

Executive Summary

University of Colorado Colorado Springs Brand Exploration

Purpose

This report summarizes major findings from a comprehensive campus engagement process focused on brand exploration for the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. Insights were drawn from facilitated focus groups and an open-ended survey including students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and community members.

Study Details:

Focus Groups

A series of focus groups were conducted with representative campus constituencies, including students, faculty, and staff. These sessions provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on perspectives, concerns, and engage collectively with the proposal. Focus groups were structured around consistent prompts to explore perceived benefits, concerns, identity implications, and communication needs.

Respondents:

- Faculty: 6
- Staff: 32
- Students: 3

Open Ended Survey

A survey collected both structured responses (e.g., initial sentiment) and open-ended written feedback. Survey respondents included students (undergraduate and graduate), faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and community members. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to express views in their own words, including conditional or mixed perspectives that may not align neatly with predefined categories.

780 Unique Responses (Respondents could select multiple identifiers i.e. Graduate Student & Staff etc.):

- Faculty: 204
- Staff: 211
- Undergraduate Student: 208
- Graduate Student: 62
- Alumni: 149
- Community Member: 67
- K-12 Partner: 3
- Parent: 31

Questions:

1. What is your initial reaction to the idea of shifting to CU Colorado Springs
2. What potential positive outcomes or potential advantages do you see for you, current/future students, faculty/staff, and campus as a whole?
3. What concerns or potential disadvantages do you see for you, current/future students, faculty/staff, and campus as a whole?
4. How might this impact your day-to-day experience or identity with the campus?
5. If the data supports moving forward with the brand change, what could make the transition feel smooth and clear?
6. If the data supports updating the brand to CU Colorado Springs, what aspects of the UCCS identity and culture should be preserved?

Methodology:

All open-ended survey responses and focus groups were examined using an iterative, qualitative discourse analysis approach grounded in methods described by Cook et al. (2025), Gee (2025), and Nguyen & Welch (2025). The process included an initial manual review of every comment to identify repeated phrases, clause structures, and frequently used concepts, followed by AI-assisted coding that highlighted linguistic patterns such as repetition, emphasis, contrasts, and notable absences within and across respondent groups. All AI-generated patterns were manually validated against the raw dataset to ensure accuracy, representation, and reliability. This mixed method, discourse driven approach enabled a transparent and rigorous synthesis of high-volume qualitative feedback into actionable insights.

Limitations

The survey was administered through Microsoft Forms and designed to maximize anonymity and confidentiality; IP addresses were not recorded, and some duplicate responses may have occurred, as suggested by surveys with only Likert-scale responses and identical qualitative comments. Additionally, focus group participation was more limited among students and faculty compared to staff, which may constrain the range of perspectives captured; to address this, the analysis integrates both survey and focus group data, with the survey providing broader representation across all populations.

Analysis

Key Themes from Open-Ended Survey:

Question: *Initial reaction*

Likert Scale Summary

Response	Count	%
Very Positive	207	26.5%
Positive	81	10.4%
Neutral	59	7.6%
Negative	122	15.6%
Very Negative	311	39.9%

Key Quantitative Insights

Quantitative data reflects a highly polarized response environment rather than broad consensus.

- **Net Positive Sentiment:** 36.9%
- **Net Negative Sentiment:** 55.5%
- **Gap:** ~19 percentage points toward negative sentiment
- **High Polarization:** Largest groups are *Very Positive* and *Very Negative*
- **Low Neutrality (7.6%):** Indicates strong opinions and high engagement

Core Findings:

Survey results reveal a clear but conditional pattern:

- There is moderate conceptual support for stronger alignment with the CU system, particularly around:
 - brand recognition
 - clarity of institutional affiliation
- However, there is strong and highly emotional opposition, driven by:

- o timing concerns (budget context)
- o loss of institutional identity
- o reputational risks (especially acronym-related)
- o lack of evidence that rebranding will achieve intended outcomes

Key Themes from Focus Groups & Open-Ended Survey Qualitative Responses:

Positive Responses

Positive sentiment is driven by future-oriented benefits:

- Brand Clarity and Recognition
 - o Easier to communicate institutional affiliation
 - o Reduced confusion outside the region
- Alignment with CU System
 - o Perception of legitimacy and cohesion with peer campuses
- Prestige and Market Position
 - o CU brand seen as stronger nationally
- Potential benefits for recruitment, employment, and partnerships

Negative Responses

Negative sentiment is driven by immediate, tangible concerns:

- Timing and Resource Allocation
 - o Perception that rebranding is inappropriate during financial strain
 - o Concern that resources should prioritize students, faculty, and operations
- Reputational Risk
 - o Significant concern about acronym implications and external perception
- Identity Loss
 - o Strong emotional attachment to the UCCS name
 - o Fear of becoming indistinguishable within the CU system
- Strategic Skepticism
 - o Low confidence that rebranding will improve enrollment or financial outcomes
 - o

Neutral Responses

- Limited perceived personal impact
- Conditional openness depending on outcomes

Key Strategic Insight

The divide is not about whether alignment has value; it is about whether the conditions for success are present.

Stakeholders are weighing:

- Immediate, visible risks
- Long-term, potential benefits

Major Themes Identified

1. Clarity vs. Identity
 - o Improved recognition vs. loss of distinctiveness
2. Symbolic Value vs. Material Cost
 - o Brand alignment vs. financial priorities
3. System Belonging vs. Local Distinction

- o CU integration vs. Colorado Springs identity
- 4. Strategy vs. Trust
 - o Leadership intent vs. stakeholder confidence

Risk Assessment

High Risks

- Perception of poor fiscal prioritization
- Reputational harm (acronym issue)
- Alumni disengagement and reduced giving
- Erosion of trust

Moderate Risks

- Employer and credential confusion
- Transition-related brand fragmentation
- Internal morale impacts

Opportunities

- Stronger national and out-of-state recognition
- Clearer alignment with CU system brand equity
- Potential support for long-term enrollment strategy
- Improved clarity in institutional identity externally

Final Assessment

A more viable path is to:

- slowly adopt CU system alignment, refine the approach
- address key risks directly
- sequence strategically within broader institutional priorities

Advancing without addressing core concerns will likely:

- damage trust
- reduce stakeholder engagement
- undermine intended outcomes