

SEARCH PROFILE:

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PEOPLE
AND CULTURE



**AURORA
UNIVERSITY**

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Aurora University (AU), a private university located in Aurora, Illinois, invites nominations and applications for the position of Associate Vice President for People and Culture (AVPPC).

Aurora University, a comprehensive independent university, located in Aurora, Illinois, is known for its singular commitment to students and their success. AU blends its reputation for preparing graduates for lives of personal fulfillment and professional achievement with a distinguished tradition of community collaboration, academic excellence, cocurricular engagement, and effective management. The university is forward-looking and entrepreneurial. It promotes these future-oriented traits with a deep commitment to putting students first.

The university presents an unmatched opportunity for an enterprising, service-oriented, creative human resources leader to guide this community. In June of 2023, the university welcomed Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills as the institution's 14th and first Latina President. As president, Dr. Rivera- Mills is building on the momentum of AU's achievements and innovations to ensure that the university remains united in its dedication to the transformative power of learning.

The new AVP for People and Culture will report to the Senior Vice President for Business and Finance and will lead the human resources team as they continue AU's rich history of serving a diverse undergraduate and graduate/professional student body. In addition to traditional Human Resource oversight areas, the new AVPPC will introduce programs and initiatives to attract and retain talent at AU to build AU's reputation as an innovative and inclusive employer of choice.

The new AVP for People and Culture is expected to take office in late summer 2024.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PEOPLE AND CULTURE POSITION

The AVPPC is the Chief Human Resources officer for Aurora University with responsibility for university-wide strategic, people centered, human resources leadership. The AVPPC will be a direct report to Sharon Maxwell, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance.

A strategic partner to the leadership team, the incumbent will lead the HR team and the university on the journey toward becoming an employer of choice, recognizing that people are the greatest asset. The AVPPC will establish and implement strategies designed to create a culture of belonging and community aligned with the mission and

strategic plan of AU. As a champion of workplace culture, the AVPPC will identify, recommend, and advance initiatives that allow staff and faculty members to excel. Across AU, the AVPPC will provide direction and thought leadership on matters involving recruitment and retention; onboarding; leadership development and succession planning; employee relations; total rewards; performance management; and human resources technology and data. The AVPPC will be a strategic leader, thinker/planner, and change agent where continuous improvement and innovation are vital aspects of this important leadership position.



RESPONSIBILITIES

The AVPPC will play a key role in providing strategic leadership and transformational vision for the purpose of reimagining the office of Human Resources into a high-functioning office of people and culture as well as developing and building the HR team into subject matter experts, well positioned to provide effective human capital support. With this in mind, the AVPPC will be well-positioned to address the following opportunities and challenges:

- Design and implement an HR strategic plan that addresses current and future workforce needs based on research, data, and state of the art best in practice solutions.
- Foster an affirming and welcoming workforce through the development of innovative programs that are people-centered, inclusive engagement strategies to enhance workplace culture.
- Ensure delivery of timely, effective, responsive, and customer-focused HR services to include the oversight of HR policies, practices, and programs that comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws.
- Identify and implement continuous improvement principles to offer creative and innovative HR solutions that are actionable and people centered.
- Establish robust communication strategies to the university community to reinforce cultural strategies and goals.
- Direct the design of a competitive, cost-effective, and equitable total rewards program that encompasses compensation, benefits, and wellness based on regular market trend analysis to ensure university total rewards remain competitive in attracting and retaining talent.
- Identify, implement, and advance HR technology solutions for HR functions to enhance overall operational effectiveness, provide accurate and timely actionable data, and build capacity while reducing the number of manual processes.

- Conduct data-informed HR related analysis.
- Seek input on policy changes from key campus community stakeholders and serve as a trusted consultant to senior leadership, providing guidance in all employment-related matters.
- Cultivate a healthy and supportive relationship with the university academic community through an understanding of the unique hiring needs and shared governance structure inherent to higher education.
- Serve on the university's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, act as liaison to the university Staff Executive Council, and serve on other committees and task forces as requested.
- Ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are realized in all aspects of the workforce.
- Coach and mentor HR team members, in order to build a high performing team focused on people and culture.

