



**COLORADO**

Department of  
Higher Education

1600 Broadway, Suite 2200

Denver, CO 80202

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Academic Council</b> <b>February 10, 2026</b> <b>1:00 – 3:00 pm</b>
<b>Location</b>	Remote ONLY
<b>Call-In Information</b>	<a href="#">View Zoom Recording</a>
<b>Meeting Participants</b>	Provosts and Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) of the public institutions of higher education
<b>Meeting Objectives</b>	Members advise the Department on policy development and implementation, as well as other matters affecting higher education.

## **AGENDA – NOTES**

### 1. Greetings and Introductions

In attendance: Kelsey Bennett (WCU); Helen Caprioglio (CSUP); Jerid Counterman (CSUG); Kirsty Fleming (UNC); Cher Hendricks (CMU); Roze Hentschell (CSU-SYS); Andy Herring (CSM); Mark Kavanaugh (CU Boulder); Mike Lightner (CU-SYS); Matt Makley (MSU Denver); Karen Marrongelle (CU Denver); Kimberly Miloch (CSU); Dave Oehler (Aims); Tina Parscal (CCCS); Kathryn Regjo (CMC); Susan Taylor (UCCS); Linda Van Doren (EGTC); Christina Carrillo (CDHE); Carl Einhaus (CDHE); Brad Griffith (CDHE)

### 2. Approval of January Meeting Notes

[see handout: 2026-01-13 NOTES-AC.pdf]

Notes approved

### 3. Announcements and Discussion Items

#### a. Updates from CCHE Advisor Michael Lightner

Carl provided updates on recent CCHE activities, noting that the Commission met jointly with the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to continue work related to the Governor's executive order aligning higher education and workforce systems. The goal of that convening was to build stronger cross-agency relationships and prepare for a multi-year statutory effort that will further integrate workforce and postsecondary planning. All CCHE items were handled as consent so the groups could focus on discussion.

Carl also shared concerns raised at CCHE regarding the Talent Pipeline Report, specifically whether promoting only high-wage “top jobs” could overlook essential but lower-paying occupations such as educators and nursing technicians. He noted that this will be an ongoing topic, especially as the state strengthens K-12 career advising connections. The CCHE meeting also included an external AI presentation, with takeaways about the environmental impacts of current GPU-based systems and the development of more efficient AI-specific chips expected to reduce heat, water usage, and overall energy demands.

- b. Review and discussion of updated CCHE Policy II, Part D: Policy for Public Institutional Reporting College Opportunity Fund Student Credit Hour Stipend Enrollment (COF policy)

Carl reviewed two key COF Policy (Policy II-Part D) updates approved by CCHE: (1) removing the affidavit requirement for undocumented Colorado residents seeking in-state tuition and COF eligibility, following 2023 legislation; and (2) allowing students enrolled in prison education programs who meet residency requirements to receive COF, reversing a longstanding prohibition for programs closed to the public. Carl emphasized the research-supported benefits of prison education — including reduced recidivism and improved employment outcomes — and noted that institutions may need time to adjust operational procedures for these changes.

- c. Discussion on final results from survey on reduced-credits bachelor’s degrees (Brad Griffith)

Brad presented the results of the statewide survey on reduced-credit bachelor’s degrees, issued in response to HLC’s October 2024 guidance allowing institutions to seek substantive change approval for reduced-credit programs. Colorado statute currently requires 120 credits, preventing public institutions from utilizing this new flexibility. Brad’s report included 22 institutional responses spanning four-year campuses, community/technical colleges, and system offices. Most respondents showed conditional support, with 45% favoring reduced-credit degrees if protective safeguards exist and 25% open to controlled pilots. Only a small minority preferred to retain the 120-credit minimum without exception. Institutions cited the potential for innovation, workforce alignment, and cost/time savings as benefits, but raised significant concerns about academic rigor, general education integrity, graduate school eligibility, licensure, transferability, and student confusion if multiple bachelor’s degree types coexist.

Brad outlined preferred policy paths: half of respondents supported establishing a new credential category in statute, while others preferred CCHE-approved exceptions or an entirely new intermediate credential between associate and bachelor’s degrees. Many

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institutions emphasized the need for clear student disclosures, alignment with HLC requirements, and strong employer validation. Several four-year and two-year institutions stressed the risk of creating “inferior” bachelor’s degrees or undermining statewide GE requirements if the degree type is not carefully defined.

