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# UCCS Improves Retention, Recruitment, and Mental Health with Nearpeer


## RECRUITMENT + RETENTION = ENROLLMENT


The University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) is a mid-sized public university and part of the University of Colorado System. Once a small satellite campus, UCCS has established itself in recent decades as one of the fastest-growing universities in the state of Colorado. Much of UCCS's rapid growth over the decades can be attributed to UCCS's "students-first" approach and the university's investment in innovative support services to meet the needs of its undergraduate and graduate populations.

## KEY FINDINGS

Their Nearpeer launch was recognized by UCCS as a top university-wide achievement because of its positive student impact. Results include:

 **95%** of incoming students who used Nearpeer **enrolled for Fall term**

 **"Huge Decrease in Melt"** ...according to **Chief Enrollment Strategist, Dr. Wendi Clouse**

 **8.4%** **transfer enrollment increase** since launching Nearpeer

# RECRUITMENT + RETENTION = ENROLLMENT



## University of Colorado Colorado Springs

After decades of rapid growth, the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) saw a decline in undergraduate enrollment in 2018. By 2023, enrollment dropped 15% from its peak a few years earlier, marking the lowest level in over a decade. The university's main challenge has been retaining first-year students, which has offset any recent gains in recruitment. With a first-year retention rate of 67.7% and a graduation rate of 43%, UCCS has faced significant budget impacts, as nearly *half* of its revenue comes from student tuition and fees.

To reverse these trends, the university has partnered with Nearpeer to help grow recruitment – particularly with priority populations, including transfer students, out-of-state students, and Hispanic students – and to support their retention goal of 73.6% by 2026. The initial results are promising: since launching Nearpeer, both enrollment and retention are up considerably at UCCS, and the platform's ability to improve student mental health aligns with the university's new direction toward becoming a recognized and designated "wellness campus."

## UCCS Priorities

- Grow enrollment
- Increase retention of first-year students
- Improve recruitment of priority populations (transfer, out-of-state, Hispanic)

The University of Colorado Colorado Springs understands that boosting enrollment requires both strong recruitment and retention efforts. They also understand that students with strong social networks are more likely to start and stay in school. For these reasons, the university views Nearpeer as a key tool for achieving a goal in its 2030 strategic plan. The plan aims to “foster a community of learning, engagement, and inclusive belonging... [that] strengthens our culture of health, safety, and wellbeing... increasing overall satisfaction and sense of belonging on campus.”

**Since launching Nearpeer, both enrollment and retention are up considerably at UCCS**

# TAKING ACTION TO REVERSE DECLINES

## A MENTAL HEALTH APPROACH TO RECRUITMENT

Realizing the need for a new direction – one that incorporates a broad mental-health initiative and a unified strategy that acknowledges recruitment and retention as equally important in achieving enrollment growth – the new University of Colorado Colorado Springs Chancellor, Dr. Jennifer Sobanet, created a singular Enrollment Management & Student Affairs (EMSA) division. At its head is Dr. Stephanie Hanenberg, Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs and the former president of the American College Health Association.



**Dr. Stephanie Hanenberg**

Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs

*“Our goal is to attract, engage, retain, and support each student while guiding them as they pursue their ultimate goal of achieving a degree at UCCS.... We have to be innovative and try new things... to think outside the box, to come up with other things that we should be trying. How do we get students to be able to stay?”*

*- Dr. Stephanie Hanenberg*

**Dr. Wendi Clouse**  
UCCS Chief Enrollment Strategist



One of the visionary administrators leading this charge is Dr. Wendi Clouse, the university’s new Chief Enrollment Strategist, who learned about Nearpeer’s transformative work during AACRAO’s annual Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) conference. Attending a session titled “The Untapped Power of Belonging,” Dr. Clouse learned about the considerable increases in recruitment and retention that were achieved across the California State University System via Nearpeer, and the additional benefits for incoming students’ mental health and overall sense of belonging on campus. These results inspired Dr. Clouse to introduce Nearpeer at UCCS: if a single app could improve recruiting priority populations, retaining first-year students, and supporting greater student mental health, it would be a bullseye for UCCS and its new strategic plan. Little did UCCS leadership expect the positive and immediate impact that Nearpeer would drive in the Fall of 2024.



