



University of Colorado **Denver**

## Vice Chancellor for University Communications

Leadership Profile

Fall 2020



*WittKieffer*

## Executive Summary

The University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) seeks an experienced and inspiring leader to serve as its next vice chancellor for university communications.

Part of the University of Colorado System, CU Denver is a comprehensive urban research institution in metropolitan Denver. With eight schools and colleges, the university is home to more than 15,000 students and 1,138 faculty members and offers 110 degree programs both in-person and online. Reporting directly to Chancellor Michelle Marks, who joined the CU Denver community on July 1, 2020, the new vice chancellor will serve as a strategic communications advisor and active member of the university's executive leadership.

The new vice chancellor will lead the development of a transformative marketing strategy and implement a strategic communications plans that repositions the institution. The vice chancellor will develop and lead the university's external and internal communications, news media relations, social media, and brand vision, and support efforts to recruit students, attract world-class faculty and staff, engage the civic and business communities, and motivate students, alumni, parents, and donors.

CU Denver seeks a vice chancellor who will be a skilled communicator, possess an instinct for win-win solutions, and proactively engage and develop relationships with colleagues to ensure that the interests of all constituents are understood and represented. The vice chancellor will be skilled in advancing the mission of the university as well as its reputation and identity as a leading academic and research institution. CU Denver is committed to an ethical foundation, sense of shared responsibility, and culture of trust, and the new vice chancellor must possess impeccable moral character and conviction in serving the greater good of the university.

The vice chancellor will join the university as it prepares to launch a university-wide strategic planning process in January 2021 and celebrate the university's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2023. This is a timely opportunity for an institutionally-ambitious leader to join a new chancellor and a mission-driven and dedicated executive team that, together with the full participation of CU Denver's community, is elevating the impact and reach of the university.

For information on how to apply or to submit nominations, please refer to the section, "Procedure for Candidacy" at the end of this document.

## Role of the Vice Chancellor for University Communications

At the direction of the chancellor, the vice chancellor is responsible for leading a team of roughly 15 marketing and communications professionals charged with creating the overarching strategy, goals, metrics, and tools to promote and raise the visibility of CU Denver. This includes engaging key internal and external audiences while protecting and elevating the reputation of the university.

The vice chancellor supports the Chancellor's Office in all communications needs and manages the internal communications for the institution, ensuring that the campus has timely and effective communications around critical issues, key developments, and emergencies. The new vice chancellor will also oversee a robust marketing plan across traditional, social, digital, and emerging media, and assume a leadership role in integrating and coordinating the efforts of communications and marketing professionals across the university, including enrollment marketing and communications, to ensure the university's goals and priorities are achieved.

Roles and responsibilities include:

### 1. Marketing and Brand:

- Lead the development and implementation of a branding and marketing strategy, consistent with the strategic goals, plans and aspirations of the university and market research, and in collaboration with the chancellor, other senior leaders, and key stakeholders.
- Ensure consistent messaging across all platforms including print and digital content.
- Develop and implement a marketing strategy that supports enrollment management goals.
- Engage communications professionals across CU Denver to ensure interdepartmental coordination and collaboration in efforts; facilitate brand integration to ensure that marketing materials are in line with the brand and institutional priorities.

### 2. Strategic Communications and Media Relations:

- Lead the development of a strategic communications plan that advances the university's strategic priorities through strategic storytelling, creative services and digital communications.
- Manage the implementation of a multi-faceted communications plan using broad concepts to include: strategic communications; brand, theme, and messaging; best-practice consultation; print and digital communications production; campaign event communications and marketing; and related digital communications coordination (email, website and social media).
- Lead the creation of communications and marketing materials.
- Provide vision and creativity to implement new forms of communications and marketing for the university, encompassing the latest communications formats, tools, and delivery methods.
- Oversee the university's media relations strategy, including key relationships with on-campus, regional, and national media. Develop programs and prepare key administrators to interface effectively with the media.
- Manage the resources and personnel within University Communications for strategic delivery of services. Provide leadership and mentorship to staff, both in terms of departmental strategy and professional development.

