

April 20, 2026

President Todd Saliman
Vice President for University Counsel Kerry C. Tipper
CU Denver Chancellor Ken Christensen
Managing Associate University Counsel Chris Puckett
Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Karen Marrongelle

RE: Treatment of student concerns by university administration and CU's contract with Open AI

Dear Administrators,

We write to express our disapproval of system and upper-level CU Denver/CU Anschutz campus administration's treatment of undergraduate student Flynn Zook, in his efforts to investigate the University of Colorado's contract with Open AI for ChatGPT Edu as well as to raise further awareness regarding student and faculty concerns about the contract.

Zook is a 3-D Graphics and Animation major in the Visual Arts Department at CU Denver. When he learned about the university's Open AI contract, he began connecting with other students and faculty to discuss concerns. This led to his organization of a Linktree to centralize information and the creation of flyers to better educate the student population about the coming contract; the flyers were distributed across campus by a group of concerned students. In turn, this led to Zook spearheading student conversations at CU Denver about AI over the last few months.

Parallel to these organizing efforts, Zook also engaged in a sustained effort to communicate in good faith with the university administration about the contract. Zook reported that he contacted the University Council of CU Denver/Anschutz on February 25, 2026, for assistance with spreading the word to other CU campuses about the Open AI contract.¹ When he received the following email response from Jenny Watson Willits, Senior Associate University Counsel for CU Anschutz, on February 27, it was with nearly all other recipients of Zook's initial email included in her reply: "Closing the loop on this one. I don't think a response is required from our office, but I am happy to use AI to draft one."² One cannot help but view this remark as an insult at Zook's expense, as well as at the expense of all students and faculty whose concerns he represents.

Also on February 25, 2026, Zook contacted the Office of the President (University Leadership Team) with an email outlining student and faculty concerns about the Open AI contract, but he reports to us that he received only "a boilerplate email repeating the same things that the CU GenAI page already covers" and no "concrete answers to the faculty and student concerns expressed." Instead, he received recycled assurances such as "you and your fellow students'

¹ Zook's email was addressed to Alison Adnan, Sahian Almaza, Cheryl Espinoza, Karyn Hardy, Amy Lopez, Carrie McVay, Chris Puckett, Jordan Ross, Kimberly Spiering, Jenny Watson Willits, and Steve Zweck-Bronner.

² Sahian Almanza was not included in Willits' reply.

success, both at CU and following graduation, was a primary factor in our decision to contract with ChatGPT” and “there are challenges and opportunities in everything we do, and we believe the benefits of proactively and equitably providing and supporting safe, responsible use of the tool is the right path forward.” Following this email response, dated March 3, 2026, Zook sent an “email request for an in-person meeting” on the same day, for which he reports having received no response, as of the writing of this letter. Zook also shared that when he attempted to set up an in-person meeting with CU President Todd Saliman, he was given the phone number of President Saliman’s executive assistant, Connie Johnson. When Zook called Johnson on the morning of March 2, 2026, “she told [him] she would look into how these concerns [about the Open AI contract] were being addressed and call [him] back.” Zook reports that, as of the writing of this letter, he has not received the promised return call.

However, the most public and egregious response to the concerns that Zook raises came from CU Denver Chancellor Ken Christensen at a CU Denver Faculty Assembly meeting from 12:30-2:30 pm on March 3, 2026, attended by sixty other people, including a member of the press, CPR education reporter Jenny Brundin.³ Zook was invited by Faculty Assembly leadership to present student concerns about the Open AI contract at the meeting. Zook provided a clear and impressive overview of the work he and his fellow student organizers had been doing, including the fact that they had conducted an independent survey of students which had received 270 responses over the course of only two weeks, with 93% of student respondents - from disciplines as diverse as arts, architecture, engineering, business, math, psychology, public health, and criminal justice among others - indicating that they opposed the contract. Zook relayed that he and his peers also learned from the survey that many students had only heard of the contract through peer-organized communications (such as Zook’s), not official channels. Mirroring the concerns of many faculty, the survey identified key student objections to the contract related to lack of transparency; ethical concerns; the (then planned) mid-semester implementation; no student voice in the decision-making process; and concerns about why implementation was occurring before any AI literacy infrastructure was put in place or before faculty could properly prepare the curriculum for AI integration.

Despite Zook’s organized and professional presentation (an impression shared by several faculty members both during and after the meeting), which also included an account of the communication he had thus far attempted with university administration, Chancellor Christensen responded dismissively, and with what several faculty members have described as contempt. Indeed, three of the FA LGBTQ+ committee members who were present at the meeting witnessed this treatment, and several other attendees have shared similar assessments of Zook’s treatment by the Chancellor with our committee. For example, here are the comments of a faculty member in attendance at the meeting, who wishes to remain anonymous, about Zook’s treatment at the meeting:

³ For a full list of attendees and a rundown of the discussion, please see the CU Denver Faculty Assembly Meeting Minutes from the day in question available on the Faculty Assembly webpage: https://www.ucdenver.edu/docs/librariesprovider280/faculty-assembly/faculty-assembly-meeting-materials/minutes-march-2026.pdf?sfvrsn=4d97b6b4_1.

