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Administration Addresses University Statements and Staffing

Tyra Okuda, Copy Chief/Online Editor

Seattle University administration made updates to how they make official statements, announced new personnel and provided a Strategic Directions update in March.

In a recent email to the Seattle U community, President Eduardo Peñalver recapped his decision to limit the number of presidential statements issued by his office. He explained that a statement on local, national or global events will be issued only if it affects Seattle U's ability to pursue its educational mission, if it directly impacts the ability of members of campus to carry out their roles or if Seattle U has an opportunity to influence policy relating to the issue.

Peñalver also discussed how, even in the absence of a statement, the university engages on issues and events in other ways including university courses, hosting seminars and forums for the community, providing space for community members to come together and the university's policies and practices.

If an academic unit would like to make a statement in the absence of a presidential or university statement, they now must consult with the Vice President for University Affairs, the email shared.

Vice President for University Affairs Scott McClellan further explained the consultation process



Jordie Simpson

The Administration building pictured from the west side of campus.

“I view it as a two-way consultation, as opposed to a review, so there is an opportunity to both understand the need for a college or school, or perhaps a division (led by a vice president), to issue a statement and to inform their decisions,” McClellan wrote to The Spectator.

Joseph Phillips, dean of the Albers School of Business and Economics, does not believe that this change will greatly affect his college and fully stands by the President’s approach.

“Like the President, I long thought that we should be very parsimonious with our statements,” Phillips said.

In addition to the President’s stance on university statements, there were also administrative role changes made last month. Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Wilson Garone announced that he is stepping down to join Santa Clara University as their Vice President for Finance and Administration. The March Strategic Directions update email announced the appointment of Sue Theiss as the university ombudsperson. As ombudsperson, Theiss will provide university employees with informal, independent, impartial and confidential conflict management services.

“My goal is for employees to feel heard and valued and to empower them with new skills and frameworks to address conflicts and challenges that will arise in the future,” Theiss wrote to The Spectator.

Through her position, she will progress the fourth goal for the university’s reignited Strategic Directions. Reigniting Our Strategic Directions is a living document that encompasses Seattle U’s broad goals for 2022 through 2027. The original document was published in 2020, but after the arrival of President Peñalver, the document was updated and republished in 2022.

The document lists five main goals: reimagine and revise our curriculum, strengthen professional formation for all, enhance the student experience, promote inclusive excellence and reposition for growth.

As outlined in the document, Vice President for Strategic Initiatives Chris Van Liew further explained what “[promoting] inclusive excellence” means.

“At Seattle U, we essentially devote one of our pillars to the focus on inclusive excellence, diversity, equity and inclusion, a focus on a diverse community here at the institution,” Van Liew said.

By 2027, the university says that work from each category will be completed.

The March Strategic Directions update email gave an overview of the past month’s work including an update of the goal four working groups Narrative Through Art and Symbols and Recruitment and Retention of BIPOC Staff.

Over the next five years, the university will continue to fine-tune and update its plans, as the intention is to have a rolling strategic plan.

“When you read through the document, that’s an exciting picture,” Van Liew said. “That’s an institution that I want to be a part of. That’s a place that I want my children to attend. It’s something that we’re all very passionate about.”

Collectively, staff and faculty who are involved are confident that these changes will continue to improve all aspects of the university. As the strategic directions unfold, President Peñalver will be able to orient Seattle U’s agenda in a manner reflective of his ambitions for the university.

