Good morning. Today, I’ll share a story about how 25 people (and counting!) are collaborating to increase CU Denver’s capacity for Inclusive Excellence. This collaboration will provide our students with a breadth of supports and reforms that no one person or office alone could provide.
Nationally, there are equity gaps in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) degree completion. These data show that one third of first-year college students intending to study STEM identify as underrepresented minority, but underrepresented minority students comprise only 1/6th of the students who earn STEM baccalaureate degrees and only 1/10th of the students who earn STEM PhDs.

There are equity gaps in STEM degree completion.
We are uncovering related equity gaps here at CU Denver. General Biology is one of the largest enrolling courses on campus, and has one of the highest DFW rates. Over the past six years there were 5,262 enrollments in General Biology 1, and 39% of those received grades of D, F, or withdrew from the course. That’s over 2000 Ds, Fs, and Ws. When we looked at DFW rates by race/ethnicity (that is, disaggregated these data by race/ethnicity) we revealed equity gaps as large as 22 points.
“...agents of equity for students of color...react to data showing inequity in educational outcomes as evidence that **something is not working.**”

- Estela Mara Bensimon  
  Co-Director, Center for Urban Education  
  University of Southern California

We take this as evidence that something is not working, and we are committed to doing something about it. But what to do? And who will do it? And how will we begin?
David Asai, Senior Director of Science Education at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, notes that past efforts to address equity gaps tend to use a deficit-minded approach to the problem that seeks to “fix the student”. It is our calling to shift focus from the students to campus culture and learning environments. Toward this end, the HHMI committed 60 million dollars through its Inclusive Excellence program to help institutions catalyze change and build their capacity for inclusive excellence.
What is Inclusive Excellence?

“Making Excellence Inclusive is AAC&U’s guiding principle for access, student success, and high-quality learning. It is designed to help colleges and universities integrate diversity, equity, and educational quality efforts into their missions and institutional operations.”

https://www.aacu.org/making-excellence-inclusive

We used the HHMI call for proposals to organize our thinking and plan our response to building CU Denver’s capacity for Inclusive Excellence. We chose to begin our work by addressing the inequitable outcomes in General Biology, and to scale the effort in later years. And we used Inclusive Excellence as our guiding principle, committing to integrate diversity, equity, and educational quality into our intervention.
In our proposal, we told the HHMI that the way forward for CU Denver was to COLLABORATE. We would rally the campus around this focused mission and work together to change the way we support our students. To do this, we would bolster four pillars supporting student success.
In the first pillar, we would conduct a comprehensive barriers assessment, bringing together qualitative and quantitative data, new and existing, and we would raise awareness of equity gaps in the sciences.
In the second pillar, we would create an *Inclusive Pedagogy Academy* to provide a coordinated, multi-year professional development experience to our faculty and staff engaged in the transformation effort.
In the third pillar, we would apply this new and existing knowledge to redesign our general biology courses using inclusive pedagogies and practices. We’d follow a persistence framework designed to bolsters student confidence and motivation through engagement in active learning, learning communities, and early research experiences as our students learn and do science and develop identities as scientists.
In the fourth pillar, we would apply new technology and experiment with new approaches to student orientation, advising, registration, and supplemental academic support. Using this data-informed, proactive approach, we would ensure that our students got access to the right courses, at the right time, and with the right academic support for their individual needs.
We would connect all of these efforts through an *Inclusive Excellence in Science Alliance*. Members of the Alliance would regularly review data, assess efforts, remove barriers, and report on our accomplishments. The Alliance would be publically accountable, celebrating successes and acknowledging failures.

This was the vision for collaboration that we proposed.
And in addition to what we’d do, we told HHMI what we’d already done! I’m breaking several PowerPoint rules to make a point here. This campus engages in meaningful efforts to support equity and student success: our administrators do, our faculty and staff do, and our student leaders do.
Collaboration is the Catalyst.

Ultimately, we conveyed to the HHMI that far more than the grant funding, or any individual resource or investment that we’ve made, collaboration is the catalyst that would drive transformational change on our campus.
If you read the description of this talk, then you know the good news already. CU Denver was selected as one of 24 institutions to receive an HHMI Inclusive Excellence award. I have the privilege to serve as Program Director for the award. But the application was prepared and the award was won by a TEAM, open to and working together for change. A team willing to collaborate, to work across boundaries, and to keep the ideals of equity and student success driving them forward.
This fall, more than 25 people from over a dozen different units on campus are beginning work on this project. We are listed here in alphabetical order. I want to acknowledge and thank every one of them. We have five challenging years ahead of us. And I want you to know that as we do this good work together over the next five years, we need and value your input. We welcome your participation. Thank you!