



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

CSU Provost transition

January 6, 2026

Dear CSU Faculty and Staff,

I'm writing today to let our university community know that Provost and Executive Vice President Marion Underwood has informed me she is resigning from her academic leadership role to return to the faculty, effective tomorrow, January 7. Given the timing during winter break, I felt it was important to wait until we returned to share the news.

I have put in place a transition plan for CSU's academic enterprise, with Lise Youngblade, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences, agreeing to serve as interim provost and executive vice president. With a nearly 20-year history at CSU – including almost seven years as dean – Lise will do an excellent job and ensure a smooth transition. I'm grateful that Vice President for Research Cassandra Moseley will chair the search for our next provost, a process that will start immediately.

Marion has been a strong advocate for academic and research excellence at CSU during her tenure, and I'm deeply grateful for her leadership, dedication, and partnership over the last two years. These are challenging times not just for CSU but all higher education, and Marion has helped this institution navigate those challenges and seize opportunities with a lens that is always focused on preserving and strengthening CSU's core mission of teaching, research, and service.

Thanks to her work creating the CSU Strategic Roadmap 2035, which has been adopted by the CSU System Board of Governors, the university's students, faculty, and staff will benefit for years to come from Marion's vision and focus. Her positive impact extends to many other areas. She played a critical role in helping develop and fine-tune a new budget model that, when fully implemented, will enhance and bring greater transparency to the way CSU distributes tuition and state dollars to academic units. She has also hired outstanding academic leaders, including a dean for the College of Agricultural Sciences, a dean for the College of Liberal Arts, and a Vice Provost and Dean for Undergraduate Affairs.

A clinical psychologist by training, Marion has made mental health and well-being central to her leadership at CSU. Her many initiatives, including the Provost's Ethics Colloquium on Mental Health and CSU System Vision for Student Mental Health 2030, focused on integrating wellness into the university's mission and many key aspects of campus life. Marion truly leaves a wonderful legacy across the campus. Please join me in thanking her for her service to CSU.

The role of provost and executive vice president is vitally important. Not only does this position serve as the second in command for the entire university, but it is CSU's top academic leader and both a voice for and liaison to the faculty. Marion has laid a strong foundation, and I have full confidence in Lise's ability to build on it during the transition.

Lise comes to the interim role with formidable experience as a professor, world-class researcher, and accomplished academic leader at Colorado State. She joined CSU from the University of Florida in 2006 as head of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, a position she held until she was appointed dean of CHHS in 2019. Lise knows CSU, is respected across the campus, understands the institution's innerworkings, and is deeply committed to the land-grant mission. I can think of no better person to lead the provost's office during this transition, and I look forward to partnering with her in the new year.

The search for a new provost will begin in the coming weeks, with Cass serving as chair. CSU's stock continues to rise nationally in terms of our academic and research prominence, and both Cass and I are confident that we will attract a strong pool of candidates. She will move quickly to form a committee and run a comprehensive process that will allow a new provost to be named before the end of the spring semester.

This transition will be bolstered by the fact that Faculty Council Chair Mendy (Melinda) Smith, on February 1, will move into the role of Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, a key position within the provost's office that works to support faculty and shape academic culture. I want to acknowledge and thank Sue James for her service in this role over the last 5.5 years. Following Sue's decision to return to the faculty, CSU conducted an internal search for this position in the fall, and I'm very happy I was able to hire Mendy for this important role over the break. Mendy has been a powerful voice for faculty for many years at CSU. During the 2021-2022 academic year, she served as the faculty representative on the CSU System Board of Governors. After that she was elected Faculty Council vice chair during the 2022-23 academic year and began serving as chair of Faculty Council during the 2023-24 academic year. As she moves into a new academic leadership position, Mendy will continue her research as a community/ecosystem ecologist and faculty member in the Department of Biology.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce that Matt Hickey, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs in CHHS, will serve as interim dean of CHHS. With a 28-year history at CSU, Matt is a professor of Health and Exercise Science with a joint appointment in the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, a University Distinguished Teaching Scholar, and the director of the Human Performance Clinical Research Lab.

These changes reflect CSU's commitment to academic excellence and our continued trajectory as a leading research university. I have the utmost confidence in Lise, Cass, Mendy, and Matt as we move forward, and I'm excited about the future of our academic enterprise. Please join me in supporting their work during this transition.

Thank you,

Amy Parsons
President

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