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Seeing the big picture: Excellence in Leadership Program builds skills and knowledge for senior CU leaders [1]

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Stronger leadership results when leaders deepen their understanding of the University of Colorado system and build a community together.

This is something the Excellence in Leadership Program, or ELP, has specialized in for 24 years. ELP delivers content and conversations aimed at sharpening organizational understanding through leadership insights, encounters with CU experts and deeper connection to the greater CU community. The Excellence in Leadership Program website [3] offers additional information about its curriculum and opportunities.

The nine-month program delivers a comprehensive curriculum for high-potential faculty and staff from across CU campuses. Fellows visit each campus, delving into its unique identity, organizational strengths and challenges. They also meet with campus chancellors and their leadership teams, attend workshops led by campus experts and tour each campus.

Meeting campus leadership

At the Oct. 10 session at the UCCS University Center, fellows listened as UCCS Chancellor Jennifer Sobanet and six members of her leadership team discussed ways the campus is working to build a culture of care. Afterward, each leadership team member met with small groups of ELP fellows.

“(Fellows) get to meet with each of the leaders and have small group conversations,” said Ashley Eschler, program director for leadership and organizational effectiveness at CU System Human Resources, who organizes the ELP program. “This gives them a grounding in institutional knowledge and insights into what it looks like to be at that level of leadership within the broader university context.”

ELP fellow Beth Ladd joined CU Anschutz last year. Taking on a new role, one of the first things she always tries to do is orient herself to a new place. She found this somewhat challenging with CU’s geographic dispersion and differing campus cultures. Her time in ELP has provided valuable clarity.

“Each leadership team is appropriately reflective of the campus culture,” said Ladd, assistant vice chancellor of Information, Data Empowerment and Assurance. “Seeing and hearing the perspective and the focus of the leadership team on this campus as compared to different perspective and focus of the leadership team on another campus, it just helps you build that alignment of all the pieces — kind of like filling in all the pieces in the Trivial Pursuit pie.”

Insights with CU experts

ELP draws on CU experts to deliver leadership workshops based around key campus priorities.

At UCCS, Nicole Weis, director of Health and Community Programs at the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience, delivered the talk, “Leading Population Resilience.” The talk focused on an ever-present challenge of modern life: stress.

Weis explained different types and sources of stress, the ways the nervous system reacts to stress, and the physical, physiological and behavioral symptoms. How people manage stress can lead to fallout in organizations — increased turnover, communication issues, greater workload, burnout and other challenges.

Weis explained signs of burnout to the group, emphasizing ways to recognize stress and treat it before it becomes overwhelming. She also provided a wellbeing rubric tool to evaluate individual and group wellbeing and guidance on how to address stress in yourself or your team.

“Getting action points and practical insights people can use the next day when they go back to work was really helpful,” said Tony Kong, chair of the Social Responsibility and Sustainability Vision at CU Boulder’s Leeds School of Business.

Becoming an ELP Fellow

While ELP fellows better understand CU and its impact, Eschler said one of the program’s greatest strengths is how it builds a community of CU leaders. Over nine months, leaders build relationships and realize they can share challenges, ideas and support.

“We have some dynamic, amazing people who work at the university,” Eschler said. “You get to see them make those connections together. Feeling connected to the amazing work these leaders are doing and seeing them get excited about the work they’re doing and hearing them talk to each other is just incredibly inspiring.”

ELP fellows are typically high-performing performing staff at the director level or above and associate or full professors with leadership appointments. Each campus manages its own nomination process during the spring semester.

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