- Bring together important voices throughout the institution to clarify goals and unify messaging to strengthen engagement.
- Offer ideas and support to academic and administrative unit communications professionals, to inform and inspire an integrated approach to marketing and communications across the campus.
- Collaborate with the CU System, President's Office, Auraria Higher Education Campus (AHEC), and other University of Colorado campuses to develop and deliver cohesive and effective communications strategies that serve the best interests of both CU Denver and the CU System as a whole.

### **3. Advisor to the Chancellor:**

- Advise the chancellor on all aspects of communications and marketing.
- Serve as a strategic partner to the chancellor as the chancellor considers various initiatives and directions, and their implications.
- Serve as a member of the university's senior leadership team.

### **4. Crisis Communications:**

- Serve as lead advisor on all critical communications matters. Manage communications of difficult and sensitive university issues, including crisis and emergency communications.
- Act as University spokesperson to the public in times of institutional crisis.
- Work with university leadership and others to provide communication for internal and external audiences.
- Take the lead in ensuring accuracy of information on various platforms, especially social media.
- Strive to reinforce the trust that the public has in CU Denver through accuracy, timeliness, transparency, and integrity in crisis situations.

## **Opportunities and Expectations for Leadership**

### **University Communications Strategy**

As CU Denver strives to offer a transformational educational experience to a highly diverse and talented student body, produce world-class research, contribute to critical discourse, champion social justice, and solve the most pressing real-world challenges of the times, it requires a dynamic and nimble communications and marketing plan that is grounded in data-informed analysis and responsive to internal and external perceptions of the university. In close collaboration with the chancellor and other senior leaders, the vice chancellor will lead the effort to construct this plan, which will result in a marketing and communications campaign with consistent and clear messaging across the entire institution. The design of this plan will coincide with and complement a university-wide strategic planning effort set to begin in January 2021.

The vice chancellor will utilize internal and external partners to highlight the university's scholarly achievements, research, and teaching excellence. The plan should also build on the work of the university over the course of the last decade, reinforcing its refreshed brand and paying careful attention to efforts to differentiate itself as Denver's urban public research university. The [\*CU in the City\*](#) campaign has been an important part of this continuing effort. The university must also continue to focus on student

recruitment, enrollment, retention, outcomes, and graduation rates as a top priority, including articulating CU Denver's value proposition and impact to potential and current students and their families.

### **An Institution-Wide Voice for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

One of CU Denver's strategic priorities – foundational to the university's success – is to create a more cohesive, collaborative, and inclusive culture, ensuring that all who learn, teach, research, and work at the university feel that they belong. To that end, CU Denver has embarked on a series of [Diversity Dialogues](#), the first of which was held on November 20, 2019. Diversity Dialogues are designed to help normalize conversations about identity, culture, and other current issues at CU Denver.

Additionally, Chancellor Marks spent her first ten days in office dedicated to an extensive listening tour focused on issues of equity and racial justice impacting the CU Denver community. Chancellor Marks has made a formal [Commitment for Action](#), inspired by the conversations. The actions are set on a schedule that will have both immediate and long-term impact on the CU Denver community. Additional details about this commitment can be found on page 10 under the sub-header: *Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion*.

The new vice chancellor will implement a plan that highlights and amplifies the voices of underrepresented students, faculty, and staff as well as scholars and community partners who champion equity and social and racial justice. This plan must ensure that CU Denver is doing everything possible to adopt meaningful change as an institution unwavering in its commitment to this effort. To this end, the vice chancellor will work closely with the vice chancellor of diversity, equity, and inclusion and other university champions to ensure that this work remains visible as a university priority and is integrated into every strategic initiative. The vice chancellor will also ensure a regular and consistent plan for internal and external communications, anticipating and responding proactively to matters of global social justice, and opposing prejudice and racist actions in all their forms.

### **A New Era of Leadership**

Chancellor Marks joined the CU Denver community on July 1, 2020. She arrives at a time of multiple challenges for higher education, including racial justice and a public health pandemic as well as the ongoing priorities of student success, scholarly excellence, creating an inclusive community and fiscal stability.

As part of her commitment to CU Denver's internal and external constituencies, Chancellor Marks has prioritized ongoing and transparent communication via campus-wide listening sessions, emails, a dedicated website, and social media platforms. The vice chancellor will be a critical strategic partner to Chancellor Marks as she establishes leadership priorities, embarks upon a university-wide strategic planning effort, responds to crises in an expedient and substantive manner, and continues to place communication and transparency as a high priority.

### **Managing Infrastructure and Partnerships**

The vice chancellor will be responsible for leading a high-performing, best-practices division that effectively advances CU Denver's mission, vision, and brand. In addition to the [centralized University Communications staff](#), the vice chancellor will encourage collaboration with other decentralized [campus](#)

communications partners embedded in the university's academic and administrative units, with particularly close communication with the Chancellor's Office, Enrollment Management, and Advancement. The vice chancellor will skillfully use leadership influence and goodwill to ensure each college and unit is dedicated to following campus-wide marketing and communications policies, procedures, and guidelines.

The vice chancellor will be responsible for assessing staff and operational needs within the division and university wide to ensure that as trends change, both the division and university have the talent and resources to be effective in its work. A vice chancellor with exceptional management and mentoring skills will be key to ensuring a high-performing, customer-centric team that is ready to adapt to a fast-paced and rapidly changing higher education landscape. Each member should be valued as a university spokesperson both in front of and behind the camera.

Additionally, the vice chancellor is responsible for a \$2.5 million operating budget and will be accountable for ensuring the most efficient and effective use of financial resources.

## Professional Qualifications and Personal Qualities

The ideal candidate will be an innovative, agile and proactive professional who embraces a team environment and works with colleagues in a spirit of partnership, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. The new vice chancellor will be a confident, high energy leader who has most if not all of the following professional qualifications and personal characteristics:



- **Fit with mission:** A deep resonance with the mission and possibilities of a CU Denver education including a drive that is constantly student centered, belief in opportunity and the transformative power of education, and commitment to community; demonstrated impact in enhancing diversity, equity and inclusive excellence; a strong understanding of faculty work and the faculty world, an eagerness to tie in to the academic and intellectual enterprise of the university, an understanding and appreciation of shared governance; and an ability to take a principled position, even in times of crisis.
- **Leadership ability:** The ability to provide collaborative, visionary, creative, and galvanizing leadership to a critical office of communicators, communicators across the university, CU Denver leadership, and the broader community; a track record of inspiring collaboration and innovation, and of motivating teams; the capacity to serve as a strategic thought partner to the chancellor and other senior leaders, with the attendant skills of a creative, trusted and additive contributor to the overall

leadership of the university; and the energy, enthusiasm, credibility, and empathy to interact with colleagues at all levels of the organization in a manner that engenders buy-in and followership.

- **Expertise in branding, marketing, media relations and/or communications:** A proven track record in leading branding, marketing, media relations and/or communications planning and execution for a complex organization with a diverse set of constituencies and audiences (experience in a higher education setting of similar size and complexity is preferred). A record of developing effective integrated marketing and communications plans and strategies that support both advancement and enrollment management goals and a history of drawing upon data and analysis to inform decision making is essential. Strong knowledge of and experience working with a broad spectrum of communications vehicles, including print and social media, website, CRM, and other digital communications are expected. Experience responding appropriately and strategically to legitimate public scrutiny, sensitive public issues, and requests for information on behalf of a high-profile public institution is a plus, as is the ability to maintain professionalism, create order, and instill a sense of calm in crisis situations.
- **Management skills:** The ability to manage and develop people, programs, and operations effectively and to assess and make necessary changes to the organization and infrastructure so as to achieve objectives; promote a culture of high performance and continuous improvement; advance an approach that both values excellence and responds successfully to a high-volume, deadline-oriented environment; and carry out the many responsibilities of the role including planning, analysis, resource and budget allocation, and supervision.
- **Communication skills:** Exemplary communication skills, ability to present information effectively, and respond to questions from internal and external audiences with grace and finesse, both orally and in writing, including the capacity to formulate, articulate, and persuade a wide range of audiences around a shared vision; demonstrated skill in listening with care and working with others collaboratively to reach critical decisions, and the ability to communicate effectively about issues, decisions, and developments large and small.
- **Personal qualities:** A demonstrated confidence and ability as a senior leader with the humility to be an effective part of a collaborative and collegial senior team; a lack of ego and self-promotion, together with the desire to partner with others in service of the strongest possible effort; an ability to listen and hear ideas and thoughts from a variety of interested parties and partners and to integrate the thinking and views of others into one's own; integrity and trustworthiness; flexibility, adaptiveness, and resilience; optimism; and a sense of humor are all desired qualities.
- **Credentials:** A bachelor's degree is required and a master's degree, preferred.

