CU in the 21st century: The power to change lives

Elizabeth Hoffman

Elizabeth "Betsy" Hoffman, Ph.D., is president of the four-campus, 45,000 student University of Colorado system. She also holds the faculty position of professor in the department of economics, College of Arts and Sciences, at CU-Boulder. Prior to becoming CU president, she served as provost and vice chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where she was also a professor of economics, history, political science, psychology and a professor in the Institute of Government and Public Affairs. At UIC Hoffman managed a $1 billion budget and headed the nation's third largest health sciences center. She has published dozens of academic articles and reports, and has been a consultant to a variety of American business organizations. Hoffman holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Pennsylvania, a Ph.D. in economics from the California Institute of Technology, an M.A. in history from the University of Pennsylvania, and a B.A. in history from Smith College.

It is now known simply as "The Gift," an endowment so large that no amount of words can adequately describe it. The $250 million gift to the University of Colorado from Bill and Claudia Coleman is the largest ever to a public university. The sheer size of it has captured the attention of local and national news media, said CU President Betsy Hoffman.

The Denver Business Journal in a Jan. 19 editorial, talked about the importance of the gift: "The Colemans' generosity raises CU several notches on the list of top research institutions in the United States. It further cements the relationship between CU's Boulder campus, the Health Sciences Center and the university's other campuses. And it will seed further grants and research in promising areas of study and development."

The gift was announced in mid-January of this year, a mere five months after Betsy Hoffman became president on Sept. 1, 2000. It puts her mission to spur investment in the university on the fast track. And she is leading the charge with a do-as-I-do attitude; together with husband Dr. Brian Binger, she contributed $100,000 to CU soon after taking the reins of the presidency.

New Century

When Hoffman talks about the gift, she talks about the "New century of partnerships" and the origin of the university, which was formed the same year as the state of Colorado. "1876 was a year of tremendous ferment," said Hoffman. "Colorado was established officially as a territory, and then almost immediately became a state. The university was established as a partnership among the business community, the citizens of the new state of Colorado, and the emerging political leadership.

"The people of that territory knew then that you could not have a great state unless you had a great university that would educate the next generation of leaders to govern Colorado and build the economy."

The fledgling university in this frontier state occupied one building, in the middle of a prairie, surrounded by nothing but a sweeping horizon. The student body numbered 44 when the doors opened; the president lived in the basement and taught classes, and there was just one other professor.

CU continued to grow in size and prestige over the next 125 years. Today, thanks to the vision of its earliest citizens, Colorado's educated workforce is the bulwark of the state's economy. And the university itself is a major economic generator for the state.

"For every dollar that the state invests in the university, we find other sources of support: tuitions, federal grants, private gifts, auxiliary services. Factor in what the students and their parents spend, and what the employees spend, the gross state product we produce is about $2.2 billion, or $11 for every $1 of state investment."
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Global partnership

"We need to bring back the idea of partnership that marked the university's beginnings," said Hoffman, "and ensure that the partnership serves the entire state of Colorado." There are all kinds of partnerships, she told the Global Executive Forum. "You're all here because you care about the issues this Forum represents, and that's a partnership. The Forum brings together business people from Colorado with business leaders from around the world; that's another partnership.

"The University of Colorado at Denver, and the Institute for International Business, which organizes this Forum, is integrated with the business community and the network of neighborhoods that span the region.

"The global partnership that's represented by members of the Global Executive Forum and the work that the Institute does are extremely important in bringing the university, not just to the city and state, but to the world."

Intellectual power

The Coleman endowment will establish the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, bringing to life Hoffman's long held dream of a university where the faculty from different departments and colleges can bring their intellectual power to bear on some of the great problems of society.

Hoffman explained, "Faculty from various disciplines - genetics, special education, psychology and engineering - will research the genetic basis of cognitive disabilities in an effort to understand how to help people who are cognitively disabled learn or relearn, and to develop the appropriate assistive technologies to make their lives better."

About 20 million Americans have cognitive disabilities. This number includes people with genetic defects such as autism and Down's syndrome, and problems that can develop as a result of severe head trauma and aging.

"We hear every day about people who are severely injured from accidents and end up with cognitive disabilities or in wheelchairs," said Hoffman, adding that strokes and Alzheimer's disease are a threat to everyone and curtail a person's ability to live independently.

"If, through the research this gift will allow, we can facilitate people's ability to get out of their homes and interact with others, we can prolong their useful lives even if they have a debilitating disease like Alzheimer's.