University of Colorado  
Colorado Springs



# "FABULOUS RESULTS"

## HIGH ADOPTION AND DECREASED MELT

*"Our first year with Nearpeer has been fabulous." - Dr. Wendi Clouse*


Dr. Clouse and team were impressed with Nearpeer's ability to help across multiple strategic areas. She explains, "We saw a huge decrease in melt." While hopes were high for Nearpeer, Dr. Clouse acknowledges that so much activity on the platform was "unexpected." Launching just a month before fall classes started, UCCS quickly achieved a 68% Nearpeer adoption rate amongst their incoming freshmen. Over 1,000 first-time, first-year students downloaded the app, and those students only had a 4.3% melt rate, which was considerably lower than UCCS's overall melt rate. In total, 95% of incoming students who used Nearpeer were actively enrolled for the Fall term.

 Nearpeer



 Nearpeer

 **95%** of Nearpeer users enrolled for Fall

 **8.4%** Increase in transfer enrollment

 **24%** Decrease in Fall attrition

This was such a milestone that the University of Colorado Colorado Springs recognized their successful Nearpeer implementation as one of its top university-wide achievements of 2024. Further, since launching Nearpeer, UCCS has seen an 8.4% increase in transfer enrollment over the prior year, and UCCS has achieved a 24% decrease in fall attrition. Beyond its ability to increase enrollment and improve student satisfaction and socialization, Dr. Clouse also appreciates the intelligence Nearpeer provides.

*"Nearpeer provides us better forecasting and projections, and it gives us access to data we've never had before."*

*- Dr. Wendi Clouse*

# CHANGING TIMES & CHANGING NEEDS

## WHY UCCS INVESTED IN NEARPEER

“One of the reasons we invested in Nearpeer is because we had a high percentage of students who were not engaging on campus. They were not using campus resources like the library or recreation center, so we wanted to find a way for them to start engaging before they ever arrived,” explained Dr. Clouse. She also acknowledges, “We’ve seen a considerable shift in the need for mental health services. There is a lot more need coming from entering students. And we’re also seeing a shift in demographics, which means different needs for different populations.” This is why introducing Nearpeer to incoming UCCS students was so important and timely.

*“Your first year of college can be somewhat challenging, especially if you don’t have that group of friends.”*

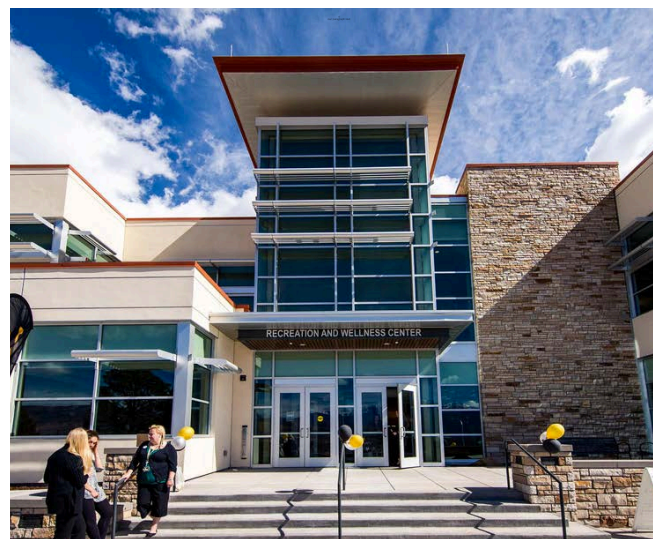
- Katrina Schwank

As the Learning Communications Support Specialist for UCCS, Katrina sees Nearpeer’s value as “a great way to make those connections.”

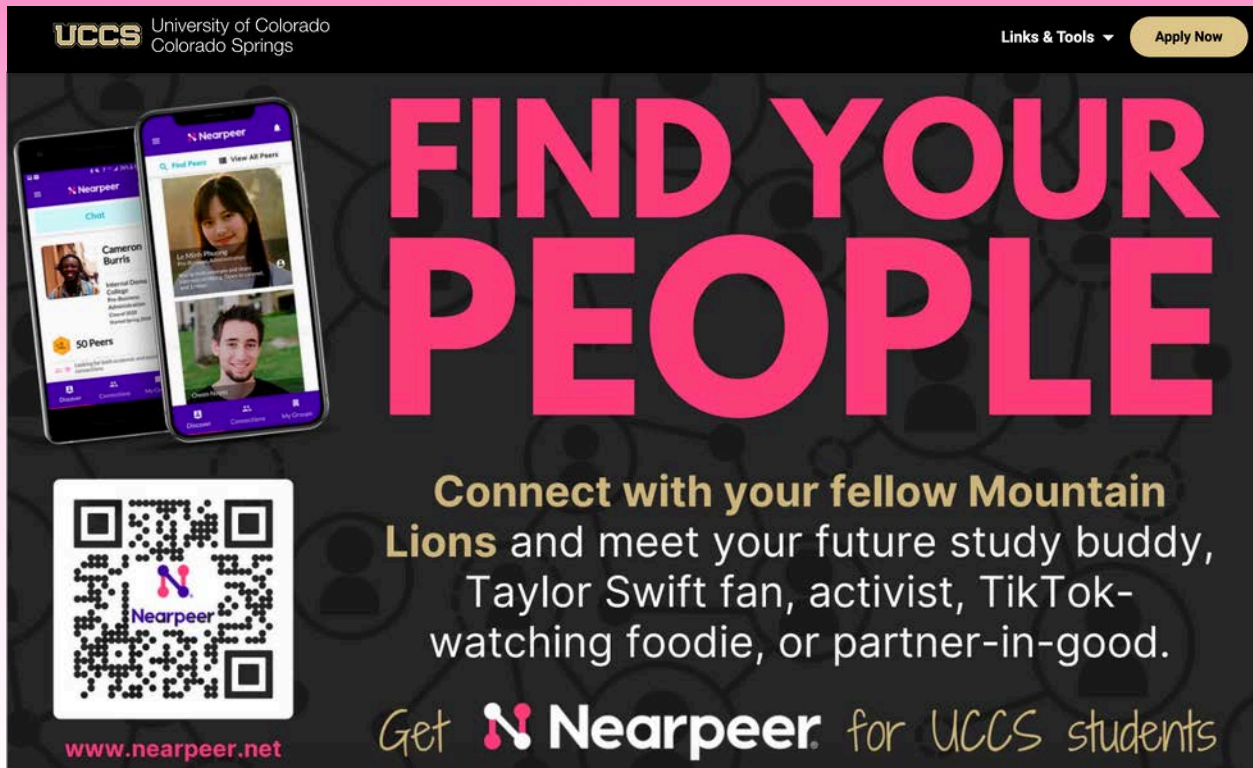
# UCCS


*“There are tons of events on campus to go to and meet new people... but with Nearpeer, you can find people to go with you to those events.”* - Katrina Schwank

And, speaking of events, Noelle San Souci, the Director of Student Life at University of Colorado Colorado Springs, appreciates all of the intelligence she can learn from Nearpeer about what UCCS’s students are most interested in. With the average incoming student listing 24 unique interests and aspirations about themselves in their Nearpeer profile, San Souci and team now feel like they understand what clubs, activities, and events are most relevant to UCCS’s newest students



# UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS LIKE NEVER BEFORE



The image shows a screenshot of the UCCS Nearpeer website and mobile app interface. At the top left, it says "UCCS University of Colorado Colorado Springs". At the top right, there are links for "Links & Tools" and "Apply Now". The main heading is "FIND YOUR PEOPLE" in large, bold, pink letters. Below this, there are two smartphone screens displaying the app interface. The left screen shows a chat window with a profile for Cameron Burris. The right screen shows a search results page with a profile for Li-Min Phony. Below the screens is a QR code with the Nearpeer logo in the center. To the right of the QR code, the text reads: "Connect with your fellow Mountain Lions and meet your future study buddy, Taylor Swift fan, activist, TikTok-watching foodie, or partner-in-good." At the bottom, it says "Get  Nearpeer for UCCS students". The website URL "www.nearpeer.net" is at the bottom left.

## ACCESS TO NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN DATA

Who knew, for example, that more incoming UCCS students enjoyed reading over playing a video game? Or that soccer was by far the most popular sport amongst new UCCS students? Or that their favorite food was sushi, even though their favorite restaurant was Chick-Fil-A? This data can be parsed further, too. Incoming transfer students are more passionate about anime, hiking, and travel than incoming first-time freshmen – and first-time freshmen are more passionate about activities like camping, baking, and painting than incoming transfers. Insights like these can help UCCS staff offer relevant events and social meetups on campus that will garner higher attendance and help students feel a greater sense of belonging.



# HELPING EVERY STUDENT FEEL THEY BELONG

## GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

UCCS is going the extra mile to ensure that Nearpeer helps all incoming students experience less anxiety, loneliness, and isolation. UCCS invites staff to join the platform to engage with incoming and first-year students, along with orientation leaders and designated “engagement leaders” who answer students’ questions and keep conversations lively. And, by being able to see which students are making friends on the platform and which ones may be struggling, UCCS has current students on the app to reach out and bridge the gap for incoming students who may be nervous to initiate one-to-one connections.

As one UCCS leader acknowledges...

*“Students come to college expecting to have some of the most impactful social experiences of their lives and wind up feeling disappointed and disenchanted when their reality differs from those expectations. When friendships don’t happen easily, students can feel isolated and like they themselves are the problem.”*



This is how a platform like Nearpeer can be so transformational. Here is what one UCCS student had to say about the app:

*“It’s really hard finding friends. I mean, we have so many people in the world, but it feels like so few have things in common with me. That’s why I’m glad I found out about this app.”*

Dr. Hanenberg sees a bright future ahead for the university and its strategic focus that unifies improving enrollment, retention, and student health.

*“It’s exciting. I mean, there are so many new opportunities for students, and now we’re serving students we might not have been able to serve before.”*

# THE Nearpeer<sup>®</sup> EXPERIENCE



## LAUNCH QUICKLY

Nearpeer is a turnkey solution that can be implemented with minimal lift from university partners. With no system integration or university staffing required, the platform has launched in as little as 24 hours for clients seeking immediate help growing enrollment, improving retention, and supporting greater sense of belonging among students.

## SEE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

Institutions using Nearpeer can achieve 3X higher yield rates, up to 93% melt reduction, 17% year-over-year retention increases, and 16% higher four-year graduation rates. Students also report reduced anxiety and isolation, along with greater inclusion and belonging, making Nearpeer the top choice for improving student success and mental health.

## TRUSTED PARTNER AND REAL IMPACT

Nearpeer partners with institutions of all sizes to support diverse learners, from undergraduates to adults and early-college students. Nearpeer conducted the largest clinical trial on belonging's impact on student success in higher education, establishing itself as a leader the field. This transformational work is backed by philanthropic leaders like The Lumina Foundation and The Lilly Endowment.

## ENHANCE EXISTING INVESTMENTS

Nearpeer is a powerful standalone tool that seamlessly enhances universities' existing systems, including student information systems, res-life platforms, marketing tools, student success platforms, and resources for tutoring, mentorship, and mental health.

## CONSIDERABLE ROI

Nearpeer is a proven, high-ROI investment for universities, driving increased yield, reduced melt, and improved persistence. Partner schools see a 10x (or higher) return through higher enrollment that increases tuition revenue, with some achieving up to 97x ROI. No wonder *Forbes* calls Nearpeer "A very big deal."

## HIGH ADOPTION

"Will I fit in?" is today's top concern for college students, and without an early sense of belonging, enrollment and persistence decline sharply. Nearpeer addresses this need by helping students form meaningful friendships before orientation, leading to an average 50% voluntary adoption—rising to 95% at some schools.



# Forbes

“ For those in the know, or who follow the razor’s edge world of college recruitment, boosting enrollment is gold. But also boosting retention, as was shown in this study [of Nearpeer], is platinum...

This is a very big deal. ”

# ABOUT NEARPEER

Our peer-to-peer engagement platform acts as a transformative catalyst, fostering meaningful connections and enhancing students' sense of belonging at every stage of their journey. Leveraging advanced matching algorithms, Nearpeer facilitates personalized, meaningful, and healthy 1:1 connections tailored to each individual student. Nearpeer's clients benefit from a custom-built, safe, and inclusive virtual peer-networking platform that has proven to strengthen engagement, commitment, and community throughout the student lifecycle. This unique approach drives measurable improvements in enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates while also proving to reduce student loneliness, anxiety, and isolation. This is why so many schools partner with Nearpeer – and why Forbes calls Nearpeer “a very big deal.”



 **Nearpeer**®



For more information, visit [nearpeer.com](https://nearpeer.com).