

Message from Chancellor Marks



Dear Faculty and Staff,

I hope that you are well and enjoying the start of your summer.

It's been a busy and invigorating few weeks since Commencement. In late May, I had the opportunity to speak at the opening plenary of the [2022 NAFSA Conference](#), a multi-day event here in Denver that we sponsored, where we discussed CU Denver's commitment to international education. Then, [James Rojas](#), acclaimed urban planner and expert on Latino Urbanism, joined Regent Nolbert Chavez and me for a conversation about our vision to restore and preserve the historic homes along Ninth Street.

We have also had multiple opportunities in recent days and weeks to honor the impact and value of our Lynx community members. We hosted our alumni who are featured on our [new campus murals and canvases](#)—along with their families and internationally renowned artist and two-time alumnus Detour—for a wonderful event. We also officially dedicated our [new Benson Terrace](#) (what we are naming the courtyard between the Student Commons and the Lola & Rob Salazar Student Wellness Center in honor of former CU President Bruce Benson and First Lady Marcy Benson).

In early June, our College of Architecture and Planning organized a public exhibition on the Auraria Campus of the new, two-year [design build program known as Cape Shirreff](#) that our CAP scholars are conducting in partnership with the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Our talented faculty and students are helping to design eco-friendly, weather-resistant habitats that will sustain NOAA researchers in Antarctica later this year. Our School of Public Affairs is also honored to be the first and only Colorado institution selected to host the prestigious Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders, enabling us to host 25 fellows from June 8 through July 17. Most recently, our LYNX National Arts and Media summer camps kicked off last week, and it was wonderful to welcome so many passionate high school students to our beautiful downtown campus.

Suffice to say, CU Denver is alive with activity and contributing to the cultural, economic, and workforce vibrancy of our Mile High City. Our 15,000 students—70 percent of whom are on ground during the primary academic year—and our 2,200 faculty and staff contribute mightily to the vitality of our campus and our downtown and to creating the sense of community and belonging that we all determined to be critical components of [Goal 5 of our strategic plan](#).

I have been thinking a lot about how we achieve Goal 5, Becoming a Best Place to Work, and what that means in today's world. So much has changed as the pandemic forced a large portion of our global workforce to go through a remote-work experiment. And I suspect the future of work will be permanently altered. Some of you may know that my academic background is in industrial-organizational psychology—how teams work together effectively, what the optimal organizational structures are in companies, how to motivate and elevate workforces, how to optimize workplaces to enhance productivity and quality of life, among other topics. I

continue to read and absorb everything I can about my area of expertise, whether academic papers or newspaper articles, and I can attest that the future of work is a topic of much interest and debate.

As we all know, the pandemic and the resulting Great Resignation have shaken the very fabric and norms of workplaces in America and all over the world. Organizations of all sizes and in different industries are grappling with a new normal of operational excellence: how to organize, how and what to measure, how to meet and exceed service expectations, how to recruit and retain top talent, and how to manage remote work. One common thread is that everyone is still figuring this out, trying to set the gold standard for the next chapter of American employment.

In the midst of this evolution, I see optimism and a moment for us to lead. Organizations are thinking more about employee well-being and what it means to create productive, healthy, and flexible work environments. And national unemployment levels are at an all-time low. We saw some people exit the workforce to retire or stop out during the pandemic, but now we are seeing many people return to the labor market and look for new opportunities. And they are paying a lot of attention to employers that are considering how to support the longer-term career prospects and overall well-being of employees. This includes career progression opportunities, flexibility, benefits that address the changing needs of employees, professional development, and a positive, inclusive climate.

Last year we set ourselves on this path with Goal 5 of our 2030 Strategic Plan: to become a best place to work. Since I began my chancellorship two years ago this week, I heard how much people love our mission and our students, but also how we need to grow and develop into a high-performing, people-centered organization that attracts and retains exceptional talent. And we have already begun this work by forming our own human resources function under AVC of HR Teri Engelke's leadership, creating new professional development programming for supervisors and department chairs, and beginning the process of a holistic compensation review. Yet there is a lot more to do.

I see us laying out our vision for being a Best Place to Work with greater clarity and precision, from performance management and professional development to culture and wellness. And I see an opportunity and a critical business need to refocus on our mission of serving our students—most of whom are on ground—in the ways they need to be served.

As we enter this next phase of the CU Denver workplace, we have a number of big issues to address together, including flexibility, career pathways, rewards and recognition, professional development, benefits, and well-being, just to name a few. I know there is a lot of interest in this topic, as we saw in the May 25 Community Conversation when over 300 of you showed up to provide your feedback, and I have personally received feedback from some of you as well.

So, I am requesting two major actions—one short term and one longer term—to move us forward:

- By the end of the month, I have asked Vice Chancellor for Finance and Business Operations and CFO Todd Haggerty and Teri Engelke to share guidance on partial telework options for staff units. We will ask unit leaders to collaborate with deans and vice chancellors to work through staffing plans that provide our students with high-quality service that meets their needs and helps them to succeed. This guidance will be in place for the upcoming academic year as we work on our longer-term vision and approach for the future of work.
- In the early fall, under the executive leadership of Executive Vice Chancellor Jennifer Sobanet and Provost Constancio Nakuma, I will be launching a Future of Work Task Force to examine and help inform our evolving workplace

holistically and comprehensively and with representation among faculty, staff, and students. This Task Force will address a broader array of topics and aspirations that will lead us to become a Best Place to Work while ensuring that we are meeting the needs of our students and running a campus that has a large ground-based operation.

As challenging as the last two-plus years have been, it has given us the opportunity to think differently about how we come together to meet our mission of life-long learning and innovation. Just as we charted a new path for higher education in our ambitious 2030 Strategic Plan, here again we are defining a new way of working that supports our values of operational excellence, of being people- and student-centered, and of modeling a community of well-being.

Thank you for everything you do for CU Denver, our students, and our community.

Michelle Marks
Chancellor



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