"So you begin to think about the power of this gift not just to change the university, but to change lives."

Leveraging funds

The value of the Coleman gift goes beyond the many millions it provides. Hoffman made a promise to the Colemans that "we would take the endowment and use it to seed research projects and provide matching funds, and that we would double or triple the return on their endowment every single year."

Hoffman believes that everyone has the ability to make a major gift, relative to his or her net worth. "The $100,000 gift that Brian and I made relative to our net worth is about the same as the Colemans' gift relative to their net worth. For a recent graduate who is struggling to pay back loans, $25 a year may be as much of a stretch as $250 million was for the Colemans."
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The gift sends a message about the importance of philanthropy, "and a philanthropy about something you care about very deeply. What we're seeing is a much more hands-on approach to giving," said Hoffman. "I think there's so much joy in making a gift and then having input into how your gift is spent. And that's what we're seeing with the Colemans; they are totally hands on. They want to make sure that their gift will make the kind of difference they have always dreamed about."

Hoffman pointed out that neither Bill Coleman nor his wife Claudia is a CU grad; Bill is a graduate of the Air Force Academy and Stanford. "They got interested in CU because CU paid attention to what they cared about."

Recent gifts to the University from the business sector

Bill and Claudia Coleman: $250 million to establish the Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities, the largest gift ever given to a public university in the United States, according to an editorial in the Denver Business Journal. "Creation of the Coleman Institute marks the first time in the history of CU that an institute will encompass the entire university system. The institute will start with a partnership between the CU Boulder campus and the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center in Denver, then branch out to the remaining two campuses."

Bill Coleman is the founder and chairman of BEA Systems, Inc., a San Jose, Calif., software company.

The Anschutz Foundation: $55 million to the University assists in building the hospital's programs at its new Fitzsimons Campus. In recognition of this grant, UCH buildings currently under construction at Fitzsimons will be named The Anschutz Centers for Advanced Medicine.

BP: $10.6 million to fund the BP Center for Visualization at the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences on CU's Boulder campus. The center will focus on research and the application of new technologies.

J.D. Edwards: $5 million consisting of five suites of OneWorld® Software for CU-Denver's College of Business.

Starz Encore Group and the Anna and John J. Sie Foundation: $5 million to create the Starz Encore FilmCenter on the Denver campus.

Microsoft: $.5 million in software products to upgrade the Computer Science and Engineering department at CU-Denver.

The University of Colorado Health Sciences Center at the developing Fitzsimons Campus

The Coleman Institute for Cognitive Disabilities will be a part of CU's Health Sciences Center (UCHSC) on the site of the decommissioned Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Aurora. Between now and 2010, as the Fitzsimons campus is built out, the university will relocate the
UCHSC and the University of Colorado Hospital (UCH) from their current overcrowded Denver locations to the larger Aurora campus. The goal is to create a 21st century academic health center that will stimulate research and improve patient care.

Fitzsimons is located between Colfax and Montview avenues, slightly west of I-225. It is convenient to DIA, the world's seventh busiest international airport, and affords easy access to metro Denver's business corridors. The city of Aurora is now redeveloping the surrounding area to take advantage of the retail opportunities that will ensue.

Some of the campus construction has been completed. The Anschutz Cancer Pavilion, a $28 million facility, and the Anschutz Outpatient Pavilion, at a projected cost of $119 million, are now open.

CU President Betsy Hoffman advised that the Colorado Commission on Higher Education has authorized the start of construction on the education facility. "We have some funding for the education facility and we need to continue that funding."

In addition, "We're breaking ground this spring on the research facility, which will be all private and federally funded. The outpatient care center was all private and federally funded. The only portion of Fitzsimons that is state funded is part of the education facility, the library, and some of the infrastructure. Hoffman expects that the total funding from the state will be no more than 10 percent to 15 percent of the total budget for that project.

The Fitzsimons site also includes a biotechnology research park, which is blooming under the care of Aurora's Fitzsimons Redevelopment Authority. It will work in harmony with the UCHSC. "Faculty who work in CU's research building will be able to transfer knowledge to businesses that will be in the bioscience park," Hoffman explained.

Academic research and retail opportunities will create 18,000 jobs.

The redeveloped Fitzsimons site will elevate UCHSC/UCH in rank to the top 10 academic health centers in the country. Furthermore, its programs will have a regional, national, and international scope.