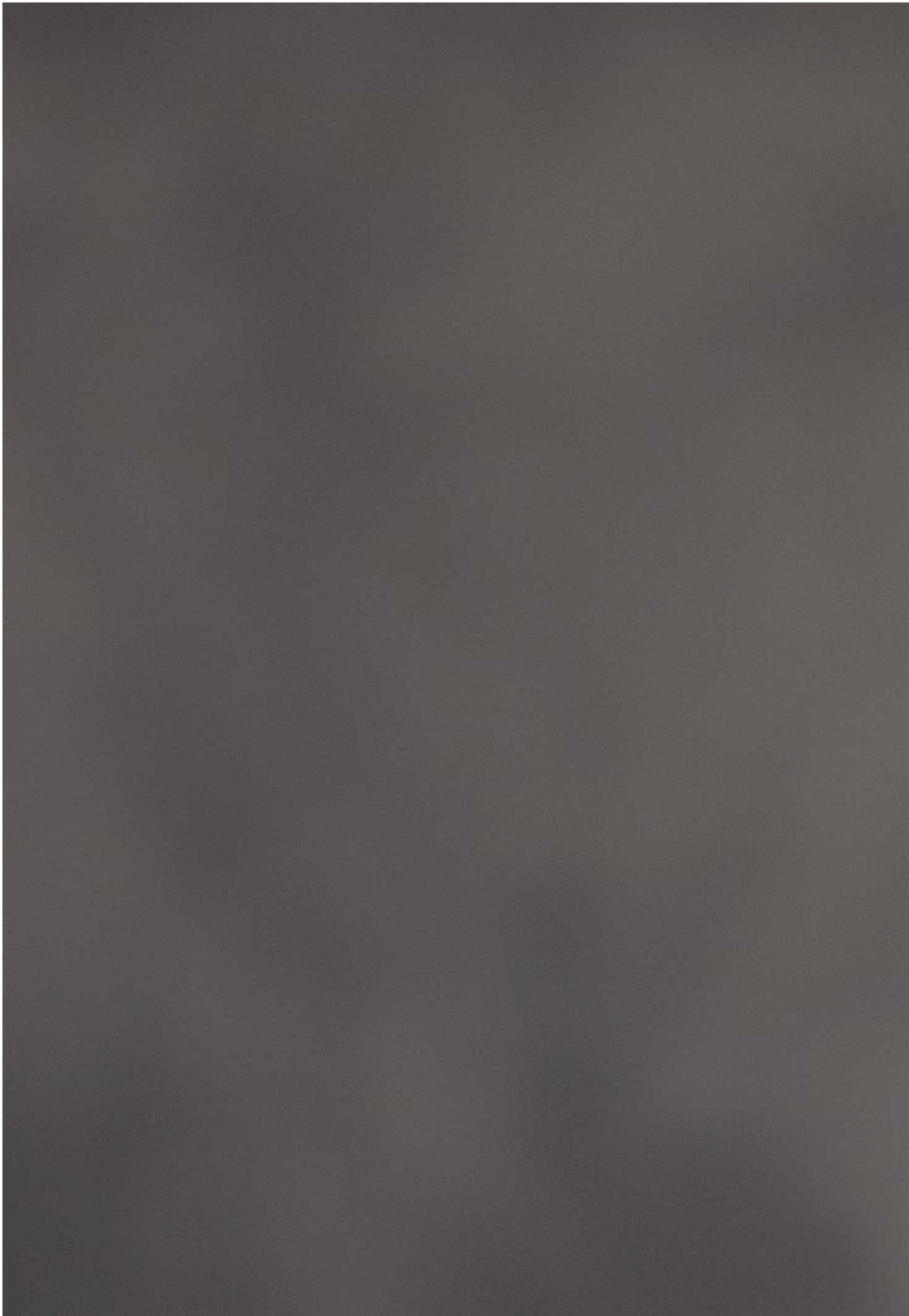


## **2023 Staff Excellence Award Recipients** <sup>[1]</sup>

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## **Kenny Sisco**

Kenny has been working in the IT industry for nearly 20 years, starting in a small computer shop in Pueblo, CO as a teenager. He got his Bachelor's of Science degree in Computer Information Systems from CSU-Pueblo in 2010, and is currently seeking a Master's of Science degree in Information Systems here at CU Denver. Kenny has worked most of his career in education but has a breadth of experience in numerous industries. He worked as a student technician at CSU-Pueblo, started up an IT practice from scratch at a charter school right after graduating, and spent a couple of years as a network engineer and consultant supporting advanced technology solutions across numerous industries including education, healthcare, retail, law, government, and more. Kenny started working for the College of Engineering, Design and Computing in 2013 as a Senior Systems and Network Administrator. He was promoted to IT Manager in 2016 and IT Director in 2021. Kenny now serves as the IT Director for the College of Engineering, Design and Computing and also the Interim IT Director for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and has been an integral part of improving IT systems and practices across the Denver campus for over a decade.

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**Tawnya Boulier**

Tawnya is a Colorado native and graduate of the CU Denver Business School (BSBA, 2010) and Colorado State University (M.Ed., 2017). Her professional journey began in 2010 when she was a recruiter for a search firm, but ultimately found her way to higher education where she worked at CSU-Pueblo, Denver Scholarship Foundation, and the Colorado Department of Higher Education prior to joining CU Denver. She began her journey at CU Denver in 2016 as the Associate Director of Scholarships and Student Development. In late 2020, she shifted her career from student services to HR and business operations. In 2022, she joined the Office of Human Resources as Assistant Director for Strategic People Operations.

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## **Kristina Mendez**

Kristina is the Learning Design Manager for the Financial Services & Solutions team in the Office of University Controller at CU System Admin. She first joined CU as an area accountant for the Denver|Anschutz Medical Campus Finance Office in 2014. In her current role, Kristina focuses on helping CU employees across all four campuses confidently perform their financial and reporting responsibilities. She enjoys creating engaging learning experiences and developing creative solutions to support her colleagues and campus customers.