## About University of Colorado Denver

### Overview

Nestled in the center of one of America's most vibrant and fastest growing cities, the University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver) is Denver's public urban research university. It educates a diverse student

body through high-quality academics, ambitious research, creative work, and civic engagement in the city it calls home. Leveraging its proximity to and partnership with so many public, nonprofit, and private sector employers, CU Denver graduates gain the powerful combination of immersive classroom and real-world applied experiences that are in demand today. CU Denver provides well-educated top talent and a new generation of knowledge to fuel the future of Denver and the region. It is *CU in the City*.

CU Denver offers more than 100 academic degree programs, from the bachelor's to doctoral level, in the heart of downtown, where more than 15,000 students pursue academic programs that range from business, health, engineering, and global energy management to music industry studies to criminal justice. As part of the state's largest public university system, CU Denver is a major contributor to the Colorado economy, with nearly 2,500 employees and an annual economic impact exceeding \$800 million.



In 2004, the Denver and Anschutz campuses were consolidated to realize enhanced mission outcomes with greater academic, administrative, and operational efficiencies. In 2014, the University of Colorado president announced that the CU Denver campus and the CU Anschutz Medical Campus would each be led by its own chancellor, reporting to the president. The institution would continue to be consolidated, and the structure would provide dedicated leadership on each campus to address their respective unique opportunities and

challenges. A number of units and programs continue to be consolidated including academic and student affairs, human resources, information technology, finance, and facilities. The consolidated services for the two campuses preserve the unity of the academic and administrative areas and allow ongoing shared services and efficiencies. The arrangement enables the CU Denver chancellor to direct the academic focus while benefiting from a close relationship with the region's premier medical campus. The two campuses remain a single academic entity, accredited by the Higher Learning Commission and classified by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education as R1, and are an integral part of the four-campus University of Colorado system. Each chancellor represents their respective campus to the external community and to the Board of Regents.

CU Denver has a diverse student body of 10,600 undergraduate and over 4,500 graduate students. 52% of the fall 2020 entering class are students of color; the campus is an emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution. Many students are first-generation college and most work while pursuing their studies. Over 30% of the undergraduate students pursue health-related degrees. The campus employs 1,800 faculty and staff and has an annual budget of \$330 million. CU Denver is located in downtown Denver, Colorado and shares the Auraria campus, which is the largest campus in the state, with two other distinct and separate institutions: Community College of Denver and Metropolitan State University of Denver. Each institution has its own neighborhood, and the three institutions maintain and manage the campus with a

shared governance model through the Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC). In addition to shared facilities (e.g., classrooms, labs, student union, library, health center) on the Auraria Campus, CU Denver owns and operates three academic and administrative buildings in the downtown's urban core.

## Current Initiatives

### Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

CU Denver is a diverse academic community that attracts students of all ages and backgrounds. It is home to 49% first-generation college students and 42% students of color from 48 states and 64 countries. The university is focused on creating a welcoming and respectful learning environment where a culture of inclusion can flourish and diversity enriches the educational experience for all. The university offers services, resources, and guidance to enhance diversity university-wide and foster a culture of inclusion.

During Chancellor Marks' first ten days in office, she embarked on an extensive listening tour dedicated to hearing from the community about how equity and racial justice impacts their personal and professional lives. After 20 listening sessions, the chancellor laid out plans to ensure a sense of equity and belonging at CU Denver. A [dedicated website](#) outlines the steps that are being taken over the course of her first year in office. Additionally, the chancellor has [outlined steps](#) that CU Denver will take to move toward becoming an even more socially and racially just academic institution, including establishing an Equity Task Force.

### Advancing Online Education

CU Denver offers more than [25 fully online degree programs and certificates](#) in order to provide a high-quality education with maximum flexibility for students, many of whom are working adults. The campus is currently part of a major initiative across all four CU campuses and the CU system administration to expand online capabilities to better deliver on its mission, broaden access for learners, and meet workforce needs.

### Investing in Technology to Strengthen the Student Experience

CU Denver, along with the three other CU campuses, is part of a CU system-wide transformation and innovation program initiative with a goal to upgrade the way technology supports all aspects of the university, with an early focus on the student lifecycle to enhance the university's student-centered, holistic approach to student success. This initiative is also exploring where CU can create additional efficiencies and synergies that link strategic planning and goals with thoughtful, intentional, and inclusive project planning, bolstered by campus engagement and change management.

## Strategic Planning

CU Denver is a diverse teaching and learning community that creates, discovers, and applies knowledge to improve the health and well-being of Colorado and the world.

In 2016, the university established five strategic priorities to guide its ongoing success as Colorado's public, urban research university. These strategic priorities include: student success, scholarly excellence, community asset, inclusive culture, and financial sustainability.

Following Chancellor Marks' [100 Days of Listening](#) tour, the university will launch a new strategic planning process to identify the university's next set of priorities. This process will begin in January 2021 with completion by June 2021.

## Safe Return: COVID-19

The University of Colorado Denver gradually returned to campus in fall 2020 with a firm commitment to provide a [flexible plan](#) designed to keep the community safe, ensure its students ongoing success, and innovate for the future. The university posts [weekly updates](#) with related news and resources and a commitment to transparency and the wellbeing of its campus community. While at the time of this publication a firm decision has not yet been made, it is anticipated that a hybrid academic experience and ongoing alternative work arrangements will continue into the spring of 2021.

A testament to CU Denver's proactive efforts, it has very promising metrics relative to the infection rate more broadly. The university continues to work with Denver Public Health and community partners to provide a safe and proactive pathway for its students, faculty, staff, and those impacted directly or indirectly by the virus.

## Leadership

### Michelle A. Marks, Ph.D., Chancellor, University of Colorado Denver



Dr. Michelle Marks has been chancellor of CU Denver since July 1, 2020. A longtime leader in higher education, Dr. Marks has the business acumen of an experienced senior administrator as well as the spirit of an academic. She is known for developing innovative programs that help students succeed, attract new student populations, facilitate research opportunities, and drive new revenue growth.

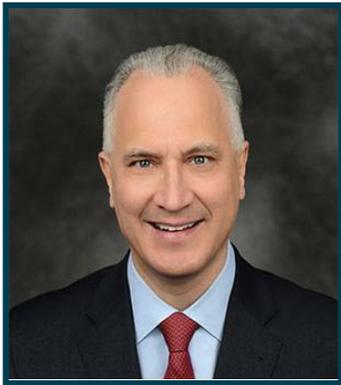
Prior to being named CU Denver's next chancellor, Dr. Marks served as vice president for academic innovation and new ventures at George Mason University. She led strategic partnerships designed to deliver online programming at scale, create pathway programming for international students, and support adult degree completion. She also forged critical relationships with businesses, government, and education institutions to support the university's mission.

Dr. Marks has extensive experience in the academic arena, having previously served as Mason's vice provost for academic affairs and associate provost for graduate education. As a professor of management in Mason's School of Business, Dr. Marks' research focused on organizational leadership development and teamwork. She has published studies illustrating the dynamic nature of the collaborative processes used by organizational teams and the critical roles of team leaders. Among the numerous awards she's received are the George Mason University Alumni of the Year Award (2017), Executive MBA Professor of the Year award (2008 and 2011), and Teaching Excellence Award (2006).

She holds a BS in psychology from James Madison University and an MA and PhD in industrial/organizational psychology from George Mason University.

In addition to her chancellor role, Dr. Marks is also a tenured professor in CU Denver's Business School.

### **Mark Kennedy, President, University of Colorado**



Mark Kennedy was named 23rd president of the University of Colorado on May 2, 2019, and officially started leading the CU system July 1, 2019. He oversees a university system with four campuses (Boulder, Colorado Springs, Denver and the Anschutz Medical Campus), more than 67,000 students, 37,000 employees and a \$4.8 billion annual budget.