The AVPPC will lead a team of four individuals with future staffing available for consideration:

- Director of Human Resources – primarily responsible for all university benefits and compliance.
- Talent Acquisition Manager (position is under active recruitment) – responsible for managing the candidate lifecycle from sourcing and recruiting talent, screening, guiding hiring managers, performing pre-employment checks, and onboarding.
- Employee Relations and Development Manager (position to be developed and recruited by AVPPC) – responsible for employee relations, staff development, performance management, and onboarding/orientation.
- Human Resources Assistant – responsible for the HR front desk to manage walk-ins, emails, student workers, and general office support.



ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY

Aurora University is a four-year, private, nonprofit, accredited higher education institution offering students an excellent education that will prepare them for success beyond AU. The university was founded in 1893 in Mendota, Illinois as a seminary college before moving to Aurora in 1912. Aurora is the second largest city in Illinois, located approximately 45 miles west of Chicago.

Aurora University is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission to award degrees at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels, offering more than 50 undergraduate majors and minors. Today, AU enrolls nearly 4,000 undergraduate and 2,000 graduate students and is home to over 400 full-time faculty and staff and another 1,000 part-time faculty and student workers. Large enrollments are concentrated in nursing, social work, business, education, psychology, health sciences, and criminal justice. The graduate level program offerings include athletic training, business, education, criminal justice, nursing, and social work.

AU is organized into various academic units: the College of Education and Social Work, the College of Health and Sciences, the College of Liberal Arts and Business, and a School of Nursing. Each unit is headed by a dean who works closely with school and department leaders and with the provost.

The university has a Faculty Senate with seven committees. The Senate considers all proposals affecting academic programs, academic policies, and faculty personnel policies. Similarly, the university has a Staff Executive Council who provides professional development and social engagement opportunities.

AU is a relationship-intensive institution, fostering a culture of collaboration and partnership among faculty, staff, and students. We believe this encourages engagement both in and out of the classroom; creates a culture of connections leading to mentorships, internships, and job opportunities; promotes personal and professional growth; and cultivates a sense of belonging.

Also central to our identity is our active engagement with the community. Whether responding to evolving academic needs, addressing workforce demands, providing enriching cultural experiences for our neighbors, or participating in acts of service throughout the Fox River Valley, community interaction is at the heart of what we do.

Aurora University is proud to be a “private university with a public purpose” and to work at the intersection of need and hope to pioneer sustainable solutions to complex social problems. As one of the lowest-cost private institutions in Illinois, we offer our students the opportunity to have an outstanding educational experience at an affordable price. Additionally, we are committed to welcoming new populations to higher education by supporting a wide range of programs essential for serving diverse learners. Most recently for example, AU has become one of a limited number of colleges and universities across the country offering a program for neurodiverse students to garner the support and guidance needed to adjust to campus life, earn their university degree, and make a successful transition to the workplace.

Our success can be attributed to our innovative culture—where we prioritize critical thinking, creativity, and a mindset of lifelong learning.

OUR STUDENTS

Aurora University is a federally designated Minority-Serving Institution as well as a Hispanic-Serving Institution since 2018. A significant percentage of the 4,000 undergraduates are the first in their families to enroll in a college or university. Latina/o students comprised 38% of the institution's undergraduate population in the fall of 2022, with white students accounting for 43%. Black, Asian, and international students constituted the remainder of the full-time enrollment. Women students outnumber men at Aurora University by a margin of 2:1.

One hundred percent of this year's full-time, first-time AU freshmen received some form of financial aid. Overall, 96% of all undergraduates are aid recipients, while 67% of graduate students also receive assistance. A significant majority of Aurora University undergraduates commute to the campus from home or live in rental units scattered throughout the city.

Approximately 700 students live in campus housing.

Intercollegiate and club athletic programs are an especially important part of campus life at Aurora University. The Spartans compete in Division III of the NCAA in 24 sports. AU is a dominant force in the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference and participates in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association and the College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin.



The institution also recently added men's wrestling and women's wrestling. AU continues to climb the rankings in the prestigious Learfield Cup competition. Recent years saw the Spartans boast 77 conference titles and 96 appearances in post-season NCAA tournaments. Individual student-athletes continue to contend for national recognition among their peers as players and as scholars.

