December 9, 2025

CU Denver Chancellor Ken Christensen
CU Denver Provost Karen Marrongelle
CU Denver Executive Vice Chancellor for Finance & Administration Ann Sherman
CU Anschutz CIO and Vice Chancellor for Information Strategy & Services Christopher Smith
CU Anschutz Interim Deputy CIO Beth Myers

RE: Critical need to address CU information systems structural problems

Dear Administrators,

We write to bring your attention to urgent and ongoing problems in the University of Colorado's interconnected information systems – particularly those of CU Denver and CU Anschutz – that result in students and employees being misnamed, misgendered, and/or inadvertently outed. These issues cause harm and create barriers to belonging, access, and student and employee success. The two core structural problems underlying these harms are:

- **Identity data barriers**: Individuals face significant challenges and limitations when updating their names, pronouns, and other identity information in university systems.
- **Systems communication challenges**: There is a lack of communication between university systems when it comes to sharing personal data.

Although piecemeal measures have been taken to address individual issues related to these systems in the past, there has been no systematic effort – to our knowledge – to holistically address these structural problems and the issues they engender.[1] This lack of a systematic approach, a general lack of attention to the problems' structural dynamics, combined with

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[1] For example, as part of CU Denver's Office for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion's (which is now the Office for Access and Campus Engagement) multi-year "Inclusive Self-Reported Demographics Initiative" changes were made last year to how employees selected their gender and sex, as well as what options they had in that selection process. Please see VC Antonio Farias university wide email "Empowering Employees to Self-Identify Gender" (November 12, 2024):
https://view.com.ucdenver.edu/?qs=ee466c1ed68ec0826e2bf6512cb2f8a6f769319eb6f385520d152d28b777355fd6f5f6282fb18355ea49c5503173c8771edb6f08239c60e91ff9b0cd97f025ced40a9a2ac1329c50c85b5344462dbd5f and Zenaida Kotala Gonzalez, "Working to Reduce Invisibility on Campus: DEI Self-Reported ID Initiative Launches," *CU Denver News*, (April 15, 2024): https://news.ucdenver.edu/working-to-reduce-invisibility-on-campus-dei-self-reported-id-initiative-launches/. Notably, the link to the Initiative cited in the story is no longer available, and it is unclear if it is still ongoing or has been stopped.

unclear ownership of the problems disproportionately impacts minoritized community members, especially LGBTQ+ people and women, among others.

For example, in terms of **identity data barriers**, when an individual changes their name – whether because of marriage, divorce, gender transition, or any other reason – it is incredibly difficult and often laborious to make those changes in CU Denver's information systems including UCDAccess, Outlook, Canvas, and Zoom among others.[2] This invariably has several adverse results including loss of work time as individuals troubleshoot basic identity information updates; the disruption of pay, benefits, and HR processes; email errors limiting individuals' ability to perform essential duties; and individuals being regularly subjected to misnaming, misgendering, identity negation, and gatekeeping.[3] Given how common name changes are, the difficulty of this process – and the emotional and practical consequences of it – should be immediately addressed.

Another example is pronouns. Not all university information systems allow for the input of personal pronouns, which is in and of itself a major issue since using a person's correct pronouns is essential for signaling basic respect for their humanity. Those systems that do allow for pronoun selection often have limited pronoun options available, and/or there are unnecessary barriers to selecting one's pronouns, such as the need to contact a system administrator rather than make the changes personally. Students, for instance, can only select one set of pronouns from a preset list of options in UCDAccess; however, if the pronouns a student uses are not listed or if a student uses more than one set of pronouns (such as she/her and they/them) with the current set up, they must choose only one set to display, negating some portion, or all of their identity. While students can select from a (limited) list of pronouns in UCDAccess, employees do not even have this option.

Using a person's stated names and pronouns is a matter of basic respect and safety. Research consistently shows that failure to acknowledge and/or respect a person's identity, including

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[2] This issue is complex and relates to various challenges including social versus legal name changes, university policies or lack thereof, the choices around what information system options are turned on or off (and thus visible for individual users), and the technological limitations of the systems that the university contracts with, among others. Members of the LGBTQ+ committee have done research on both our information systems as well as best practices for how to make university information systems accessible and inclusive. While it is not possible to relay that knowledge in the space of this letter, we are happy to work with, and indeed expect that, those tasked with addressing these issues will consult us – and other experts and affected groups – continually as solutions are brainstormed, discussed, and implemented.

[3] This kind of experience often happens when university members contact OIT, HR, and other university departments to make changes to their identity data. This is not to call out or isolate individuals or departments, but rather to point out that these are structural issues stemming from unnecessary barriers to individuals making changes themselves, a lack of clear guidelines or policies, and/or little to no education within these units about these problems. For instance, anyone has the right to change their email alias and there is no requirement to show proof of a legal name change to do so (nor should there be since many times people change their social, but not legal names and there is not a requirement in the state of Colorado to get a legal name change to get a new birth certificate issued with one's correct name); however, university members are frequently asked for such proof and repeatedly misnamed and misgendered when they call OIT to make changes.

misgendering, is linked to significantly higher rates of depression, suicidal thoughts and behaviors, as well as being subject to increased levels of violence and discrimination.[4] This is especially the case for transgender, non-binary, and intersex people, even more so at a time when these groups are increasingly under attack. These harms are not theoretical – they occur here, in our state and on our campus. The Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People in Colorado confirms that LGBTQ+ young people experience significantly *lower* rates of suicide attempts "when they have access to affirming spaces and communities" and people in their lives who "understand and support their identities and advocate for them."[5] Since research also links the failure to acknowledge an individual's gender identity to decreased academic achievement – including lower GPA, lower rates of attendance, and higher dropout rates – addressing these problems with our information systems is critical in order to ensure students feel respected, that they belong at our university, and that they can be successful in school.

