UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER
HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION ACCREDITATION 2020
ASSURANCE REVIEW

Draft for Campus Review
September 16, 2019

Criterion 4. Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement

The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs, learning environments and support services, and it evaluates their effectiveness for student learning through processes designed to promote continuous improvement.

4.A. The institution demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs.

1. The institution maintains a practice of regular program reviews.
2. The institution evaluates all the credit that it transcripts, including what it awards for experiential learning or other forms of prior learning, or relies on the evaluation of responsible third parties.
3. The institution has policies that assure the quality of the credit it accepts in transfer.
4. The institution maintains and exercises authority over the prerequisites for courses, rigor of courses, expectations for student learning, access to learning resources, and faculty qualifications for all its programs, including dual credit programs. It assures that its dual credit courses or programs for high school students are equivalent in learning outcomes and levels of achievement to its higher education curriculum.
5. The institution maintains specialized accreditation for its programs as appropriate to its educational purposes.
6. The institution evaluates the success of its graduates. The institution assures that the degree or certificate programs it represents as preparation for advanced study or employment accomplish these purposes. For all programs, the institution looks to indicators it deems appropriate to its mission, such as employment rates, admission rates to advanced degree programs, and participation rates in fellowships, internships and special programs (e.g., Peace Corps and Americorps).

4.A.1. CU Boulder rigorously reviews its academic programs on a regular schedule through the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee (ARPAC), which reports to the provost (see 3.A.1. and 3.A.2.). The program review process ensures that the degrees, minors, certificates and courses offered by academic programs and by other programs that sponsor academic credentials (such as institutes that sponsor certificates) meet CU Boulder standards and meet the needs of our students.

4.A.2. CU Boulder evaluates all the credit that it transcripts. The criteria and processes for evaluating transfer credit are published in the university catalog and on the transfer student admissions information page. Essentially, transfer credit evaluation is a two-step process. (1) The Office of Admissions performs an initial evaluation of transfer credit after an applicant has been admitted. (2)
Each college or school, in accordance with its policies, determines whether transferable credits are or are not applicable to graduation requirements for a particular college, school or major (see 4.A.3.). Colleges and schools also establish their own guidelines as to the maximum number of semester credit hours that may transfer; the minimum number of semester credit hours that must be completed on the Boulder campus to receive a degree; the minimum number of semester credit hours that must be completed as a degree student in residence on the Boulder campus to receive an undergraduate degree; the maximum number of semester credit hours earned through correspondence or in a similar format that may apply to degree or major requirements; and the content and the age (maximum: 10 years) of credit hours that may apply to degree or major requirements. Coursework completed at other campuses in the University of Colorado System is treated as transfer credit, according to University of Colorado policy (APS 8005).

4.A.3. As outlined in the CU Boulder policy on transfer credit, coursework of comparable content and scope to the CU Boulder undergraduate curriculum will generally be transferred if it was completed at colleges or universities accredited by a regional accrediting body recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). For international colleges or universities, the international equivalent of regional accreditation or Ministry of Education recognition will be considered. If coursework was completed at a school not regionally accredited, the student may request that coursework be considered for transfer. CU Boulder uses the factors recommended by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers when making its decision, including the educational quality of the sending institution, the comparability of credit to be transferred, applicability of the credit in relation to the programs offered at CU Boulder, and additional documentation that students may be required to provide. As described in 4.A.2., however, acceptance of transfer credit does not mean those courses will be applied to the degree requirements of a particular college, school or major. Colleges, schools and departments make these decisions by consulting with faculty with expertise in the relevant discipline or area. Students may appeal decisions on the transferability of coursework as specified in the policy on transfer credit.

Courses in which the grade earned was below a C– (1.70) are not accepted for transfer credit. Other course credits not accepted for transfer credit include:

- Courses identified as remedial/developmental
- Vocational-technical courses offered at two-year and proprietary institutions
- Courses in religion that constitute specialized religious training or are doctrinal in nature
- Credits earned for work experience or through a cooperative education program
- Credits earned through outdoor leadership education
- Credits earned through physical education activity
- Credits identified as college orientation

The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) has developed a Guaranteed Transfer (GT) Pathways General Education Curriculum for courses that will apply to most bachelor’s degrees at every public Colorado college and university. CU Boulder participates in the GT Pathways program with a specific list of courses that are regularly reviewed for reapproval by the CDHE. The GT Pathways courses do not apply to some degrees at CU Boulder.