Kennedy served as president at University of North Dakota from July 2016 to June 2019. He had also served as director of the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University and in the U.S. House of Representatives. He also played leadership roles at Pillsbury and the company that is today known as Macy's.

He earned a bachelor's degree from St. John's University and a master's in business administration with distinction from the University of Michigan. More about President Kennedy can be found [here](#).

### **University of Colorado Board of Regents**

The [board of regents](#) comprises nine members serving staggered six-year terms, one elected from each of Colorado's seven congressional districts and two from the state at large. The board is charged constitutionally with the general supervision of the university and the exclusive control and direction of all funds of and appropriations to the university, unless otherwise provided by law.

### **University of Colorado System**

The University of Colorado is a public research university system with four campuses: University of Colorado Boulder, University of Colorado Colorado Springs, University of Colorado Denver and University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. It is led by a president and governed by a nine-member elected Board of Regents. With more than 67,000 degree seeking students and an additional 8,000 taking courses for credit, nearly 6,500 students taking online courses exclusively, over 6,200 full-time instructional faculty and an additional 1,700 research faculty members, CU is the largest institution of higher education in Colorado and has an annual budget of \$4.8 billion. CU researchers attracted more than \$1.2 billion in sponsored research funding in fiscal year 2018-19. Academic prestige is evidenced by the university's five Nobel laureates, 10 MacArthur "genius" Fellows, 20 astronauts and 20 Rhodes Scholars. For more information about the entire CU system, go to [www.cu.edu](http://www.cu.edu).



## Denver, Colorado

Denver has established itself as a great city on many accounts. Set at the front range of the Rocky Mountains and known as the Mile High City, it is geographically stunning. Denver has a reputation for being extremely dynamic for business and livable for individuals and families. Many consider the Denver Metro area to have the perfect blend of outdoor adventure and metropolitan sophistication. It is one of the nation's fastest growing cities and in 2016 was named the best place to live in the USA by U.S. News & World Report.

While the city itself has fewer than 700,000 residents, the six-county metro area has a population approaching three million. The state of Colorado is annually ranked as one of the best states in which to do business, and Denver is known for its blend of large corporations and manufacturers as well as vibrant small business environment.

Denver has a mild, dry, mostly sunny climate (whereas the mountains receive the majority of the snow). The Denver metro area receives eight to fifteen inches of precipitation a year. As such, parks and outdoor activities are abundant in Denver. The city itself has over 200 parks, and of course, Denver is in close proximity to many prominent ski, golf, and recreation resorts.

Culture thrives in Denver. The city's diverse population supports culture through the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD). This cultural district is home to many popular attractions like The Denver Performing Arts Complex, the second-largest arts center in the nation. SCFD also offers the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, The Denver Art Museum, The Denver Zoo, and well-known Botanic Gardens. Denver is one of only a few cities to offer eight professional sports teams, and has built

new stadiums in recent years. Excellent shopping and restaurants are found throughout the city, from Cherry Creek Shopping Center to downtown's pedestrian-friendly 16th Street Mall.

As might be expected of a thriving, vibrant city, Denver is home to exceptional public and private schools, colleges and universities, religious institutions, and vibrant neighborhoods.

For more information visit [www.denver.org](http://www.denver.org) or [www.denverchamber.org](http://www.denverchamber.org).

## Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV or resume, and a letter of interest addressing the themes in this profile.

WittKieffer is assisting the University of Colorado Denver in this search. For fullest consideration, candidate materials should be received by Friday, October 23, 2020.

Application materials should be submitted using WittKieffer's [candidate portal](#).

Nominations and inquiries can be directed to:

Melissa Fincher, Jen Pickard Ph.D., Robin Mamlet  
[CUDenverUComm@wittkieffer.com](mailto:CUDenverUComm@wittkieffer.com)

*The University of Colorado Denver | Anschutz Medical Campus is committed to recruiting and supporting a diverse student body, faculty and administrative staff. The university strives to promote a culture of inclusiveness, respect, communication and understanding. We encourage applications from women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and all veterans. The University of Colorado is committed to diversity and equality in education and employment.*