Council members raised numerous questions and reactions:

- It was noted the absence of guidance on the acceptable range of credits (e.g., 90 vs. 97 vs. 110) and encouraged flexibility rather than prescribing a single credit target. Brad affirmed the state has no predetermined stance and is gathering input.
- It was also suggested exploring linkages to concurrent enrollment and GE credential pathways to intentionally design “three-year after high school” bachelor’s plans. Council members observed that existing 3+2 bachelor’s-to-master’s agreements implicitly accelerate time-to-degree and might offer lessons. DHE staff agreed that improving alignment with K-12 and Individual Career and Academic Planning (ICAP) advising could reduce CE course misalignment and better inform student pathways.
- Concerns were raised about Colorado’s cultural aversion to differentiation given the standardization pressures of SB 24-164. Council members warned that increased flexibility could later lead to mandates for uniformity unless transparency and intent are preserved. DHE staff agreed this would be a major legislative tension point.
- Council members questioned whether reduced-credit degrees would render current STAAs unworkable or require duplicative DRAs for each credit structure; DHE acknowledged this concern.
- Council members also raised the possibility of a “credit-hour reduction race” among institutions competing for enrollment through lower-credit programs, prompting discussion of guardrails and possible pilot limitations.
- Council members also expressed concerns about unfunded mandates — particularly hidden institutional costs related to curriculum, advising, data reporting, transfer mapping, and compliance — which are often excluded from legislative fiscal notes. DHE staff agreed this must be captured in future assessment.
- Council members additionally highlighted competitive pressures, noting that out-of-state institutions already market reduced-credit bachelor’s degrees, which could disadvantage Colorado publics if the state does nothing.

Brad then reviewed national examples, including Indiana’s statewide requirement that each public institution offer at least one reduced-credit degree; Utah’s “Bachelor of Applied Studies,” which maintains full GE; Kansas’s 90–120 credit reduction mandate

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and approval process; Arizona’s bachelors of professional studies models; Maine’s system-approved programs awaiting review; and North Dakota’s 90–119 credit pilot limited to BAS programs with requirements for employer validation, mandatory advising, and tracking retention/completion through 2030. Brad noted that graduate program admissions studies show many deans are unlikely to admit students with reduced-credit bachelor’s degrees unless deliberate agreements exist.

Brad closed with guiding questions for future Council deliberation: whether Colorado should pursue a pilot model; how to treat GE requirements; how to select early pilot fields; what safeguards are necessary; how to communicate degree differences to students; and how statutory changes should be structured.

d. Transfer initiatives update (Carl Einhaus)

- Higher Education Transfer Audit
- CCHE Transfer Subcommittee

Carl briefly revisited statewide transfer work, noting that the Transfer Subcommittee has met three times with a fourth meeting scheduled later that week. The group is currently focused on orientation and understanding the state’s transfer frameworks. This group will be focused on the Office of the State Auditor’s (OSA) 19 recommendations, of which three are complete and sixteen are due by October 1. No questions were raised.

e. Open discussion

The Council discussed the newly introduced Thriving Institutions Act. One member expressed strong support, noting that the designation would allow institutions — particularly open-access and rural institutions — to expand practices that historically aligned with Hispanic-Serving Institution models but apply them more broadly to improve outcomes for all students served. They viewed the bill as an opportunity to formally recognize and support the equity-focused work already occurring.

Council members further inquired whether the designation could affect future state funding or the funding formula. DHE staff noted that the bill explicitly states that the designation does not create entitlement to state funding, which alleviates some concerns, though encouraged attention to any possible long-term fiscal implications. Carl encouraged members to continue raising legislative questions of interest at future meetings.

4. New, modified, and closed programs

a. New

- Adams State University

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- Master of Science in Computer Science
  - Colorado Mesa University
    - Undergraduate Certificate in Graphic Design
    - Undergraduate Certificate in Patient Care Technician
    - Undergraduate Certificate in Sustainable Farm & Ranch Management
    - Undergraduate Certificate in Wildland Fires Management
    - Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education
    - Master of Natural Resources in Geography
  - Colorado State University
    - Bachelor of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences Education
    - Master of Advanced Practice in Dietetics
  - Pueblo Community College
    - Bachelor of Applied Science in Diagnostic Medical Sonography
    - Bachelor of Applied Science in Technology Education
  - University of Northern Colorado
    - Bachelor of Science in Data Sciences and Statistics
    - Bachelor of Science in Sport Administration
  - Western Colorado University
    - Undergraduate Certificate in Western-CU Partnership Honors Program
- b. Modified
- None
- c. Closed Programs
- Colorado Mesa University
    - Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts
    - Bachelor of Arts in Kinesiology
    - Graduate Certificate in Applied Mathematics
    - Master of Arts in Education: Rhetoric and Literary Studies
    - Master of Arts in Education: Applied Mathematics
    - Master of Arts in Education: Social Science

**ACTION ITEMS**

Issue	Action / Next Step	Assigned To & Date Assigned

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