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## **Faraz Ali**

Faraz began his career as a student employee at University Information Systems (UIS) in 2018, swiftly moving up to a full-time Integrations Developer role the following year, and later, to a Principal Cloud Applications Engineer. Currently, he works for the Integrations Platform team where he adeptly handles a variety of technologies like AWS, Container Orchestration tools, DevOps CI-CD pipelines etc. A strong advocate for Machine Learning, Faraz

continuously explores ways to blend it with his daily work, adding a touch of innovation to his projects.

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## **Kara Bajdas**

Kara is the Geological Sciences Graduate Program Administrator at CU Boulder. She graduated from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Geneseo with a B.A. in English and minors in Psychology and Human Development. In August 2004, Kara moved from her hometown of Buffalo, New York to Denver, Colorado to pursue her love of bright sunshine and the joy of the outdoors. Her Program Administration career encompasses roles in various sectors including non-profit (YMCA, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colorado, EarthLinks), for-profit small business, and higher education. After attending a graduate program at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, she returned to Colorado and began working at CU Boulder in early 2017. Kara began her Graduate Program Administrator role in Geology in June 2018. Her main objective is to assist graduate applicants and students during the entire cycle of their academic careers at CU Boulder - from being a prospective applicant to graduation. In 2022, Kara began pursuing her education again - a Master of Arts in Higher Education at CU Boulder. To date she's completed half the credits for the MA degree. When not at work or in class, Kara enjoys walking the outdoor paths of the front range with friends, traveling, and hanging out with her long-haired cat, who is an outdoor enthusiast as well.

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## **Bree Orozco**

As the Assistant Director of Advising at the Leeds School of Business, Bree oversees advising operations and her first year advising team. She earned a master's degree in social work from Washington University in St. Louis and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Iowa. Bree is a first-generation college student and higher education has truly transformed my life! I have worked at CU for over 15 years, and she enjoys supporting students to develop and achieve their goals. Outside of work I enjoy gardening, camping, and playing card games with family and friends! Working title: Assistant Director of Advising, Leeds School of Business.

