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Shaping the Future of Seattle University

McKenna White, Staff Reporter

Eduardo Peñalver began his tenure as Seattle University's 22nd president in July 2021. With this shift in leadership, some Seattle U staff members made a transition of their own, leaving a number of positions vacant.

"President Peñalver has brought to the university great energy and vision. He has updated and reignited our strategic directions," Seattle U Provost Shane Martin said. "Now, as people are choosing to retire and there are vacancies, he is able to hire people. He's able to bring in a team that complements his own leadership style, his vision and his energy."

As of now, Seattle U has hired three senior-level staff members: Edgar Gonzalez, vice president of University Advancement; Cynthia Dillard, dean of the College of Education; and Anthony Varona, dean of the School of Law.

"I think in their own way, they will absolutely help Seattle U in its mission," Martin said.

Gonzalez currently works as the Assistant Vice President for Development at the Oregon Health and Science University Foundation. He will begin his position at Seattle U this spring. As Vice President of University Advancement, Gonzalez's job will be to oversee the university advancement division at Seattle U, fundraise for major university priorities and help with alumni engagement. Having attended the University of Washington, he is looking forward to living and working in the Seattle area again.

"I chose to work at Seattle U because it provides an opportunity to align my skills and experience with my faith and values like never before in my career," Gonzalez said. "It's an opportunity to serve a community I love and to be a small part of something great that does good in the world."

Meanwhile, Dillard began her role as Dean of the College of Education in early February. She previously worked in a leadership position at the University of Georgia. Dillard, who received her doctorate from Washington State University, is the founder and president of Give. Build. Share, an organization that raises funds and resources through donations to provide access to education and health care in high-need communities in Ghana, West Africa.

Dillard is also a renowned scholar who has authored or edited four books and researched race, culture, gender and spirituality and how they pertain to education. Dillard plans to continue addressing pressing challenges in education, both in Seattle and around the world.



Luca Del Carlo

“The College of Education is important because they educate teachers, counselors, school leaders and mental health professionals who work in schools, community organizations and nonprofits,” Martin said. “The work that they do has a huge impact on the community. A new dean in that college can help to revitalize programs and help bring the faculty together for further growth.”

Last Thursday, Seattle U announced Varona as the new Dean of the School of Law. Varona, was formerly Dean of the University of Miami’s School of Law. There, he played an integral role in building the university’s law program through fundraising, recruiting, improving its national reputation and elevating student performance on the bar exam. About one year ago, Miami abruptly fired Varona without speaking to his fellow faculty, sparking national outrage. As a result, students, professors and fellow lawyers wondered if Varona’s identity as an openly gay Cuban man was a reason for his termination.

Varona steps into his position at Seattle U this July.

Along with these three senior-level hires, Seattle U also hired a new Advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences, Mayra Arellano Serrano, and a new Director of Orientation, Nick Cubita.

Arellano Serrano is the new academic advisor for Communication, English, Film Studies and Political Science majors. After moving to Washington at a young age, she stayed in the area, earning her bachelor’s degree in Communications from the University of Washington Tacoma. While completing her undergraduate studies, Arellano Serrano worked as a student retention and community development assistant, which ignited her passion for serving and supporting students.

Cubita began his role as director of orientation earlier this month. He is a Seattle U alumnus who recently graduated from Northeastern University with a doctorate in Higher Education Administration. Cubita is in charge of overseeing the orientation process for new students.

“I’m excited to shape an experience for our students through orientation leaders and also developing leaders through the orientation program itself to make it a really positive experience framed by their sense of belonging to the Redhawk community,” Cubita said.

While periods of transition can be stressful, Martin is confident that Seattle U’s new hires will each add to the university’s mission and have a positive impact on students and staff.

“It’s a very exciting time for Seattle U under President Peñalver’s leadership,” Martin said. “We’re attracting a terrific team of leaders who bring passion and energy and competency and professionalism to the work. We will all benefit from it at Seattle U.”