In 2018, the CDHE instituted a policy on prior learning assessment to implement new state statutes. CU Boulder conforms to this policy by allowing students to obtain credit for CU Boulder GT Pathways courses through examination (AP, IB, CLEP and DANTES) or portfolio review. The same CDHE policy
requires that military and veteran students be awarded GT Pathways credit for designated military
schooling, including courses and occupations, and for qualifying scores on Defense Language Proficiency
tests. CU Boulder has developed a policy and guidelines for evaluating military credit and applying
transferable credit toward either general education requirements or elective credit. The applicability of
both GT Pathways and military transfer credits to specific degree or major requirements is subject to the
determination of the college or school and department, as described above.

College-level work taken during high school is evaluated in accordance with general guidelines for
transfer credit at CU Boulder. Transfer credits for graduate degree programs are accepted by CU Boulder
only after approval by the department/program and under the special conditions outlined in the rules of
the Graduate School.

In February 2019, a committee appointed by the provost to examine policies and practices regarding
transfer students recommended that CU Boulder “create processes for faster early analysis of transfer
credit for prospective, incoming and current transfer students, and for faster mapping of transfer credit
onto CU Boulder college/school and major requirements.” This committee’s work was the first stage of a
concerted effort to improve CU Boulder’s preparation, recruitment and advising of students who are
interested in transferring to the university. A number of projects in this regard are being planned and
implemented through the Financial Futures strategic initiative (see 1.A.3.). For example, additional
pretransfer advisors are being hired to give students a better idea, before they enroll at CU Boulder, of
how many of their credits will transfer.

4.A.4. In accordance with the Laws of the University of Colorado Board of Regents, CU Boulder faculty
maintain authority over the curriculum, including all prerequisites for courses (see 3.C.1.). Regent Policy
4 designates the dean of each college or school as responsible for academic and administrative matters,
including curriculum. The ultimate authority over academic matters at CU Boulder is the provost, to
whom the deans of the colleges and schools report. All of these levels of governance maintain academic
rigor and set expectations for student learning. The quality of the education CU Boulder gives its
students is ultimately assessed and confirmed on a regular basis by the process of program review (see
3.A.1., 3.A.2. and 4.A.1.), which also engages all of these levels of governance. Program review is based
in and overseen by faculty assessment. A faculty committee, the Academic Review and Planning
Advisory Committee (ARPAC), assesses a self-study provided by the faculty of a unit, an internal review
by campus faculty outside the unit, and an external review by disciplinary experts at peer institutions.
ARPAC makes recommendations to the provost for action on the part of the department and its college
or school; those actions are then reported back to and assessed by ARPAC in subsequent years. This
iterative process of self-improvement ensures that CU Boulder’s academic programs maintain a
consistently high quality that meets the standards for academic rigor and effectiveness appropriate to
an institution of our mission and status.

Specific processes for course review, assessment of access to learning resources, and review of faculty
credentials assist in maintaining academic rigor and effectiveness. The approval and review process for
new and existing courses, academic programs, and other academic credentials is described in 3.A.1. and
3.A.2., and the approval and review process for CU Boulder’s two dual credit courses is discussed in
qualifications of and review processes for faculty, including instructors of dual credit courses, are
4.A.5. A number of academic programs at CU Boulder maintain specialized accreditation. All specialized accreditations are up to date with no adverse actions. In 2018, the School of Education voluntarily declined to renew the accreditation of its teaching licensure program by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the successor to the School of Education’s former accrediting agency, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The School of Education’s teaching licensure programs are Approved Educator Preparation Programs by the Colorado Department of Higher Education, as is the clinical audiology program in the Department of Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences.

4.A.6. In tracking and evaluating the success of our graduates, CU Boulder uses indicators appropriate to its statutory mission as a flagship research university engaged in graduate education; its mission as a University of Colorado campus to meet the educational and workforce needs of Colorado and its residents; and its own strategic imperatives to shape tomorrow’s leaders and positively impact humanity (see 1.A.1.). These indicators include data related to graduates’ employment, satisfaction with their education, placement in graduate and professional schools, and engagement with improving the public good.

