

## Personal Touch Contributes to CU Medical School's Dramatic Increase in Applicants

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Camri Wolf had her choice of medical schools. She accepted the offer from one place outside of Colorado. She even applied for housing there.

Then Dr. Robert Winn, the associate dean of admissions for the University of Colorado School of Medicine, telephoned.

Winn told her CU wanted her. They chatted. The call made her remember the interview process – friendly,

and focused not just on how she'd done on tests and in classes, but on who she was. Never mind that housing application she'd filled out. She told CU yes and now is a first-year student.

"It was the call from Dr. Winn that really made me put CU over my other medical school choices," Wolf says. "That personal touch is what it's all about."

From his office phone, cell phone and home phone, Winn logged 304 of those calls in recent months to students CU has accepted for the class that will start next fall.

"Last year I got hoarse," Winn says with a smile. "This year I am better at pacing myself."

The results of this mad dialing – and other efforts -- are striking. Applications are up 22 percent this year, far above national average of 2.8 percent. There are more than 4,000 applicants for 160 slots. Diversity of the first-year classes has about tripled in two years, to 32.5 percent for students from ethnic and racial groups counted as "under-

represented in medicine," or URM in the lingo of med school admissions. Adding other forms of diversity such as rural background, about half the class is nontraditional in some way.

"What we try to do is get excellence," says Winn, a lung cancer specialist. "We don't chase diversity, we go after excellence."

How'd it happen? The answer is something of a handbook for any school or organization:

**Outreach.** Winn, Admissions Director Dimple Patel and Director of Community Outreach Ozzie Grenardo, scour the state and country for potential students. They've gone to traditionally minority colleges and are working with Native American organizations. They go after the students they want to accept, holding pot luck dinners with applicants and faculty at Grenardo's house and making all those phone calls.

**Heart.** The medical school goes after students with heart, in the non-anatomical sense. "They are going

into a lifetime of service,” Patel says. “They have to exemplify that.” More than at many medical schools, CU’s coursework emphasizes community service, primary care, teamwork and ethics. Winn recalls an applicant with top grades and scores on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT, but “no sense of passion or empathy.” Winn turned the applicant down, saying, “It’s about much more than your grade,” That applicant began volunteering at a clinic for indigent patients, then reapplied. “He had grown,” Winn says, and so he got in. “Now his big MCAT and GPA fit his big heart.”

**Money.** There’s new scholarship money, including \$10 million over five years from CU President Bruce Benson. The organization that accredits medical schools told CU three years ago that it should improve student diversity. Benson committed \$2 million a year for five years to scholarships. CU also revamped Admissions and put into place “pipeline” programs to steer younger students to the

med school. It appears that money helps but isn’t everything. Of the 52 entering students last year from racial or ethnic groups that are in the URM category, half had money from that scholarship and half did

At some places, it’s something of a death march of relentless, back-to-back interviews. Winn calls the CU approach “holistic.”

“I want people to say, ‘We never had an interview day like this.’” Winn says. “We challenge them to have fun. We give them down time to sit and reflect. And the truth is, they interview us as much as we interview them.”

Admissions officials work hard, Winn says, to compete with the best medical schools for the best students.

“It can be difficult, given that these people are outstanding in every way,” Winn says. “Like Camri Wolf, they could go to any school they want to. But now we see them turning down other schools and coming here.”

**Statistics for Matriculants to the School of Medicine, August 2011**

Female	49%
Male	51%
Non-Resident	30%
Colorado Resident	70%
Under-Represented in Medicine***	32.5%
Rural**	8.75%
Median MCAT	10.67Q
Mean MCAT	10.8
National Mean MCAT*	10.37Q
Median GPA	3.74
Mean GPA	3.69
National Mean*	3.67
Median Age	24.58

\*2010 data-National numbers for 2011 not yet available.

\*\*Students in the Rural Track Program.

\*\*\*Rural students not included.

not. On a revisit, the accreditation team said the diversity question had been addressed.

Even the interview process has changed at CU’s medical school.

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