



University of Colorado **Anschutz Medical Campus**

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The University of Colorado College of Nursing at Anschutz Medical Campus partners with Fort Lewis College to offer undergraduate nursing program in Durango

Students are slated to begin classes at the CU Nursing Fort Lewis College Collaborative in the fall of 2023

AURORA, Colo. (February 8, 2022) – [Fort Lewis College](#) (FLC) and the [University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus](#) have announced a new partnership to create a four-year undergraduate degree in nursing, bringing the state's flagship medical institute of higher education to the rural and Indigenous-serving campus of Southwest Colorado.

Ushering in a new model of health and collaboration in higher education, FLC and the [University of Colorado College of Nursing at Anschutz Medical Campus](#) are combining hands-on, culturally sensitive, patient-centered healthcare with the latest trends in medicine, like telehealth, which is an immediate need in rural communities around Durango.

“We’re thrilled to be partnering with the healthcare visionaries at CU Anschutz to bring this caliber of nursing education to Southwest Colorado,” said Cheryl Nixon, Fort Lewis College provost and vice president of Academic Affairs. “We are aligned in our community focused values and this collaboration will leverage the unique Indigenous perspective and sense of place that FLC brings into all of our academics.”

“We are honored to forge this partnership with an esteemed school in a part of the state offering such tremendous opportunity for training the future healthcare workforce of Colorado,” says Donald M. Elliman, Chancellor of the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. “By partnering with Fort Lewis College, we are bringing world-class healthcare education into a highly respected liberal arts environment, optimizing the best of both environments to deliver a top-tier nursing education.”

The first cohort of the [CU Nursing Fort Lewis College Collaborative](#) is expected to arrive at the FLC campus in the fall of 2023. The Durango-based program will fuse FLC’s liberal arts [OB1] core with the nursing curriculum at CU Anschutz, with students building a creative and critical thinking foundation in STEM-focused general education courses alongside nursing courses uniquely aligned to rural, Indigenous healthcare perspectives. The four-year program is an integrated and robust partnership of strengths, leveraging the experiential learning of an FLC education and the research prowess of Colorado’s flagship nursing school.

“We are grateful to Fort Lewis College and this opportunity to ensure the future of nursing reflects the patient population,” says Elias Provencio-Vasquez, Dean of the University of

Colorado College of Nursing at Anschutz Medical Campus. “It is important for patients to experience healthcare from professionals who look like them, and can understand their backgrounds. Expanding the opportunity for furthering careers in nursing ensures that the students of Southwest Colorado can serve their communities and beyond.”

FLC is a nontribal, Native American-serving institution located in Durango, Colorado, on the ancestral lands and territories of the Nuuchiu (Ute), Jicarilla Abache (Apache), Pueblos of New Mexico, Hopi Sinom (Hopi), and Diné (Navajo) Nations. FLC is the stronghold of academic excellence in the Four Corners region, serving a student population that is 46% Native American. FLC today awards more degrees to Native American students than any other four-year, baccalaureate-granting institution in the U.S.

The birthplace of the nurse practitioner program, the University of Colorado College of Nursing at Anschutz Medical Campus comprises four degree programs with four nurse-led practices in nine locations. Nursing baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral students learn with state-of-the art technology and advanced learning methods. Additionally, the College was just named by U.S. News & World Report as one of the best online Master’s in Nursing programs in the country.

Furthermore, the College of Nursing has taken a dedicated position in recruiting, developing, and growing a diverse community of students, faculty and staff. Aligning with the strategic priorities of the University of Colorado system, the College’s goal is to continue to provide educational programming and professional support in order to advance the profession of nursing, the quality of healthcare and research to better serve a diverse community.

Leaning into these strengths, the program will be one of the most cutting-edge nursing degree options offered at a Colorado institution of higher education—and will reach a part of the state in need of local nursing-focused educational programs.

“The philosophy here is to bring nursing out of the hospitals and into communities to provide healthcare to a rural and diverse population that has been historically underserved,” Nixon said.

A new higher education model

The CU Nursing Fort Lewis College Collaborative is the first of its kind in Colorado. The partnership is a new model of cross-state resource and knowledge sharing that will optimize how two educational institutions impact not only the students in the program but communities in rural Colorado.

Students stand to benefit from the close-knit, personalized, and high-touch undergraduate experience of FLC while accessing the prestigious curriculum and faculty of the University of Colorado College of Nursing at Anschutz Medical Campus. By locating the program at the premier four-year institution of the Four Corners, CU Anschutz and FLC are creating a pathway for local students to earn a bachelor’s degree and then return to their home communities with the healthcare expertise rural and underserved areas need. This community-facing program will not only prepare students for their future careers but address gaps in regional healthcare services:

- [According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing](#), 46% of employers require new nursing hires to have a bachelor's degree while 88% strongly prefer baccalaureate-prepared nurses.
- Historically, a lack of training facilities and teaching personnel has led to nursing shortages, especially in rural areas. [According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce](#), Colorado had the fourth lowest concentration of nursing professionals by state in the U.S. in 2020.
- In 2018, the U.S. Government Accountability Office studied employment data from the Indian Health Service, concluding that there are [not enough healthcare providers in the IHS service area to provide quality and timely healthcare to Indigenous people](#)—the average vacancy rate for physicians, nurses, and other care providers was 25%.

Siblings with ties to FLC and CU help fund nursing program

Durango stalwarts and siblings Karen Zink and Steve Short are doubling down on their devotion to the Four Corners by supporting the CU Nursing Fort Lewis College Collaborative with more than \$1 million in philanthropic support. In January 2022, Zink and her husband Jerry launched the Karen Zink Family Fund for Nursing Education Leadership. The Zink's \$1 million challenge match grant will not only support the hiring of the program's leader but will also help build a comprehensive network of support to maximize the success of students through access to scholarships, mentorships, peer-to-peer programs, and more. Short, former chairman of the FLC Board of Trustees, and his wife Jane are supporting the first student cohort with a \$30,000 nursing scholarship fund.

“Two things we can achieve by having the nursing program here instead of on the Front Range are improving diversity in nursing and establishing culturally relevant caregivers for underserved populations,” said Zink, a University of Colorado College of Nursing graduate school alumna and healthcare provider with more than 50 years of experience. “This partnership between FLC and CU has the creative potential to change the landscape and show how healthcare can and should look. This program will help prepare the nurses of the future.”

Zink points out that this program would not be possible without the tireless efforts and expertise of Dean Provencio-Vasquez. Provencio-Vasquez is the first Latino male to earn a doctorate in nursing and head a nursing school in the U.S. He refers to Zink as “la chispa,” that is, “the spark” in English, for her loving, outspoken, action-oriented desire to see change today.

About the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus

The University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus is a world-class medical destination at the forefront of transformative science, medicine, education and patient care. The campus encompasses the University of Colorado health professional schools, more than 60 centers and institutes, and two nationally ranked independent hospitals - [UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital](#) and [Children's Hospital Colorado](#) - that treat more than two million adult and pediatric patients each year. Innovative, interconnected and highly collaborative, the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus delivers life-changing treatments, patient care and professional training and conducts world-renowned research fueled by over \$650 million in research grants. For more information, visit www.cuanschutz.edu.

About Fort Lewis College

As the Four Corners' stronghold of academic excellence, Fort Lewis College blends small class sizes, engaged faculty, and unparalleled research opportunities to help students earn college degrees and chase dreams. Guided by real-world experiences and a bountiful landscape, our students develop critical thinking and communication skills to fuel further studies or rewarding careers. A broad range of subjects and diverse student body weave cross-cultural knowledge throughout signature programs focused on environmental studies, education, the health sciences, creative arts, and business administration. Find an education to live by at FLC.

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