To better understand the postgraduation activities of CU Boulder undergraduate degree recipients, the Office of Data Analytics (ODA) has partnered with EMSI Labor Market Analytics to create alumni employment profiles for graduates from 1997 to the present. The results show undergraduate alumni salaries, job titles and employers and may be broken down by school, college or program, major, and also whether a student pursued graduate studies. CU Boulder also tracks the first postgraduation destinations of all its degree recipients through the Graduate Destinations Survey, administered six months after graduation. Results, which may be broken down by major and degree level (bachelor’s, master’s, doctoral) show in what industries/sectors recent graduates are employed, their geographical locations, their salaries, and where they are attending graduate school. A 2016 survey of alumni from all four University of Colorado campuses garnered almost 11,000 responses from CU Boulder graduates and showed a very high rate of satisfaction (96%) with the education received at CU Boulder. Results broken down by year of graduation and by the ethnicity of respondents showed a satisfaction rate of 91% or higher for every group of alumni.

CU Boulder also tracks the success of its students in particular postgraduation programs and professional fields. As required by its accreditor, the American Bar Association, the law school tracks and publicizes bar passage rates and employment outcomes for its graduates. The Office of Top Scholarships tracks CU Boulder students’ impressive achievements in becoming winners or finalists for scholarships/fellowships such as the Rhodes, Marshall, Truman and Fulbright, among others. The Peace Corps, which annually announces the colleges and universities producing the most Peace Corps volunteers, tracks CU Boulder at No. 5 for total Peace Corps volunteers since the organization was founded in 1961.

4.B. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational achievement and improvement through ongoing assessment of student learning.

1. The institution has clearly stated goals for student learning and effective processes for assessment of student learning and achievement of learning goals.

2. The institution assesses achievement of the learning outcomes that it claims for its curricular and co-curricular programs.
3. The institution uses the information gained from assessment to improve student learning.
4. The institution’s processes and methodologies to assess student learning reflect good practice, including the substantial participation of faculty and other instructional staff members.

4.B.1. CU Boulder has clearly stated goals for student learning for all baccalaureate degrees and is in the process of helping all academic programs articulate learning goals for all undergraduate degree programs. About one-third of undergraduate degree programs now state goals for student learning in the catalog. Other programs have articulated learning goals as part of the program’s specialized accreditation but have not yet formatted those learning goals for publication in the catalog. For example, accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music requires the College of Music to specify the purposes, content, and core competencies of each of its undergraduate degrees, and each of the programs in the College of Engineering and Applied Science accredited by ABET reports annually on its educational objectives and student learning outcomes, but these colleges’ student learning goals have not yet been included uniformly in the catalog. Other programs are in the process of articulating their goals for student learning, and others have not begun. The same spectrum of completion applies to the assessment of undergraduate student learning: many academic programs have a robust and effective assessment protocol in place, whereas others are beginning to do so and others have not begun.

Starting in AY 2017–18, CU Boulder began to commit the resources and design the processes necessary to make the articulation and assessment of student learning outcomes a university-wide norm rather than a practice that flourishes in some academic programs and not others. The following steps have been taken to date:

- In June 2018, the provost appointed a faculty member to a newly created university officer position, senior vice provost for academic planning and assessment, whose duties include coordinating an assessment network that will acculturate the university to the benefits and protocols of effective assessment.
- Starting in 2018, the Office of Institutional Research, in partnership with faculty involved in the Discipline Based Educational Research group, designed a “major visualization” data tool, which tracks how individual students and aggregates of students enter and leave academic degree programs. This tool tracks how students progress through the major and whether late entry into the major is likely to impede subsequent success. Deeper dives are possible that track the characteristics of students who enter and leave a major such as GPA, which courses they have taken, etc. This tool has been tested using data from two large degree programs and will be made part of the data-analysis toolkit for departments assessing the effectiveness of their curriculum, both as part of program review and in followup or supplemental assessments.
- In 2018, the Graduate School and the Office of Undergraduate Education appointed an assessment specialist to help analyze the effectiveness of their programs and assess the need for proposed programs.
- In AY 2018–19, the senior vice provost for academic planning and assessment worked with the Academic Review Planning and Advisory Committee (ARPAC), the university’s program review committee, to make the creation of student learning outcomes and an appropriate assessment process a mandatory part of program review.
- In early 2019, the Office of Data Analytics formed the ODA Assessment Team, consisting of an assistant director for campus assessment and two assessment analysts. The Assessment Team provides leadership and centralized support to CU Boulder in the assessment of student learning.
and program effectiveness. Through collaboration with campus partners, the team facilitates best practices that lead to data-informed decision-making to promote student success.

- In August 2019, the ODA Assessment Team launched the ODA Assessment website, a centralized location where CU faculty and staff can access assessment resources such as information about assessment cycles and timelines, writing effective learning outcomes, direct and indirect methods of measurement, curriculum mapping, and guidelines and templates for assessment plans and reports.

- In AY 2019–20, following upon the recommendations of both the Foundations of Excellence and Academic Futures strategic initiatives, CU Boulder opened the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL), which unifies and coordinates a number of previously atomized programs for improving teaching and learning across campus (see 3.D.4.). The CTL will be the faculty-facing entity for educating teachers about how to assess student learning.

With this assessment infrastructure in place, CU Boulder now has the resources to help academic programs develop and assess meaningful student learning outcomes in a way that faculty can embrace, that can be tailored to the needs of individual programs, and that can be implemented on a campuswide scale.

As mentioned above, one of the steps in acculturating assessment campus-wide is to implement the development and assessment of student learning outcomes through the program review process described in 3.A.1. and 3.A.2. This process begins with an academic program’s writing a self-study. For several decades, the self-study guidelines have required that a program discuss its assessment procedures. Most programs in the past responded to this prompt in terms of the success of their students in completing their degrees, obtaining employment, gaining admission to graduate school, etc. Beginning in AY 2017–18, however, the self-study process became much more precise in terms of asking about assessment. Academic programs are now asked to describe their graduate and undergraduate degree programs, including (1) student learning outcomes and the process by which the faculty determine them (course level and program level), and (2) how the faculty and program assess whether these outcomes have been achieved. If the academic unit does not yet have student learning outcomes or an assessment protocol set up, it is asked to describe progress toward doing so. The ODA Assessment Team is now in place to help every program begin this project and develop an ongoing assessment plan.

The complete cycle of program review guarantees that all academic units will have learning outcomes and assessment protocols in place no later than 2024. With the assistance of the ODA Assessment Team and the other resources described above, however—and with many academic programs already leading the way—we hope that the full complement of academic units will have completed this project before 2024. Detailed course-level learning outcomes are one aim, but they are less crucial to us at this time than is curriculum mapping as a more holistic approach to determining how courses required within a degree program achieve one or more stated learning outcomes for the degree. Equally important, as discussed in 4.B.4., is that the faculty are the ones empowered to design the learning goals and assessment procedures for the curriculum they own and over which they have oversight.

The program review cycle also builds the scaffolding for keeping student learning outcomes and assessment plans up to date. Each academic program is reviewed every seven years. The ODA Assessment Team will provide annual assessment updates to academic units, ensuring evaluation mid-cycle. As the academic program begins the program review process anew, then, it will devise a revised assessment plan and reevaluate its student learning outcomes for its degrees.
As discussed in 3.B.2., the general education curricula pertaining to the colleges and schools at CU Boulder have all articulated student learning goals. In AY 2019–20, CU Boulder will begin the discussion of a common university curriculum and in the process will articulate the shared learning outcomes for which such a common general education curriculum would aim. Implementation of a campuswide general education curriculum would then entail a campuswide assessment program.

4.B.2. CU Boulder assesses the learning outcomes it has in place for both curricular and co-curricular programs. As mentioned above (4.B.1.), every academic program’s learning outcomes and assessment of those learning outcomes are now part of CU Boulder’s rigorous program review process, ARPAC, and this aspect of program review was redesigned in AY 2017–18. Examples of the kinds of self-evaluation and improvement of assessment practices on the part of academic programs that have taken place or are in process since this redesign include:

- The academic programs in the College of Engineering and Applied Science (CEAS) were reviewed by ARPAC in 2018. Because almost all of CEAS’s programs are reviewed through the specialized accreditation process conducted by ABET, completed by CEAS most recently in 2017, the ARPAC review was an occasion for each program/department to reflect and report on what they had learned through the ABET process and on how they intended to revise both student learning goals and the assessment of those goals. The Department of Civil, Environmental and Architectural Engineering, for example, drew upon alumni surveys, student performance on the “Fundamentals of Engineering” exam and the input of faculty to revise its undergraduate curriculum to emphasize proficiency courses earlier in the curriculum and technical electives later.

- The Department of Geological Sciences is being reviewed by ARPAC in fall 2019. While geological sciences had program-level student learning outcomes in place for the knowledge and skills taught through its undergraduate degree, it did not have a formal assessment plan for student skills. In AY 2018–19, a departmental assessment committee worked to refine a curricular map of these skills and to design an assessment instrument to measure students’ competencies in observation, map and graph reading, data analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and research design. The department plans to administer this tool to undergraduate majors as they begin 2000-level courses and again before graduation.

- The academic programs in the social sciences are preparing their self-studies in fall 2019, in advance of fall 2020 program review. During the fall 2019 semester, the ODA Assessment Team will work with each of these programs to review their learning outcomes and assessment practices and provide necessary training and support as the program builds or revises its student learning assessment plan.

Other measures of student outcomes besides departmentally designed ones also apply to academic program review and other assessment processes. Every three years, CU Boulder assesses students satisfaction with their undergraduate degree programs by means of senior surveys. The results of these surveys are available in annually updated unit profiles and are one component of both ARPAC program review (3.A.1. and 3.A.2.) and of the Academic Prioritization assessment of academic program efficacy (3.A.1., 3.A.2. and 5.C.2.).

As described in 3.E.1., most co-curricular programs sponsored by Academic Affairs are housed within the Division of Student Affairs. The Student Affairs Office of Assessment and Planning was established in 2016 to support these programs in developing and implementing outcomes-based assessment practices, including the submission of unit-level assessment plans and reports. The programs follow an annual
assessment cycle based on the academic year. The most recent report highlights the programs’ goals and assessment results; these in turn contributed to the division’s 2017–20 Strategic Plan. Student Affairs is also reviewed as part of Academic Affairs in the ARPAC program review process (3.A.1. and 3.A.2.).

Examples of assessment processes for other co-curricular programs include:

- Student organizations must declare their intended purposes at the time of registering for recognition by the Center for Student Involvement, and must renew this registration annually.
- The 2018–20 Strategic Plan of the Athletics Department describes not only goals for the department, the individual teams, and the success of student athletes, but also the methods and measures by which those goals are assessed.

4.B.3. CU Boulder has multiple venues in which it uses information gained from assessment to improve practices for teaching and learning.

- Foremost, and as discussed in 4.B.1., assessment measures are an element of academic program review and of strategic planning for both academic and co-curricular programs. These processes result in concrete action designed to improve student learning.
- In accordance with University of Colorado policy, multiple measures of teaching are used as part of each faculty member’s annual evaluation as well as evaluations for reappointment, tenure and promotion (see 3.C.3.). One of these measures must be student evaluations of teaching. Currently, the instrument used for this purpose at CU Boulder is the Faculty Course Questionnaire (FCQ), which is also used at the Denver and Colorado Springs campuses. Recently, faculty governance at CU Boulder has raised concerns about possible bias in the FCQ and called the faculty to action to move beyond the FCQ in evaluating teaching; in addition, the Academic Futures strategic initiative has recommended that CU Boulder undertake a comprehensive review of annual merit and reappointment, tenure, and promotion evaluation procedures to ensure that teaching excellence is appropriately evaluated and rewarded. As a pilot for the implementation of this Academic Futures recommendation, the College of Engineering and Applied Science is working with the Academic Futures leads to determine how to better identify and quantify teaching excellence as part of both annual merit review and promotion and tenure review.
- The Teaching Quality Framework Initiative has been working with selected academic units across the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Engineering and Applied Science and the Leeds School of Business to develop multiple, evidence-based measures of teaching and learning that can help those departments improve student learning.
- The Center for STEM Learning sponsors a Discipline Based Educational Research seminar series to highlight recent research and tools in evaluating student learning and the effectiveness of teaching, courses and academic programs.
- A number of consultation and training services are available to help faculty improve their assessments of student learning and to take action to improve their teaching as a result. These services are available through the new Center for Teaching and Learning (previously the Faculty Teaching Excellence Program and the Graduate Teacher Program) for teaching faculty and for graduate student teachers; through the Arts and Sciences Support of Education Through Technology (ASSETT) program for faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences; and through workshops offered through the Center for STEM Learning. The Center for Teaching and Learning will serve as a hub and coordinator for all these services.
4.B.4. The University of Colorado adheres to principles of shared governance in which the faculty have the principal role in shaping and overseeing curriculum (see 2.C.4.). CU Boulder’s faculty thus also take the lead in establishing student learning goals for academic programs. CU Boulder professionals who are credentialed to develop student learning in co-curricular areas are similarly entrusted with establishing learning goals in, for example, advising (see 3.C.6.). While CU Boulder is admittedly slow to have developed consistent, universitywide assessment processes, the deliberative nature of departmental and program curriculum development makes it important that the university proceed with only the deliberate form of speed. Establishing and assessing student learning outcomes simply cannot be a top-down decree—if it were, these would never be meaningful processes. It is for this reason that CU Boulder has elected to integrate the establishment of student learning outcomes and assessment procedures into academic program review as described in 4.B.1. The ARPAC program review process is not conducted by the administration. Rather, it is conducted by faculty, beginning with the faculty of each academic program and concluding with the recommendations of the faculty committee that is advisory to the provost. Using this long-standing, well-regarded, rigorous program review process means that the faculty will develop student learning outcomes and assessment procedures through the conversation and consensus that a self-study entails. Furthermore, it means that both student learning outcomes and assessment procedures will be regularly reexamined, even when a program has not undertaken a major curriculum revision.

At the same time, faculty need the support and assistance of professional staff in designing, testing and assessing how students learn. While these aspects of forming and evaluating curricula must emerge from the faculty, faculty cannot be expected to invent and administer student learning goals and assessment protocols out of whole cloth. With the professional staff and the technical expertise now or soon to be available through ODA and the Center for Teaching and Learning (4.B.1.), CU Boulder’s academic programs and faculty will have the resources to undertake these commitments, and to use best practice while doing so. Similar resources recently put in place in the Division of Student Affairs ensure the same support and assistance for the evaluation of co-curricular programs (see 4.B.2.).

4.C. The institution demonstrates a commitment to educational improvement through ongoing attention to retention, persistence, and completion rates in its degree and certificate programs.

1. The institution has defined goals for student retention, persistence and completion that are ambitious but attainable and appropriate to its mission, student population and educational offerings.
2. The institution collects and analyzes information on student retention, persistence and completion of its programs.
3. The institution uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data.
4. The institution’s processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice. (Institutions are not required to use IPEDS definitions in their determination of persistence or completion rates. Institutions are encouraged to choose measures that are suitable to their student populations, but institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

4.C.1. One of the strategic imperatives through which CU Boulder articulates its mission (see 1.A.1.) is to recruit, retain and graduate students who have achieved the educational goals and who exemplify the
values that are important to the university. In other words, the success of our students is not only a desired outcome for the university but also a moral imperative.

The chancellor has set, and the University of Colorado Board of Regents has approved, an ambitious but attainable set of goals for undergraduate student retention, persistence and completion. CU Boulder reports annually to the Board of Regents on its progress in this arena. These goals use 2017 data as a baseline:

- 2017 six-year graduation rate (cohort entering as first-year students in 2011): 69%
- 2017 first-to-second-year retention rate (cohort entering as first-year students in 2016): 88%

The following goals have been set:

- 2023 six-year graduation rate (cohort entering as first-year students in 2017): 80%
- 2023 first-to-second-year retention rate (cohort entering as first-year students in 2022): 93%

Current data, which are from 2018, show how CU has progressed in one year toward those goals from the 2017 baseline:

- **2018 six-year graduation rate** (cohort entering as first-year students in 2012): 71%, a 2-point improvement from the 2017 baseline
- **2018 first-to-second-year retention rate** (cohort entering as first-year students in 2017): 88%, the same as the 2017 baseline

CU Boulder is pleased with the 2-point improvement in just one year of the six-year graduation rate, from 69% to 71%. In addition, the four-year graduation rate showed even more dramatic improvement. The four-year graduation rate for the class entering in 2014 was 50%, an all-time high and four percentage points above the previous year.

The first-to-second-year retention rate, which remained the same as the previous year, did not show the same positive movement; however, this retention rate was already an all-time high for CU Boulder and thus continues to represent real progress in the university’s efforts to achieve an 80% six-year graduation rate. Colorado residents equaled the previous high of 90% first set in 2017, while non-residents equaled their all-time high of 85% for the third consecutive year. Racially/ethnically diverse students also set a new high, at 87%, and the two-year retention rate for first-year students entering in 2016 also set an all-time high in 2018, 81%. Together, these retention rates bode well for CU Boulder’s being able to meet its 2023 graduation rate goals.

Furthermore, CU Boulder has initiated a number of significant changes to improve undergraduate student success. The recommendations of the Academic Futures strategic initiative and of the Foundations of Excellence strategic initiative for first-year education (see 1.A.3.) have led to the implementation of new projects to improve student success. A “CU 101” course to aid first-year students in developing college-level skills for success, already offered in the Leeds School of Business, is being piloted in the College of Engineering and Applied Science and the College of Arts and Sciences (see 3.B.2.). Advising is being restructured to provide advisors with more centralized guidance and to add staff, reducing advisor caseload (see 3.D.3.). And the university has established a new Center for Teaching and Learning to centralize, coordinate, and communicate methods of improving student learning (see 3.D.4., 4.B.1., 4.B.3. and 4.B.4).
CU Boulder has not set specific goals for graduate student retention, persistence, and completion. However, the university seeks to understand the factors that encourage or inhibit graduate student success and to make improvements (see 4.C.3.).

4.C.2. The CU Boulder Office of Data Analytics (ODA) posts annually updated retention and completion rates to the campus community and the public. This information is used by university constituents in analyses of unit performance conducted for academic program review (see 3.A.1., 3.A.2. and 4.A.1.); by the CU Boulder Office of Undergraduate Education in planning initiatives such as the Foundations of Excellence strategic initiative; by the CU Boulder administration in reporting metrics on retention rates for various student populations to the Board of Regents; and by interested parties such as the Colorado Department of Higher Education, which measures retention and graduation rates statewide. Data for undergraduate retention and graduation rates may be visualized using several different parameters. Detailed spreadsheets including information by entry cohort, school or college, and student characteristics may be downloaded from the ODA website. CU Boulder also collects and analyzes other information pertinent to factors contributing to undergraduate student success, including retention and graduation rates by student residence hall; retention and graduation rates for students in residential academic programs; and results of undergraduate surveys on social climate. These are used by the offices of Undergraduate Education and Student Affairs in planning academic and student life initiatives (see 4.C.3.).

Information on graduation rates and time to degree for graduate students and results of graduate surveys on social climate is also available on the ODA website and is similarly used in analyses of unit performance conducted for academic program review and by the Graduate School in planning academic and student life initiatives (see 4.C.3.).

4.C.3. CU Boulder uses information on student retention, persistence and completion to make improvements through the regular program review and planning process (see 3.A.1. and 3.A.2.), which has recently been revised to emphasize the analysis of qualitative and quantitative evidence of student success. A recent program review of the Department of Physics, for example, resulted in the recommendation that the department “examine the factors affecting student retention in the undergraduate major and determine what changes should be made.” Following upon that recommendation, and reflecting earlier self-analysis of retention within the major, the department developed concrete steps for tracking and improving student retention a part of its new strategic plan.

In addition, several of CU Boulder’s five strategic initiatives (see 1.A.3.) are using information about student success to propose and implement major changes in academic programs and student support services. Information on student retention, persistence and completion was an integral part of the Foundations of Excellence initiative, whose “Improvement” committee made recommendations on better ways to use assessment to understand student success at CU Boulder. Those recommendations are now being implemented as outlined in 4.B.3. The Foundations of Excellence “Transitions” committee used data on retention and graduation rates broken down by residence hall (see 4.C.2.) to make recommendations on changing the way student housing is assigned and how it corresponds with academic offerings; these recommendations were then taken up by a subsequent committee that fleshed out detailed recommendations on such a restructuring, now being considered for implementation by university leadership. The IDEA Plan strategic initiative has used data on retention and persistence among diverse groups in drafting many of its recommendations: for example, increasing numbers of staff in student support roles (see 3.D.1.).
The IDEA Plan strategic initiative also made use of data from the earlier undergraduate and graduate Social Climate Survey and follow-up focus-group discussions on the African American student experience at CU Boulder. One concrete action already completed as a result of that survey, for example, was the creation of lounge/collaboration spaces in the University Memorial Center for veterans and for use by recognized student organizations. Surveys of students who left the university, conducted by the Office of Data Analytics in 2016 and 2018, showed that nonreturning students listed finances and the lack of a sense of belonging, along with personal issues, as primary reasons for not returning to CU. When accompanied by information obtained from these and other surveys, retention and graduation data become not just statistical goals but also a way to understand students’ priorities, values, successes and struggles as individuals. In response to these indicators of student well-being, the chancellor has made mental health and wellness services a priority. The FY 2019–20 budget includes $1.5 million for the chancellor’s Health and Wellness initiative, focusing on mental health.

Information on graduate student retention and time to degree is also used as part of the assessment of academic units in the program review process (3.A.1. and 3.A.2.). Efforts to reduce time to degree have resulted from these assessments, and these efforts are evaluated in follow-up reviews. For example, a 2016 review of the Department of Philosophy noted a long time-to-degree for MA students, and the department in response created a new faculty advisor position specifically for the MA program. Responding to universitywide concerns about the level of graduate student financial support, heard through academic program review as well as via the United Government of Graduate Students, CU Boulder has invested over $8 million in the most recent four academic years to increase graduate student base stipends by an average of 6.2% per year, and has also invested in other forms of support. To follow up on the most recent student Social Climate Survey (2014), the Graduate School conducted a survey of graduate students in 2018 to explore issues surrounding mentorship as well as finances; the results showed both areas of great satisfaction and needed actions. A Graduate School Task Force on Stipends & Benefits was formed in spring 2019 to make additional recommendations, which were completed in May 2019 and will be considered by university leadership in AY 2019–20.

In fall 2020, a new Campus and Workplace Culture Survey will be administered that will replace the undergraduate and graduate student Social Climate Surveys that were last administered in 2014. (This new survey is being piloted in selected units in 2019.) The results will be used both in the program review process described above and in carrying out the implementation of campus strategic initiatives. Many of the 2014 questions will be carried forward into the 2020 survey so that the university can track progress in creating and sustaining a welcoming environment for undergraduate and graduate students. This survey will also provide the data to comprehensively benchmark and track staff and faculty experiences at CU Boulder. The Campus and Workplace Culture Survey will also support the IDEA Plan strategic initiative by providing benchmarking data for all campus populations and evidence of progress toward meeting the goals of creating a more inclusive campus community.

More progress in using information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data will be aided by recent campus commitments to expanding technological and human resources for data collection and analysis. Examples include a current pilot program using predictive analytics to target interventions to at-risk students (see 3.D.2.); the Unified Student Experience project to understand and streamline how students access resources online (see 3.D.1.); and investment in new positions on campus such as a corps of assessment professionals in ODA and new positions in the Graduate School and the Office of Undergraduate Education: an assistant vice provost for student success initiatives and an assessment coordinator (see
4.B.1. Building on work done by the former Faculty Teaching Excellence Program and Graduate Teacher Program, the new Center for Teaching and Learning plans to make assessment an explicit focus of their suite of offerings for faculty and graduate student professional development.

4.C.4. CU Boulder collects and analyzes retention and completion rates using methodologies outlined by IPEDS, and has done so since the campus began tracking these rates. This method meets the needs of the CU Boulder community, as it monitors student success over time and also breaks down aggregate student data by such categories as racial/ethnic identity, degree level and major.

4. Summary. CU Boulder demonstrates responsibility for the quality of its educational programs through a rigorous, regular process of program review that engages faculty at all levels of review and that results in recommendations acted upon by academic programs and college, school and campus administration; through well-established practices for transfer credit evaluation; through departmental, college/school and campus policies and processes for course and curriculum proposal and review; and through maintaining specialized accreditation for specific programs. The establishment and assessment of student learning outcomes, previously a somewhat inconsistent practice, is now being acculturated into university norms through the well-established and effective program review process in a way that is designed by the faculty and tailored to the nature of the wide range of disciplines at CU Boulder. Through its Foundations of Excellence and Academic Futures strategic initiatives (see 1.A.3.), both involving broad participation and campus input, CU Boulder is implementing recommendations for improving its evaluation of teaching and for improving the success of its undergraduate and graduate students, including special focus on the first-year student experience.