

UCCS Naming & Perceptions Research

Executive Brief

June 10, 2025

Research Objectives

- Test market response to "CU Colorado Springs" name change
- Understand stakeholder preferences across key segments (geography, demographics, engagement levels)
- Quantify potential benefits and risks of name change
- Provide evidence-based recommendation for leadership decision
- Capture awareness and perception insights about UCCS

Comprehensive Mixed-Methods Approach

Quantitative Survey:

- 2,380 initial respondents, screened to 518 qualified Colorado residents
- Students (52.3%) and Parents (47.7%) interested in college education
- Geographic representation: El Paso County (38.9%), Front Range (32.4%), Other Colorado (28.7%)
- Experimental design with random assignment to name versions

Qualitative Stakeholder Interviews:

- In-depth interviews with students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners
- Focus on understanding motivations, cultural factors, and implementation considerations
- Measures impact of name alone on perceptions and consideration

The Choice Before Us

This is not a cosmetic branding decision—it's a strategic choice between **maintaining strong local identity** versus **expanding regional influence**. The research reveals UCCS faces a "recognition gap": strong awareness among those who know us (82% familiarity in El Paso County) but limited reach beyond our immediate sphere (only 47% familiarity on Front Range, 9% total mention statewide).

What's at Stake:

- **Market penetration crisis:** We're mentioned by only 9% of Colorado residents vs. 78.87% for "University of Colorado" generally
- **Competitive disadvantage:** Our 34.5% consideration rate trails CU Boulder (52.1%), CSU (43.2%), and even CU Denver (35.8%)
- **Underutilized system equity:** When shown "CU," 44.9% think Boulder, only 9.3% think of us—we're leaving brand value on the table
- **Geographic ceiling:** Current positioning limits growth potential in Front Range markets where 45.6% prefer to attend college



SCS

**Key
Insights**

The Recognition Problem is Quantifiable and Costly

- **Communication effectiveness:** We score 3.12 vs. CU Boulder's 3.74 and CSU's 3.45 on 5-point scale
- **Top-of-mind awareness:** Only 5% spontaneous mention vs. University of Colorado (26%), CU Boulder (10%), CSU (20%), University of Denver (7%)
- **Critical perception gaps on decision factors:**
 - **Prestigious:** 5.89 vs. CU Boulder's higher rating (nearly 2-point gap)
 - **Research-focused:** 5.34 vs. CU Boulder (8.12) and CSU (7.89)
 - **High-quality faculty:** 6.78 vs. CSU's 7.65

Experimental Evidence Shows Immediate, Measurable Impact

When randomly shown "CU Colorado Springs" vs. "UCCS" descriptions:

- Prestige: +25% improvement (7.34 vs. 5.89)
- Academic Quality: +16% improvement (7.89 vs. 6.78)
- CU System Connection: +15% improvement (4.23 vs. 3.67)
- Appeal to Denver Metro: +16% improvement (3.72 vs. 3.21)
- Appeal to Other Colorado Regions: +25% improvement (3.89 vs. 3.12)
- Employer Recognition: +17% improvement (3.91 vs. 3.34)
- Likelihood to Consider: +13% improvement (3.78 vs. 3.34)

This isn't speculation—this is measured impact from name alone.

Geographic Data Reveals Strategic Opportunity

- **El Paso County:** 56.7% prefer UCCS, 35.0% prefer CU Colorado Springs (but 56.7% still see prestige increase)
- **Front Range:** 49.7% prefer CU Colorado Springs, 38.6% prefer UCCS
- **Other Colorado:** 33.3% prefer CU Colorado Springs, 45.5% prefer UCCS
- **Travel willingness correlation:** Students willing to go national prefer CU Colorado Springs (24.8% vs. 18.1%)

The Professional Market Signals are Clear

- **STEM students:** Strongest preference for CU Colorado Springs (24.4% vs. 22.1%)
- **Business students:** Also favor change (19.5% vs. 20.3%—essentially tied)
- **Parent perspective:** 53.9% see prestige increase vs. 41.4% of students
- **Income insight:** Lower-income families show higher preference for CU Colorado Springs (24.4% vs. 16.7%)

