fully staffed and only have three vacancies, one of which is anticipated to be filled in the coming weeks.
- In addition to our Counseling Center needs, we are also focused on case management and will be enriching this unit as well with three actions:
  - The hiring of additional case managers
  - The hiring of an in-house psychologist
  - A dedicated training program to help faculty deal with any behavioral and mental health concerns in the classroom.

#### **Background:**

- In summer 2022, we contracted with Keeling and Associates, a leading higher education consulting firm, to conduct a study of our mental health resources and operations as we prepared to welcome new leadership positions into the CU Denver Counseling Center.
- When the study was initiated, the intent was to provide SESS and academic leadership information about areas of strength and areas of opportunity in our Counseling Center with the aim of creating an environment of continuous improvement. The scope of the study was narrow, and the findings of the study reflect a specific point in time.
- The initial findings of the report were delivered in March 2023, but the report was draft only and was not updated with a fact-check following delivery. As a result, the report contains some factual errors.
- Despite these errors, leaders within SESS and the School of Education and Human Development (SEHD) agree with many of the recommendations in the report and are actively pursuing these activities and/or improvements, such as prioritizing the mental health of our students and expanding services.

#### **Student Access to Mental Health Services:**

- Through a partnership with TELUS Health, a high-quality provider of online mental health services, all of our students now have 24/7, 365 access to mental health services. This service began in April 2023.
- In addition, students can make appointments with the Counseling Center for in-person or virtual appointments.
- Students can use the Auraria Health Center for crisis walk-ins.

#### **Connection Between the Counseling Center and SEHD:**

- In addition to providing a range of mental health services for our students, the Counseling Center also serves as a practicum site for our SEHD students pursuing degrees in counseling.

- Each semester, the center hosts about 30 SEHD practicum students.
- The commitment to retain the Counseling Center as a practicum site remains strong and has never wavered.

**Staffing:**

- Like many mental health centers across the nation, we have had some historic challenges with retirements and turnover, which we have proactively addressed.
- In August 2023, a top-flight mental health expert and leader began heading our Counseling Center. This leader is working closely with CU Denver leadership as well as center staff and faculty to determine the most effective ways for us to deliver services to all of our students and the best practicum experience for our SEHD students. This evaluation is ongoing while we continue to serve students every day.
- The search for Counseling Center director has been launched, with a committee comprised of center staff, SEHD, and faculty, staff, and student governance representative.
- The Counseling Center has not experienced any budgetary reductions, and the center has not been downsized from a staffing perspective. Rather, leadership has made strategic decisions over time to adjust certain positions to make them more aligned with industry standards.
- Currently, there are three vacancies in the center, which we are actively working to fill.

**Next Steps:**

- We are evaluating the long-term funding and operational model of the Counseling Center to ensure it reflects industry best practices and provides the best and most sought-after services among our students.
- We will continue to evaluate areas where we can improve our services and experiences.