



January 29, 2024

To: Sasha Breger Bush

From: Constancio Nakuma, Executive Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs

Cc: Michelle Marks, Chancellor

Subject: Follow-up on 11/13 memo, 11/29 meeting

Dear Sasha,

I hope you and our Faculty Assembly colleagues are having a productive start to the semester. I look forward to our work together and appreciate your dedication and commitment to issues on our agenda in the year ahead.

I am writing in response to your Nov. 13 memo that included recommendations and suggestions for my consideration, and to follow up on our Nov. 29 meeting where we began to discuss productive ways to collaborate on important issues affecting our work. We share a desire not only for CU Denver's success, but also for the success of our students and the personal and professional fulfillment of our faculty and staff who choose to advance their careers here.

Thank you for the recognition in your memo of important initiatives we have undertaken in partnership with our faculty and staff, such as working to improve communication and to address IRC faculty issues. I also acknowledge your concerns about issues on which we must make further progress, and to which I, and those who report to me, have been devoting additional attention already. I recognize that ensuring accountability is key to achieving progress, and I am personally committed to it.

Below, I will provide updates on recent activities along the themes you have outlined in November communications references above.

Ongoing Collaboration Between Provost and Shared Governance

We have common ground in the notion that shared governance plays a central role in advancing this university—and in ensuring that interrelations and interactions between shared governance groups and university administration not only mirror higher education best practices, but also CU Denver's values of inclusion and respect.

Regarding the State of Faculty Shared Governance Report: We are now moving forward to produce this report, which will review existing structures/practices and yield recommendations for follow-up and action. As you know, we have developed a project workplan, have begun reviewing bylaws, and will begin data collection in late February. Along with AVC Kayaoglu,

project leads include the Office of Faculty Affairs (OFA) Fellow, Peter Anthamatem (on a compensated basis), who was selected with faculty governance approval based on his extensive track record with CU Denver shared governance, including as Faculty Assembly chair. As you are aware, the workplan was shared with Faculty Assembly's executive committee in December, and was discussed with deans at a Jan. 24th meeting that you and UCDALI President Beth Pugliano attended.

This report's work will consider varied elements of schools and college shared governance structures and bylaws, and will include interviews with school and college administrators and elected faculty leaders. It also will include a survey of faculty to better understand their experiences and views on shared governance. Faculty Assembly and deans can expect to review a draft report early this spring, with the goal to finalize and publish later in the spring for community awareness.

Regarding the Standards of Shared Governance document prepared by the Office of the Provost that outlines elements of shared governance development and function, AVC Kayaoglu and OFA Fellow Anthamatem will explore the feasibility of turning the Standards of Shared Governance documents into a policy or finalizing it as guidance, and will bring a recommendation to Faculty Assembly and deans.

We have also supported Faculty Assembly's request for assistance with bylaws compliance. For example, we reinforced at the Dec. 13 dean's meeting that Faculty Assembly members and committee members must be elected (rather than dean-appointed), and we reinforced and formalized this guidance in a memo shared with the deans on Dec. 15.

Regarding the ongoing issue of Faculty Course Questionnaires (FCQs) on our mutual radar, and discussed further at our Nov. 29 meeting. As you are aware, we implemented Faculty Assembly's request, for the Fall 2023 FCQ cycle, that Canvas shells have a banner outlining FCQ usage and confidentiality language. I also reiterate our financial and organizational support for a faculty task force to study effective teaching assessment tools and come up with recommendations to FA for further discussion, similar to work done by our DEI office last summer related to FAR.

We also continue to prioritize support for shared governance activities. While administrative units (including OFA) are being asked to identify budget reductions during this realignment period, Faculty Assembly's FY25 budget, which is included in the OFA's overall budget, was protected from any cuts.

Recognizing the importance of IRC faculty, the Office of the Provost highlighted major progress toward [2022-25 IRC Roadmap goals](#). These include expanding multi-year contracts and—based on IRC promotion-compensation increases standardized in CAP 1007—applying these new rates to IRC faculty [promoted within the past 10 years](#), thereby reflecting an ongoing institutional budget investment in this important faculty cohort. In alignment with our promotion

compensation processes, central administration augments unit budgets with these increases in the first year, and unit budgets account for them going forward.

I am grateful for UCDALI chair Pugliano, IRC Roadmap Advisory Committee members, and numerous CU Denver faculty working to enhance conditions for IRC faculty. In terms of impacts of this investment on pay compression, HR is undertaking a gap analysis this semester as part of its Comprehensive Compensation Collaborative work to be completed later this year, at which time key project outcomes including on pay compression will be reported.

Frequent and Regular Communication

I reiterate my sincere and ongoing desire for meaningful conversation with faculty and staff stakeholders, as reflected above and in my [Oct. 30 memo](#).

I will continue to provide updates and respond to feedback at monthly FA meetings, as is feasible, and to periodically supplement with topical updates by team members. I also will establish a regular periodic communication, to cover noteworthy updates on academic and student affairs, which may also feature updates from key Provost team members, including on SESS priority areas outlined in [my Dec. 21 memo](#). One topic for periodic updates this year would be our Academic Transformation Working Groups—itsself a fitting example of cross-functional faculty and administrative teams working on issues affecting our learning environment.