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**Chrissie Bailey**

Chrissie started at the UCCS Student Health Center in 2006 as a contracted massage therapist. She moved into the Office Manager of the Wellness Center position in 2014 as the university planned to move to an integrated care model that includes medical, mental health, nutrition and wellness promotion co-located with campus recreation. During her time at UCCS, she earned a BS in Health Care Science (2014) and a Master of Public Administration (2021). In September 2022, she took on a new role as the Assistant Director of Wellness Promotion. Chrissie is proud to work with the incredible group of professionals that make up the UCCS Recreation and Wellness team. The team's shared commitment to support each other as they leverage all their varied knowledge, skills and expertise to help students thrive during their time at UCCS and beyond is the biggest reason she loves working at UCCS.

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**Kristina Coggins**

Kristina Coggins serves as the Director of Chancellor and University Events for the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. Kristina partners with the Chancellor's Office and University Advancement team, focusing on the donor, scholarship, system-level, and campus annual events. While at UCCS, Kristina has enjoyed interacting with students, whether in the scheduling office, catering, or AV booth. It is fulfilling seeing these events make a real difference in students' lives, and it is fun to watch students develop professionally over the years. Kristina averages 200 events a year in her current role and enjoys the unique work/life balance that higher education provides for an event manager. Kristina earned her BA in Political Science from the Hood College (Frederick, MD) and her MS in Hospitality Management from the University of North Texas (Denton, TX). She enjoys spending time in Pagosa Springs with her husband and twin girls in her spare time.

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## **Jennifer Thurston**

Jennifer spent nearly her entire career in higher education in different roles: as an academic advisor, administrator, academic services program director, and even as a division I assistant volleyball coach. The common thread among these positions is her love of serving and supporting students. Originally from western Maryland, Jennifer received her bachelor's degree in applied mathematics from Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and worked at Georgia Tech as a volleyball coach and academic advisor for 13 years. She and her husband decided mountains were better than hot and humid Atlanta and they moved to Colorado in 2004. After working at CU-Denver and Red Rocks Community College, she hit the jackpot in 2010 by finding a position at CU-Anschutz that gave her the opportunity to help build a first-of-its-kind Master of Science program from scratch. Now in its 11th year, the Modern Human Anatomy Program has 187 alumni in diverse clinical and professional careers. The Modern Human Anatomy Program gave Jennifer the opportunity to put her student services skills to work, use her Master in Public Administration from CU-Denver to craft policies, and to do what she loves best, serving and supporting students. Jennifer is the Academic Services Program Director in the Modern Human Anatomy Program in the Department of Cell and Developmental Biology.

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## **Lisa Testaverde**

Lisa earned a master's degree in Kinesiology from the University of Colorado (CU) Boulder in 1992 and started at CU's former Health Sciences Center in 1996 as a Professional Research Assistant (PRA). She was hired into this position by Dr. Richard "Dick" Hamman in the School of Medicine (SOM) Department of Preventive Medicine as a lifestyle coach for a new NIH clinical trial called the Diabetes Prevention Program, which continues to be active to this day. This entry level research position proved to be the beginning of a rewarding decades-long career at CU, allowing Lisa to rise from a PRA to a research coordinator of multiple NIH studies over the next few years. When the Colorado School of Public Health (SPH) was founded in 2008, her position was absorbed into the Department of Epidemiology. In 2015, Dr. Dana Dabelea established the Lifecourse Epidemiology of Adiposity and Diabetes (LEAD) Center, which sits across the ColoradoSPH and SOM Pediatrics, and asked Lisa to become the center administrator. This position provided a platform for Lisa to transition from research coordination to research administration, culminating in her current position as the Associate Director of Research Administration for LEAD. In this capacity, Lisa leads a small but mighty team that manages a portfolio of more than 30 federal and foundation grants totaling \$40M in funding. Lisa's career trajectory exemplifies the professional growth that is possible at CU. She would like to especially acknowledge Dick Hamman and Dana Dabelea for providing mentorship and opportunity over the years, as well as all her wonderful and talented colleagues.

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### **Groups audience:**

University of Colorado Staff Council

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**Source URL:**<https://www.cu.edu/ucsc/staff-excellence-award/2023-staff-excellence-award-recipients>

### **Links**

[1] <https://www.cu.edu/ucsc/staff-excellence-award/2023-staff-excellence-award-recipients>