In terms of **systems communication challenges**, the inability of various university information systems to sync personal data across platforms creates a host of issues, particularly because people assume if their personal data is updated in one system, then it will be updated in all.[6] To give one specific example, students often assume that when they have updated their names and pronouns in UCDAccess that information will appear in Canvas, but this is not the case. This can cause staff and faculty to incorrectly refer to students based on an inaccurate Canvas roster, causing students severe distress, to drop a class, and even fear for their safety if they have been outed as a result. For the past five years, the LGBTQ+ committee has been offering inclusion workshops that educate faculty and staff on this issue. Our committee has also compiled, shares, and regularly updates CU Denver Gender and LGBTQ+ Inclusion How-To Guides for both [Students](#) and [Employees](#), which provide specific directions on how to update names and pronouns in all university information systems. Yet, these efforts are severely under supported by the university and fall outside the purview of Faculty Assembly's (FA) responsibility.[7]

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[4] See Maria Carrasco, "Addressing the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Students," *Inside Higher Ed* (October 25, 2021): https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/10/26/lgbtq-students-face-sizable-mental-health-disparities; R. Nath, D. Matthews, S. Hobaica, T.M. Eden, A.B. Taylor, J.P. DeChants, and K. Suffredini, "2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People by State," https://storage.googleapis.com/trevor-web-public/2025/02/2024-50-State-Report-Colorado.pdf, West Hollywood, CA: The Trevor Project. (2025); The Jed Foundation, "Proud and Thriving Report and Framework: Supporting the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ High School, College and University Students," https://jedfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Proud-Thriving-Report-and-Framework-10.2021.pdf, (2021): 1-47; as well as further research available through the Human Rights Campaign available at https://welcomingschools.org/resources/research.

[5] Nath, et. al., "2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People by State," 7.

[6] Importantly, the solution to this is not necessarily to make all systems uniformly communicate (nor is this likely possible) since there are important reasons why some people have different names and pronouns listed in different systems. For example, students often don't update their information to avoid being outed to a parent. Conversations with relevant stakeholders and experts will reveal a variety of needs related to this area and thus multiple solution options such as syncing some systems, but not others; instituting a comprehensive education campaign; and communicating to students about this issue when they first enroll, etc.

[7] The LGBTQ+ committee would like to acknowledge and thank VC Antonio Farias for his office's financial support for these workshops. The fact that our university does not have a single CU Denver position dedicated to

Without proper access to and knowledge of the existing systems and a limited ability to reach the entire university community, such efforts will only ever address the symptoms, rather than the underlying causes. Without a systematic effort to both improve our information systems and educate the university community about their limitations and potential harms, these structural barriers to equity for LGBTQ+ people, women, and others will remain in place.

We acknowledge that addressing these two structural problems is challenging for a variety of reasons – not least of which is the complexity of CU's multi-campus, multi-system technological infrastructure – and will take time. Attending to these issues will require a long-term plan based on collaborative efforts, and the complicated relationship between CU Denver's and CU Anschutz's information systems will be particularly important to address. Thus, we do not expect that the two structural problems outlined in this letter will be resolved shortly; however, *complexity does not lessen the urgency*. These problems are direct barriers to achieving CU Denver's Strategic Plan Refresh Goals. Specifically, these problems directly conflict with the stated goals of "mak[ing] education work for all through access, equity, and student outcomes"; "cultivat[ing] a campuswide innovation ecosystem focused on excellence and efficiency in everything we do"; and "driv[ing] toward a flourishing university community rooted in belonging and meaningful work."[8]

Therefore, we request the following:

- that the appropriate units/administrative leads responsible for these problems be clearly identified.
- that the units/leads prioritize addressing these problems with immediate effect.
- that the units/leads consistently and deeply engage numerous university community member stakeholders and experts on these problems.
- that FA be provided with a specific, comprehensive plan of action for addressing these problems by the units/leads by April 2026.
- that in the interim, the units/leads catalogue all existing materials about how to update names, pronouns, and other personal information in systems and create a central location where all this information can be found easily.
- that FA be updated once a month, in written detail, by the units/leads about how the plan for addressing these problems is progressing until they are fully addressed.
- that once solutions are decided upon, the reasoning for those solutions is widely and clearly communicated to the entire university community as well as specifically to the consulted stakeholders, experts, and FA.

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supporting LGBTQ+ university members has meant that many issues, like those described in this letter, remain unidentified, ignored, and/or dismissed as urgent or pertinent for administrative attention.

[8] These are the most recently stated strategic plan goals as of Friday, November 14, 2025 as listed on the 2030 Strategic Plan page: https://www.ucdenver.edu/strategic-plan/plan-refresh.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this letter. We are eager and excited to work with you on these problems to make CU Denver a more equitable campus.

Respectfully,

LGBTQ+ Committee
K. Mohrman, PhD, Chair
Approved: November 14, 2025

Women's Committee
Maryam Darbeheshti, PhD, Chair
Approved: November 20, 2025

Faculty Assembly Executive Committee
Wendy Bolyard, PhD, Chair
Approved: November 18, 2025

Faculty Assembly
Approved: December 2, 2025

Student Government Association Executive Branch
Approved: December 9, 2025