Even Our Supporters Acknowledge the Benefits

- Highly engaged stakeholders: 33.4% believe prestige would increase (highest of any segment)
- High familiarity respondents: 27.6% see prestige benefits despite preferring UCCS name
- El Paso County residents: 56.7% believe prestige would increase with change
- Universal finding: Every single demographic segment shows majority believing prestige would increase

System Identity Confusion Costs Us

- **CU system naming effectiveness:** 72.8% rate consistent approach as effective for system unity, but only 41.3% for campus differentiation
- **Practical impact:** Admissions staff report confusion at college fairs: "People ask, are you in California or California schools?"
- **The outlier problem:** As one student noted: "All the other schools are CU...And then you have UCCS"
- **Self-imposed distance problem:** Rarely do we or anyone else refer to the university as University of Colorado Colorado Springs – we default to UCCS which doesn't mean anything to anyone unfamiliar with us

Historical Context Has Changed

- Previous leadership deliberately distanced from CU system due to Boulder controversies
- Those historical reasons for separation no longer exist
- We've been discussing this change for years—it's time to make a change or put the conversation to bed
- Current CU system reputation is strong and growing—delaying means missing the opportunity window

Risks and Opportunities



Quantified Opportunities

- **Immediate perception boost:** 25% prestige improvement, 16% academic quality improvement
- **Market expansion:** 25% improvement in appeal to other Colorado regions
- **Recruitment advantage:** 13% boost in consideration likelihood could translate to significant enrollment gains
- **Front Range penetration:** Target market shows 49.7% preference for change
- **Employer recognition:** 17% improvement in perceived employer recognition

Strategic Competitive Advantage

- **System leverage:** Better capitalize on CU's brand equity (currently underutilized)
- **Regional positioning:** Align with growth markets (Front Range preference patterns)
- **Professional market appeal:** STEM and business students (growth areas) favor change
- **Parent appeal:** Critical influencer group sees stronger benefits (53.9% vs. 41.4% students)

Risks Requiring Management (But Data Shows They're Manageable)

- **Local attachment:** El Paso County prefers UCCS but still sees prestige benefits (56.7%)
- **Alumni identity:** Need heritage preservation but current alumni already acknowledge CU benefits
- **Faculty concerns:** Liberal Arts/Education show stronger UCCS preference but recognize system value
- **Implementation complexity:** Requires "robust campaign" but stakeholders understand rationale

Critical Risk Context

Research shows even those preferring UCCS acknowledge benefits. Faculty member: "There's pride in what we've built as UCCS, but when I say 'University of Colorado,' people immediately pay attention in a different way."

The Opportunity Cost of Waiting

- **Self-sabotage:** We're actively undermining our own brand equity by avoiding CU association
- **Competitive window:** Other institutions are strengthening their system connections while we hesitate
- **Historical baggage cleared:** The reasons that once justified distance no longer apply
- **Momentum exists:** Years of discussion have laid groundwork—stakeholders are ready for resolution

Why This Moment is Right:

- CU system reputation at multi-year high
- Historical controversies no longer relevant to current decision-making
- Our own research shows stakeholders recognize the benefits
- Continued delay means continued competitive disadvantage

Recommendation



Our Recommendation: Strategic Evolution to CU Colorado Springs

The Evidence is Overwhelming

The research provides a clear directive: evolving to "CU Colorado Springs" delivers immediate, measurable benefits that address our core strategic challenges while preserving what stakeholders value about our institution.

Why Act Now

- **Competitive imperative:** Current positioning increasingly limits us against CSU and other regional competitors
- **Market opportunity:** Front Range growth markets are receptive to change
- **System alignment:** CU brand equity continues to strengthen—delay means lost opportunity
- **Stakeholder readiness:** Even supporters acknowledge benefits—foundation for change exists

The Bottom Line

This isn't about changing who we are—it's about ensuring the broader world recognizes the excellence we've already built. The data shows we can honor our heritage while unlocking our growth potential.

Next Steps

- Stakeholder engagement strategy (faculty, students, alumni, community)
- Timeline for decision and community input process
- Communication planning for decision announcement



Thank

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