I recognize that communication lines between SESS and other CU Denver units can be further developed, and it is a priority of interim SESS head Katie Linder (who has established monthly one-on-one meetings with you) and SESS AVCs to do so throughout the unit transition.

Regarding other in-person faculty/administration engagements, I look forward to joining Chancellor Marks for school and college unit visits this spring, as I did last fall with operational units. I also will continue to participate in topical community information sessions—as I did for our Oct. 2023 budget realignment session, and as is my goal for sessions through this academic year.

Ensuring Robust Mental Health and Financial Aid Support

Improving mental health and financial aid support operations are among CU Denver's highest priorities. In [this Dec. 5 campus memo](#), I outlined some immediate and sustained action steps we are taking on these topics along with AVC Genia Herndon (on student mental health), AVC Pam Toney (on financial aid), and partners across campus. These include new working groups on mental health and scholarships, and a financial aid and scholarships advisory committee whose members include a range of campus community members. These working groups are meeting regularly and expect to deliver reports with recommendations later this spring.

Many questions from your Nov. 13 memo are being addressed through the work of these groups. As I reinforced in my [Dec. 21 campus memo](#), I am personally committed to further enhancement in and transparency about priority SESS topics, including more engagement with the AVCs leading these crucial student services. In addition to our regular discussion of enrollment-related topics in Cabinet (as often as weekly) and in Dean's meetings, we also now have made it a standing topic at CACB meetings; on Feb. 22, we will hold an enrollment information session for the CU Denver community at which current enrollment and retention trends and activities will be discussed. I also understand you have now received a copy of the Financial Aid assessment conducted in 2022-23, in support of added transparency.

Recent activities reflect some progress in these areas. Regarding mental health services, we have had several new hires since Sept. 1 (including the director role on a term basis) to fill open positions, and we have several ongoing recruitments to get us closer to sustainable long-term staffing at optimal levels.

The Financial Aid & Scholarships Office has added seven new hires since Sept. 1 (including a new director of financial aid), with an additional three people joining the team in February. We have made strong progress on packaging for financial aid applicants registered for Spring 2024. Nearly 100% of continuing students have been packaged, as are nearly all incoming Spring 2024 students—except for those from whom we need additional documents. Our team is prioritizing outreach to these remaining students to get necessary documentation and accelerate the processing of their packages.

While we have more work to do to enhance the robustness of our financial aid, scholarships, and mental health units, our increasing responsiveness to student needs on varied fronts is a promising indicator that we are moving in the right direction. We can now report that more Lynx Central calls are being answered live and average wait times have been reduced to 7 minutes (based on data the week before Spring 2024 began, compared with that same week in 2023), and we have worked to manage service challenges during high-volume periods by coordinating with operational teams in Financial Aid, Registrar, Bursar, and Student Services to provide backup support to the Lynx Central team.

Another area where attention and transparency are critical is enrollment: this is the topic of our Feb. 22 info session referenced above. While our overall enrollment has declined, we have done great work to improve retention, better serving students who do enroll. We have seen improvement in our first-year Fall to Spring persistence rates (from 86% to 87%), as well as improved continuing student enrollment rates (from 79% to 80.3%). By increasing enrollment and retention—aided by strategic marketing, better data analysis, and better student services coordination—we can reverse this declining trend.

Other Operational Considerations

I want to provide updates on two other areas referenced in your Nov. 13 memo that we discussed briefly in our Nov. 29 meeting.

Performance Management: I agree that accountability is of importance for institutional success. We have initiated review and conversation about Boulder's Provost review model (including with CU Boulder Provost Russell Moore) referenced in your memo, and will continue exploring this model in the coming weeks, with the goal of presenting a Provost performance management proposal to the Chancellor by late spring 2024.

Third-Party Reporting: I continue to agree that increased attention to CU Denver third-party engagements is important. My Oct. 30 memo suggested some initial proposed actions that would require further exploration. I understand that you have followed up on this issue with the Chancellor and with Managing University Counsel Chris Puckett, AVC Kayaoglu, and AVC engelke to delve into this topic further, and my understanding is that dialogue on this topic is ongoing. The Chancellor and I would like to see some recommendations from Counsel for consideration by fall 2024.

Continuing to Build Trust

Concerns raised by Faculty Assembly these past few months have offered all of us an opportunity to reflect on how we engage with one another to build trust and grow to be a stronger university community. There are areas in which I can grow as the chief academic officer to help CU Denver stakeholders work more harmoniously, and the same has to be true of each of us as well. Governance, when properly shared, can demand no less. I will always appreciate the value of having important questions raised and the opportunity to respond and address them thoughtfully and methodically and, just as importantly, I trust that our shared commitment to the success of our students will motivate us all always to choose collaboration over conflict.

I hope that through increased engagement, we will continue to build trust, so we can best align our time and resources toward our mutual goal of making this a great place for students to learn and for faculty and staff to work.

I appreciate your efforts, and those of our faculty colleagues, to ensure that my work on behalf of CU Denver's students, faculty, staff, and many other stakeholders is executed with utmost effectiveness. I am committed to working to improve the productivity of our partnership on behalf of CU Denver.

Sincerely,



Constancio Nakuma

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs