

**Summary, Suggestions and Recommendations
to the University of Colorado at Boulder**
**Excerpted from the Report of a Comprehensive Evaluation Visit
for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC)**
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA)
Site visit: February 22-24, 2010. Summary: August 2010.

The following summary and listing of suggestions, recommendations, and possible action items is excerpted directly from the site team report. Brackets denote CU-Boulder additions for clarity; ellipses denote omissions. The page numbers cited are internal to the section (Assurance or Advancement).

The entire site team report with list of members, this document, the letter of notice of re-accreditation, the CU-Boulder self-study, and details of the site visit are all available from <http://www.colorado.edu/accreditation/>.

HLC Site Team Overall Recommendation

The University of Colorado at Boulder clearly and unambiguously meets the criteria for accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. The circumstances, leadership, and operation of the campus as documented by the extensive materials and interviews on campus assure the team that the institution will continue to do so. (Assurance section, page 24)

General Comments

The University of Colorado at Boulder is the flagship campus of the University of Colorado. . . . The institution's plan for where to go from here is laid out in Flagship 2030 whose eight core initiatives are intended to maintain competitiveness and whose ten transformational initiatives are designed to create a model flagship university for the 21st century global economy. Despite its achievements and enthusiasm, CU-Boulder faces daunting challenges in finding and keeping the resources necessary to achieve its goals in a climate of vastly diminished state funding. (Assurance Section, page 4)

The [HLC Site] Team compliments the institution on the breadth and depth of the self-study process. The self-study report, when tested in campus discussions with different constituencies, proved to be reliable and sound in the facts and perspectives provided to the team. The culmination of the process during the team visit was characterized by exceptional cooperation between the campus and the team and strong support provided to facilitate the team's work. (Assurance Section, page 5)

As the flagship institution of the University of Colorado, CU-Boulder brings many benefits to the state. While well-educated graduates are an obvious benefit, the University has emerged as a source of technological innovation, cultural advance, and community service. CU-Boulder attracts talented people and substantial resources to Colorado, fueling economic prosperity for citizens of the state. With its ambitious plans, its effective leaders, and its productive faculty and staff, the University is poised to become an even greater asset for the state of Colorado and the nation. (Advancement Section, page 17)

Given its distinctive national and international reputation among research institutions, CU-Boulder needs to be celebrated more fully by the University of Colorado System, its Board of Regents, and the state of Colorado. (Advancement Section, page 4)

The University of Colorado at Boulder is a significant and powerful asset to the State. As a comprehensive research university, CU-Boulder provides educational opportunities at all degree levels and in many areas of vital importance to the future of Colorado, the nation, and the world. The institution is a major center of knowledge creation and currently brings to Colorado competitively awarded research grant funds well above \$300 million – a major contribution to the state's economy. That function brings with it distinctive needs for specialized facilities – advanced instrumentation, laboratories, libraries, and information technology – and funds for recruiting and retaining leading teacher-scholars within a highly competitive market. (Advancement Section, page 5)

Accomplishments and Progress since the Prior Review

The University of Colorado at Boulder has made significant progress toward many of its goals in the 10 years since the previous accreditation site visit. New facilities have been developed which sustain the architectural character of the campus while providing modern, state-of-the-art, buildings for leading programs. Some facilities including the new building for Law, the ATLAS Building, and the addition and renovation of the Koelbel Building for the Leeds School of Business have been developed with substantial support from the student capital construction fee. The campus is in the process of developing a new master plan for the period 2010-2020. (Advancement Section, page 16)

Effective changes in the administrative structure have been made in response to the NCA report from 2000, including the development of the position of Provost. The leadership team is an impressive, experienced group effectively guiding the development of CU-Boulder and its educational and scholarly programs. (Advancement Section, page 16)

Faculty members at CU-Boulder have received significant awards and honors, including three faculty members who have won the Physics Nobel Prize in the last decade. Overall, faculty members have been very successful in competing for research support, with a 67 percent increase in research support in a ten year period to \$340 million in the last fiscal year. The growth in the quality and impact of the faculty is impressive across the entire institution. The dedication of the faculty to the University is a palpable asset in continuing a record of innovation in education and research. CU-Boulder is an internationally known and respected research institution. The University's attention to cross-disciplinary research in targeted fields of expertise is especially noteworthy. (Advancement Section, page 16)

Strategic Plan

Flagship 2030 has generated widespread interest, involvement, and excitement among virtually all members of the university community, and its time frame is particularly distinctive. . . . [CU-Boulder should] identify the impact that the various plan initiatives will have on a wide range of academic support areas – Human Resources, Communications, Student Affairs, [and] Police among others – so that resource implementation issues can be addressed appropriately and intentionally. (Advancement Section, page 6)

The university will need to prioritize components of the 2030 Plan for action, specify metrics to monitor progress, and presumably identify benchmark institutions – all to assure accountability and transparency in the implementation process. As the university updates its performance measures to align them with

the Flagship 2030 plan, it might integrate the measures with specific areas of the strategic plan and identify multi-year goals/targets for selected measures. (Advancement Section, pages 6, 8)

Fiscal Health

The university is in a fiscally sound position and it is financially well-managed by the administration in complete concert with the mission, vision, and values of the university. (Advancement section, page 6)

With constraints on resources due to low and declining state support, a very modest endowment, and high dependence on tuition, the University needs to maximize other funding opportunities. It appears much more is needed from the development arm of the University. . . . Significant organizational attention will have to be applied to the main revenue generators for the University, especially enrollment management and development funding, to ensure meeting the Flagship 2030 goals and objectives. (Assurance Section, page 12)

Development

To help realize the aspirations of the Flagship 2030 plan, there should be an expanded and sustained investment in development activities – focused on garnering the financial resources needed to realize the key elements of the plan. The Chancellor should be the central figure in developing the fundraising strategy and in executing the effort with support from the CU Foundation and its leaders. (Advancement Section, page 5)

A larger, high quality, professional staff will be a necessary element in building a stronger program for the University of Colorado at Boulder. (Advancement Section, page 5)

To establish the appropriate priorities, focus, and rates of development return for CU-Boulder, consideration should be given to whether that can be done within the current organizational structure [of] the Foundation. (Advancement Section, page 5)

Given that CU-Boulder has an exceptionally strong research program, much of which is supported by federal government agencies, it would likely benefit from a stronger presence in Washington DC, through professionals dedicated to helping it realize its unique mission, . . . fulfill its research potential, . . . [and pursue] earmark monies. (Advancement Section, page 5)

Assessment of Student Learning

The new guidelines [of the Academic Review and Planning (ARP) process] [already] require specific discussion of assessment as one of the four areas on which reviews focus. . . . The Assessment Oversight Committee (AOC) is working with the Academic Review and Planning Advisory Committee to . . . [recommend] revisions that will elicit more detailed and better information about how an understanding of student learning is used to stimulate program improvement. . . . Institutional attention will be needed to ensure that momentum in this area is not lost. (Assurance Section, page 16)

Focusing on assessment in program review is an important step in giving assessment of student learning stature, but more needs to be done to ensure that the practices are good and the results are used. . . . The Assessment Oversight Committee should consider how to design a process for preparation and review of interim reports to ensure that assessment activities are undertaken with regularity and actions taken are useful and timely. (Advancement Section, page 9)

There appears to be only slim attention paid to assessment at the department level, and biannual meetings of the campus-level assessment committee may be insufficient to sustain a deep commitment to assessing student learning. . . . It [may be] more useful for departments to participate in coalitions of assessment activities, to engage in assessment across disciplines rather than within. (Advancement Section, pages 9, 10)

Efforts to measure and improve student learning at the graduate level will become increasingly important as *Flagship 2030* moves forward to expand – significantly – graduate, professional and baccalaureate/post-baccalaureate degree offerings. Among the many types of metrics that might be used will be graduate retention and completion rates within and across disciplines, time to degree, and demographic profiles. (Advancement Section, page 9)

Maintain a focus on student learning . . . [by incorporating] more direct measures of student learning into the institutional assessment portfolio; . . . evaluating student learning in the core curriculum; . . . [leveraging] the Academic Program Review process . . . [to emphasize the assessment of] curricular goals; . . . [and capitalizing] on the momentum already under way in STEM disciplines. (Advancement Section, pages 10, 11)

Research Enterprise and Graduate Education

CU-Boulder has positioned itself as a leader [in sponsored research]. . . . The long-standing [research] institutes bring depth and breadth to the funding portfolio and offer faculty and students many opportunities that would not exist in their absence. (Advancement Section, page 11)

[However,] . . . the Vice Chancellor for Research has limited staff, resources, and funding to provide needed support for the research enterprise, . . . [which impacts] the ability to recruit and retain high-quality graduate students, especially international students with visa issues, . . . [and the ability to process] grant funds in a timely manner. [The CU System requests that] new graduate degree programs . . . demonstrate the potential for generating new income to cover program costs. . . . The Dean of the Graduate School has limited staff, resources and funding that might be used to initiate campus wide support services. Other instances of funding challenges and possibilities include . . . graduate student fellowships, . . . salaries for teaching assistants, . . . [and] graduate student health insurance. (Advancement Section, page 12)

The Graduate School . . . [should] facilitate general meetings of graduate students across departments to discuss general academic and professional development issues; . . . formalize . . . opportunities for graduate student experiences across disciplines; [address] structural barriers in the curricula [which] . . . stifle . . . interdisciplinary programs; . . . provide more general oversight of mentoring; . . . examine its recruitment materials to be sure more complete and useful information is provided to prospective students; and . . . consider whether additional services to assist graduate students to find funding might be cost effective to the institution as well as to the students. (Advancement Section, pages 14, 15)

Diversity

Despite progress in many areas, and as the institution acknowledges, there remain challenges, particularly with regard to students of color at the graduate level, percentage of Colorado high school graduates of color enrolling as new freshmen, and first year retention of Colorado freshmen of color. (Assurance Section, page 8)

The Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement [should] identify a more formal senior leadership team, including representation from the campus communications office, through which the Vice Chancellor can develop and enact policy, communicate regularly to the campus about initiatives and their successes, and help coordinate communications through the campus' normal communication outlets. (Assurance Section, page 8)

The deans and department chairs need to encourage more faculty to become involved [in campus-wide diversity initiatives and programs such as CU-LEAD], and the campus reward system(s) should reflect that commitment. (Assurance Section, page 9)

The University should consider more systematic and enhanced recruitment efforts for the growing [number of] Latino high school and community college graduates [in the State]. (Advancement Section, page 15)

Globalization

CU-Boulder should consider whether a mechanism may be needed to aggregate or connect all international/globalization responsibilities, efforts, opportunities, centers, education programs, and assessment activities. . . . The first recommendation of the ACE Internationalization Laboratory Preliminary Report was for CU-Boulder to create a new Associate Vice Chancellor for International Policies and Programs. In addition to the internationalization of the curriculum, opportunities for faculty exchanges with institutions in other countries could be enhanced. (Advancement Section, pages 13, 14)

Distance Education

There appears to be a strong opportunity to expand distance learning offerings to a broader audience. Interactions with community colleges and other institutions of higher learning in the state with whom CU-Boulder could potentially collaborate to provide educational opportunities to students seem to be nonexistent. (Assurance Section, page 22)

The institution should explore the potential of extending its educational impact by developing distance education programs for specific audiences of learners. In particular, . . . CU-Boulder [should] consider developing professional MS degree programs in academic areas of high demand. Institutional support needs to be directed to developing appropriate expertise and infrastructure for sustaining these activities. (Advancement Section, page 16)

University Library

The strategic direction identified and being followed by the university library appears to be a good one. The challenges facing the redefinition of the modern university library are well articulated in the self-study. Consciousness of these challenges will help the institution to engage in conversations with others that will help achieve the vision of recreating the library as an intellectual commons for the university community . . . and identify University development activities that contribute to the library's needs. (Advancement section, page 7)

Information Technology

The University has invested in IT with excellent results. In particular, the team commends reorganization of the management of IT, replacement of all major enterprise systems, expanded facility for high performance computing, new tools and facilities for teaching and collaboration, a powerful and

extensive wired and wireless network, and expansion of associated services. (Advancement section, page 7)

A planning process should be created which allows annual updating of the IT plan. . . . [and more focus on] research support. (Advancement section, page 8)

Enhancing the Physical Campus

The campus is a great asset and is very attractive. However, [the University needs to address] . . . deferred maintenance [issues], especially in selected areas such as the physical sciences. . . . The development and maintenance of the physical infrastructure should be considered as one of the priorities for an enhanced resource development effort. (Advancement section, page 8)

Outreach, Engagement and Service

CU-Boulder has visible commitment to engagement and service. The [HLC Site] Team endorses the Outreach and Engagement Task Force's recommendation that the institution develop "a coordinated, coherent, deliberate campus strategy for outreach and engagement." (Advancement Section, page 15)

The Outreach Committee [should expand] the number and scope of projects funded; . . . increase the number of community members on the committee; expand the humanities and performing arts areas in terms of applications and awards; and explore partnerships with departments or other units that are willing to offer matching funds. (Advancement Section, page 15)

A more visible reward/recognition structure [should] be created for faculty engaged in [service learning] activities [and] effort should be made to extend service learning activities into every curriculum. (Advancement Section, page 15)