I attended the March 3, 2026 FA meeting in person. The Chancellor and Provost were in attendance, alongside the membership, several other administrators, and a student, Flynn Zook. A large portion of the conversation was about ChatGPT.

I had not met Flynn prior to the meeting but was really impressed with the work they had done researching and conducting field work on the ChatGPT contract recently signed by the CU System. I was even more impressed by Flynn's willingness to share their findings and concerns at a faculty governance meeting. Speaking critically in a public forum where leadership is present takes courage, even for the most seasoned and senior members of the faculty.

I learned about the survey Flynn conducted (n = roughly 275, I think) in their free time, the conversations they had with others on our campus and across the System, and the findings they made doing independent research. For me, Flynn's comments at the meeting represented everything I love about our students and that I value in higher education: Curiosity, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, hard work, intellectual independence, social problem solving, campus and community engagement, and the public service-oriented mindset that sets CU Denver apart from so many other universities.

For these reasons, I was surprised and dismayed by the response to Flynn's comments offered by the Chancellor. The Chancellor's response was dismissive; to me, he appeared visibly annoyed at Flynn and also frustrated. The Chancellor took up none of Flynn's concerns or questions, instead he just pointed upward and referred them to System: 'That's a system issue.' This is not an appropriate response to students, and certainly not in a public setting in which Flynn might have reasonably felt embarrassed, marginalized, or even intimidated by the abrupt and cold response from our top leadership. I was personally embarrassed and ashamed by the Chancellor's response to our student.

Similarly, another faculty member shared in an email with the Provost a few days after the meeting that "[Chancellor Christensen] even told the student who was [at the FA meeting], Flynn Zook, to follow-up with 'system.' Given the university's focus on student success, I find it unacceptable that the Chancellor would not directly address student concerns."

Most important, however, is Zook's own assessment of how he was treated. He explains how the Chancellor "fully dismissed the student efforts and opinions gathered about the OpenAI contract during the faculty assembly meeting by saying 'there was a variety of opinion.'" We add to Zook's observation that the fact that there is a variety of opinion on the subject of CU's contract with Open AI (or any other subject for that matter) does not serve as sufficient justification - or any justification at all - to dismiss, pass on, or treat with disdain a student's concerns, let alone concerns shared by hundreds of students. Mirroring faculty disappointment in the testimonies we have provided above, Zook notes that the Chancellor seemed to "shift blame off himself and told me to direct the student and faculty questions to the Systems Office. When I asked for further information on contacting the systems office, the Chancellor told me that my emails were working, and to keep emailing, despite my having received no responses to any of my emails. [He] kept stating that 'we are in the same position as you, but [you] have to work with what you're given'; however, with student and faculty effort we [successfully] managed to delay the contract implementation for students."

Put simply, we find the university administration's treatment of Zook unconscionable. We are particularly shocked and appalled by the way he was communicated with via email by Jenny Watson Willits, Senior Associate University Counsel for CU Anschutz on February 25, 2026 and spoken to by CU Denver Chancellor Ken Christensen at the Faculty Assembly meeting on March 3, 2026. We feel strongly that these incidents require direct apologies. We also agree that Zook deserves an apology from system administration for the lack of clear, transparent, and

substantive communication in response to his numerous queries. That said, we defer to Zook in identifying what future action is needed and appropriate since he is the injured party.

Beyond the specific treatment of Zook by university administration, by extension the implied treatment of students and faculty who share Zook's critiques of the Open AI contract is also of primary and grave concern to this body. We are disappointed, but unfortunately not surprised, to hear of the administration's dismissal of community concerns related to their opaque decision making around an issue that will have such massive implications for the university community, concerns that have been substantially documented, and continued to be articulated, in this [document](#) provided by CU Denver's FA as well as at the recent Regent's monthly meeting on April 16, 2026 during the public comment period from 1:00-2:00 pm by members of all four campuses. However, our lack of surprise should not be mistaken for apathy. Moving forward we expect that, with immediate effect, the following actions are taken:

- creation of a comprehensive and transparent public webpage where all community members can learn about CU's contract with Open AI;
- establishment of an avenue for students to provide feedback about CU's contract with Open AI at both the system and campus levels;
- response to student feedback in a timely and substantive manner; and that
- system send a knowledgeable representative to discuss CU's contract with Open AI at CU Denver's next Faculty Assembly meeting on May 5, 2026 from 12:30-2:30 pm.

Respectfully,

LGBTQ+ Committee

K. Mohrman, PhD, Chair

Faculty Assembly Executive Committee

Wendy Bolyard, PhD, Chair

April 28, 2026

Faculty Assembly

May 5, 2026