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# Seattle University Proceeds in Presidential Transition Process

Ben Wiley, Author

Seattle University's President-Elect Eduardo Peñalver, former Dean of Cornell Law School, was introduced to the Seattle U community on Peñalver in Fall Quarter, and on Tuesday had his first opportunity to engage with the student community. Peñalver's appointment concluded the committee's thorough search to find the successor to current President Father Stephen V. Sundborg S.J., who will be stepping down in June after 24 years of leading Seattle U. Returning to the state where he was raised, Peñalver will be the first Latino and layperson president in the history of Seattle U.



As President Sundborg embarks on his last two quarters as Seattle U's president, the transition process is likely to intensify as June approaches. Shane Martin, the Provost of Seattle U, explained the transition process in a written statement.

"Similar to a presidential transition in the U.S., Seattle U has one president at a time. Fr. Sundborg will be the president until the end of June, and President-elect Peñalver will become president on July 1," Martin wrote. "Because the President-elect was named so early, there are great opportunities during the transition for the President-elect to get to know the university, interact with Fr. Sundborg and other leaders and to plan for the future."

Martin also revealed that he had the opportunity to connect with President-elect Peñalver and is, "inspired by his energy and passion for Seattle U." He also noted that the virtual fireside chat is an opportunity for other members of the Seattle U community to get to know the president-elect.

During the event, Peñalver expressed his appreciation for his conversations with Martin.

"From my meetings with Shane, I've been impressed with the initiatives that he's undertaking," Peñalver said.

David Powers, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Seattle U, has not directly met Peñalver. However, they have worked together throughout the interviewing process to hire the new dean of the college of education, and Powers expressed enthusiasm for the anticipated changes that Peñalver will bring.

"Any presidential transition is going to affect all the colleges and the overall university. [Peñalver] is a person with a vision for the 21st century that I think fits the direction that the university wants to go. What he adds in his vision will shape how we get there," Powers said.

Powers also noted that Peñalver has already attended scholarly presentations by faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences. Additionally, he highlighted that because Peñalver is transitioning to Seattle U from his previous role as a dean, he will be equipped in understanding the challenges that deans will face. Lastly, Powers spoke to how well President Sundborg has been working with Peñalver throughout the transition process.

According to Powers, this spring, Seattle U is planning to celebrate President Sundborg for all that he has done for the university over the past 24 years, while at the same time looking ahead to the bright future of the Peñalver era.

The majority of the Seattle U community has not had an opportunity to connect with President-elect Peñalver, as he is still serving as the dean of Cornell Law School.

Erika Moore, the President of the Student Government of Seattle U (SGSU), stated that she does not know much about the presidential transition process due to it being largely handled by university administrators. She also revealed that SGSU has yet to meet with Peñalver, but hopes to meet with him as soon as possible to share their hopes for the future.

Moore said that she currently meets with Sundborg several times a quarter to discuss goals that SGSU has for improving student life, among other things, on campus.

With the appointment of Peñalver ushering in a new era at Seattle U, Moore emphasized specific measures she would like the school to change or improve upon.

"I would love to see more diversity in the curriculum across Seattle U's campus, more inclusion in general, more emphasis on financial transparency. I hope that the new president will try to address these issues, yet I haven't had the opportunity to chat with him about it," Moore said.

Outgoing and incoming Seattle U presidents took part in a special fireside chat webinar Feb. 9, moderated by Vice President of University Affairs Scott McClellan. Attendees had the opportunity to meet and learn more about President-elect Peñalver and ask questions.

When President Sundborg asked Peñalver how his experiences as a Latino American will impact the way he governs, due to his personal history of being under-represented in academia.

"These experiences have taught me, hopefully in a way that is broader than my own narrow experience, the importance of improving the experiences of people who feel out of place," Peñalver said.

Peñalver also emphasized that he has been working with lay presidents at other Jesuit universities to immerse himself in Ignatian pedagogy.

The questions, given through an anonymous chat window, addressed a wide variance of concerns. A community member asked about the rift between Catholic social teaching and the progressive mission of the university, and how Peñalver will support LGBTQ+ students.

"My role as the president is to support the community and support the members of the community, make sure that they're included and welcome and provide an environment for them to flourish. I don't see a contradiction between that and Catholic social teaching," Peñalver said.

The President-elect also underscored the importance of creating a safe institution for the queer community.

"There are dimensions of Catholic teaching that are profoundly unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ people, and I'm not in a position to change the teachings of the church on those things, but I can have an impact on the environment at Seattle U," Peñalver said.

The conversation between the incoming and outgoing presidents reflected the shared values between the two; Jesuit education, academic excellence and engaged enrichment of the community. It also highlighted their differences, however. From the generational gap to the change from clergy to laity and the inauguration of the first president of color at Seattle U, it is clear that the shared values of Sundborg and Peñalver will be interpreted through a new lens.