Greek Motto and Seal of the University of Colorado

In its history, the University of Colorado has used three different seals. Before 1893, an adaptation of the Colorado State Seal was used, but it was never adopted by the Board of Regents. From 1893 to 1908, the university seal was a copy of Wyon's medallion, "Science Trims the Lamp of Life." In this version, a Greek woman knelt before a lamp, and stalks of mariposa lilies decorated the border. In 1893, University President James Baker stated, "The new University seal bears the Greek Motto chosen from the volume of Christian Teachings to mean 'Let your Light Shine.'" (Pres. Baker's Baccalaureate Address, May 28, 1893). The present seal, was adopted in 1908, but the motto was carried over in the new design. George Norlin, classics professor and president of the University from 1919-1939, translated the motto as "a light unto your feet."

"What the University purposes to be, what it must always strive to be, is represented by its seal, which is stamped on your diplomas -- a lamp in the hands of youth. If its light shine not in you, how great is its darkness. But if it shine in you ______ today and ______ before you, who can measure its power?" (from the 'Norlin Charge to the Graduates', from "I am the Way" (1935), annually given to the graduating classes of the University of Colorado.)

The current seal, adopted in 1908, depicts a male Greek classical figure sitting in front of a pillar and holding a scroll. Next to the figure, laurel branches frame a burning torch. The inscription in Greek reads "Let Your Light Shine." The seal's designer, Henry Read of Denver, chose the classical motif because Greek civilization "stands as the criterion of culture." The laurel symbolizes honor or success; the youth suggests the "morning of life"; and the scroll represents written language.

The seal is used primarily on official documents, such as diplomas and transcripts that have been issued on behalf of the university. The Board of Regents uses the seal on its official documents and publications. The seal also appears on the President's Chain of Office, the University Mace, Regent regalia, and various formal publications.

There are currently two versions of the Seal of the University of Colorado. The Official Seal of CU has double rings on the outside and the motto is in Greek. This version of the Seal is used primarily on official documents, such as diplomas, transcripts, and regent's certificates. Other uses must be approved by the Board of Regents, 303-492-8203.

The second is the Commercial Seal of CU. This Seal has a single outside ring and the Greek motto has been translated into English. This version of the seal can be used as a design element on documents, publications, web sites, signage, and promotional items. Call 303-492-7531 for digital files.

References:

1. Research performed by Ralph Ellsworth, Library Director, CU History Collection.
3. <https://www.cu.edu/articles/upload/cu-branding-manual.pdf> See this page for descriptions and policies regarding the University of Colorado Lettermark (interlocking CU letters), the University of Colorado Wordmark, and the Athletic logo of CU athletic programs.