

May 2024 Update from Provost Nakuma Academic Transformation, SESS Working Groups

Dear Lynx community,

As we wind down the semester, I want to express how proud I am of this CU Denver teaching and learning community you all have helped build. I commend you for doing the hard work—including asking the hard questions—on behalf of and in support of our students. Before we begin summer activities following Saturday's Commencement, I want to update you on progress made this past year on ongoing priorities in our academic and student services areas.

Academic Transformation

In September I introduced the [Academic Transformation project](#), a multiyear campuswide initiative in which we're exploring—across our community—potential evolutions on topics related to our academic operations. Doing so is important because higher education and the broader world are changing rapidly. We must ensure that our foundation of programs and human expertise is aligned with where CU Denver and society are headed. And we must ensure that faculty and staff are able to provide input on these potential evolutions in the 2024-25 academic year, before they are finalized.

More than 70 faculty, staff, and students—representing each CU Denver school and college and most major units—have participated this year in working groups on these topics:

1. [Reimagining the Core Curriculum](#)
2. [Academic Program Viability and Curricular Innovation](#)
3. [Faculty Workload Practices, Policies, and Parity](#)
4. [Time Use and Course Schedules Review](#)

Group members and charges can be found on webpages linked from the titles above.

Since fall 2023, these four working groups have cumulatively met over 60 times to study these issues, consider diverse perspectives on them, and work to recommend further actions we might take on these topics.

I reviewed progress updates from Academic Transformation working groups in April and was deeply impressed by the thought and care with which they are exploring these complex themes. Because each group has distinct considerations to address, their work is progressing at different paces. Most working groups expect to deliver initial recommendations to me early in the Fall semester, and most groups will continue into the next academic year.

One thing all four groups' recommendations will have in common: None will move forward without opportunities for CU Denver constituent dialogue. Beginning in Fall 2024, there will be community-wide information and engagement opportunities related to the project and initial recommendations, with a goal toward soliciting feedback that may enable some evolutions based on Academic Transformation recommendations to begin as soon as fall 2025.

Special thanks to Academic Transformation steering committee chairs Rich Allen, senior associate dean of academic and strategic planning at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Beth Myers, associate vice chancellor of academic planning and institutional effectiveness, for modeling great faculty/administration collaboration on this project.

SESS Working Groups

In December, I updated you on [our financial aid, scholarships, and mental health operations](#) within the Division of Strategic Enrollment and Student Success (SESS), in response to some concerns expressed about our service to students in these areas. Bolstering these campus functions underpins recruitment and retention improvements we want to see—and importantly, supporting student financial and emotional health is central to our commitment as an equity-serving institution.

SESS partners have done outstanding work to serve CU Denver students and have showed real resilience in managing change this year. To support their ability to improve operations, we convened [Scholarship](#) and [Student Health, Well-Being, and Advocacy](#) working groups to consider and devise solutions on these topics.

In early 2024, these groups assessed the state of CU Denver mental health and financial aid operations and made recommendations for better service and cross-campus coordination. Each group has sent me their final report. The [Scholarship Working Group report](#) identified ways to improve consistency, systems, training, and communication. The [Student Health, Well-Being, and Advocacy Working Group report](#) advised on ways to fund and build on existing strategic work, cross-university partnerships, and national trends.

Crucially, work on each of these fronts will continue until service improvement is achieved broadly, through mechanisms such as CU Denver's financial aid and scholarships advisory committee or a proposed mental health advisory group. I look forward to continuing work in the fall, which will add to recent progress in these areas that include:

- Financial Aid Office has successfully imported more than 12,000 FAFSA files and is actively reviewing and awarding students, and award letters will start going out to students as early as the week of May 13.
- This week, Dr. Matt Heermann begins as the director of the [Student and Community Counseling Center](#), bringing broad experience in mental health counseling in campus-based centers, including in his prior role at CU Boulder.

- The Financial Aid and Scholarship Office has hired 12 new team members since December, and is now fully staffed with 16 team members.

As we search for a [long-term SESS vice chancellor](#), I am confident that the positive trajectory we've seen under interim SESS Vice Chancellor Katie Linder will continue. Special thanks to SESS associate vice chancellors Genia Herndon, Alana Jones, Pamela Toney, and Margaret Wood for their leadership.

In Closing

This Saturday, we will celebrate the achievements and passions of 2,000+ graduates for whom CU Denver is a springboard to greater opportunity. Let us take a moment to celebrate each other and be grateful for the faculty and staff community we are invested in together. I hope you are having a productive final exams and projects week and a wonderful summer.

Constancio Nakuma, Ph.D.

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs