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# Seattle University Reacts to 22nd President Announcement

Myrea Mora, Nicole Golba, Anna Popp, and Logan Gilbert

Ranging from topics involving health and safety, community engagement, political climate and most recently surrounding the Seattle University presidential search, a plethora of decisions have remained undecided entering the 2020-2021 academic year at Seattle University.

With the announcement of President Fr. Stephen V. Sundborg S.J.'s official retirement after serving as Seattle U's president for 24 years, the Seattle U Board of Trustees began their search to find a successor who would bring forth a new era to the Seattle U community.

Despite initial technological difficulties, Eduardo M. Peñalver was announced Seattle U's 22nd president early Oct. 22. Successor to Sundborg, Peñalver will officially assume his role beginning July 1, 2021.

Sundborg is looking forward to helping President Elect Eduardo M. Peñalver transition into the Seattle U community, as he will be "graduating" with the class of 2021.

"I think there are tremendous opportunities for Peñalver," Sundborg said. "I think he's going to engage in high academic standards, he is going to propel Seattle U forward and build academic quality."

Following the announcement, Peñalver received acclaim from a number of Seattle U officials. As the university's first Latino and layperson president, this decision marks a milestone and launches a transition period for the university. For Michael Quinn, Dean of the College of Science and Engineering, excitement and opportunity mark the future of Seattle U.

"One of the things that really struck me is that we have a new generation of leadership now," Quinn said. "I think [Peñalver] is going to be engaging with faculty and students in a new way, and I am excited for how that helps us move together."

Seattle U Provost Shane Martin also touched on his enthusiasm towards working with Peñalver, mentioning both current and future goals the university has set.

"I was thrilled with the announcement of Peñalver as our new president, and I look forward to working with him as a partner," Martin said. "Our strategic directions document calls us to a bold future and there's a lot of work to do to achieve the goals in the strategic directions document. I believe that Peñalver will be fully committed to implementing those goals."

Martin also attested to the early announcement of the president, emphasizing the new direction strategic plans set at the start of 2020 will take.



“We’ve had to think carefully about the priorities in the strategic plan, and make some adjustments about how we are moving forward,” Martin said. “Strategic plans are dynamic—they’re not static. Even though we have an amazing opportunity because we’ll have a presidential transition, the university would regularly be looking to update the strategic plan based on current events and what’s happening regardless.”

Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences David Powers also expanded upon how the new presidency will influence university debt.

“I think it’s about how you decide what to do with the resources you have,” Powers said. “And in [Peñalver’s] previous role as a dean, he knows not only the big picture pieces, but also how to get down to the nitty-gritty and really save money.”

Amid recent happenings both globally and within the Seattle U community concerning racial equity, various Seattle U faculty members released a statement on Oct. 16 announcing its anti-racist education and action plan, titled LIFT SU and a renewed commitment to Jesuit values.

“I absolutely know that our new president is committed to the issues around equity and diversity,” Martin said. “We are implementing an initiative now, and I know that the president’s opinion is absolutely committed to the principles in LIFT SU.”

As the first Latino president in the school’s history, not only will Peñalver continue the university’s current goals of increasing racial diversity, but through his unique perspective, he will offer new ways that the school can change.

“[Peñalver] is deeply entrenched in anti-racist work and providing justice for people in our communities,” Powers said. “As someone from the Latinx community in Washington, which has the fastest growing student population in the state, I think he can be the one to help understand the needs of the Latinx community and provide support to other more diverse groups.”

When asked what was the first thing they would like to see Peñalver do at the start of his term, Quinn spoke to his appreciation toward Peñalver’s plans to increase the schools’ sustainability efforts and continue to keep its place as a nationally recognized university for its environmentalism.

“I think there’s an opportunity for us to be more integrated in our approach to sustainability,” Quinn said. “There are particular ways in which the campus is a leader in sustainability, but I would like to see it more incorporated into the curriculum and see it come up in a variety of ways through the student experience. I think with this change we have an opportunity to improve that.”

Powers posed questions about issues Seattle U has faced, especially in relation to a less-than-ideal transition year for the new president.

“There’s two big issues that I think he will have to address on day one,” Powers said. “How are we going to be a quality institution that actively fights against 400 years of racism and white supremacy? How does he reach out to the country as our new leader to show everyone what we are all about?”

While the university president handles a multitude of administrative roles, a critical aspect of the role is the relationship Peñalver will work to foster with faculty, staff and the student body.

Student Government of Seattle University (SGSU) President and third-year Environmental Studies and Philosophy double major Erika Moore touched on the importance of availability during a pandemic that turned the Seattle U community entirely virtual in the span of weeks.

“I think something that the pandemic has offered is the opportunity to schedule meetings often,” Moore said. “People can log on whenever, so I’m hoping that since Peñalver is being introduced to the university in this context and accessibility in terms of conversation time, it will translate into more regular conversations with student leadership and the general student population.”

As Seattle U continues to adjust to unparalleled circumstances and the transition period from president to successor, the university community has been vocal about their expectations. All eyes will be on Peñalver as he makes his first impressions at Seattle U amidst global unease.