Approximately 70% of students participate in internships, study abroad, research, and service projects. Students participate in more than 50 musical, literary, religious, social, and service organizations and play active roles in campus governance. Service is a defining characteristic of AU.

PRESIDENT



Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills is the 14th president of Aurora University. She is the first Latina to lead AU as president since the institution's founding in 1893.

As a first-generation college student, Rivera-Mills understands the transformative power of education. Her goal is to create a learning environment where all students can access a high-quality education and succeed in order to reach their full potential. She remains committed

to connecting universities to their communities for the benefit of both the individual student and the community as a whole.

Prior to AU, she served as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Ball State University for five years and prior to that, in a variety of academic roles at Oregon State University from 2007 to 2018, including vice provost of academic programs and learning innovation, dean of undergraduate studies, executive associate dean of the liberal arts college, and department chair of modern languages. Before that, she was a faculty member at Northern Arizona University for 13 years.

Rivera-Mills earned a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and a Master of Arts in Spanish Linguistics from the University of Iowa. Her doctorate in Romance Languages is from the University of New Mexico. During her academic career, Rivera-Mills' research has focused on Latino communities, Spanish language and culture, and issues in sociolinguistics, as well as online teaching and learning.

Rivera-Mills is a sought-after guest speaker and presenter on innovation and leadership in higher education, digital and adaptive learning, and the role of culture and voice in student success and professional development.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND CABINET

Aurora University is governed by a 22-member self-perpetuating Board of Trustees that meets four times a year and relies upon four standing committees (Audit, Educational Affairs, Finance and Administration, and Trustee) to discharge its responsibilities.

Under the leadership of the President, Aurora University's eight Cabinet members oversee the strategic vision of the university, ensuring that students always come first and that our mission—an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of education — is prevalent in all we do.

FINANCES

Aurora University relies upon disciplined enrollment management strategies and thoughtful stewardship to manage its financial profile. The institution pairs its comparatively low tuition level (\$10,000 less than private university competitors) with a carefully managed financial aid policy to produce the annual growth in net revenue necessary to fund annual operations and regular increases in compensation. The combination of a disciplined operating budget philosophy, a discerning advancement strategy, and a judicious use of debt allows the university to provide continuous support for the educational purposes of its current and future student bodies.

The university boasts 15 consecutive years of budget surpluses and unqualified audit opinions with no internal control findings. AU does not rely upon short-term credit to meet operational needs and has a sustained record of comfortably meeting its debt covenants.

AU's operating budget is approximately \$95 million. The university budget is constructed on a cash basis that

incorporates conservatism and robust contingencies. Each annual budget earmarks funds for debt service, to include principal amortization and funding for facility reinvestment. Because of the high reliance on tuition to fund its operations, conservative estimates paired with budgeted contingency are paramount to preserving the flexibility to respond to changing conditions. At the direction of the Board of Trustees, university administration consistently delivers a balanced budget by the final iteration of the budget.

The institution's current federal health index score is 3.0, the highest score achievable.

The university's endowment has grown in recent years through the introduction of a number of programmatic restricted funds. For example, seven new donor-funded distinguished professorships have been introduced in the last decade. Earnings from such sources also support some of AU's most distinctive student learning opportunities. At the close of FY24, the endowment was over \$50 million.



CAMPUS FACILITIES

Through a combination of budget surpluses, fundraising, government appropriations, and foundation grants, AU has invested over \$252 million in new construction, renovation, and campus improvements, including nine new buildings, over the past two decades. The newest facility, opened in August 2022, is Don and Betty Tucker Hall, which houses AU's pioneering neurodiversity center. To support the development of the hall, AU raised over \$8.8 million from major donors, businesses, and government sources.

The Kimberly and James Hill Student Success Center houses the Office of Career Services. Furthermore, there is a new multi-purpose building at the Spartan Athletic Park that contains a practice facility for our new men's and

women's wrestling programs, an additional weight room, and classroom and lab space for exercise science, athletic training, and sport management programs. This expansion has been a continuation of campus improvements in recent years that have included renovation of campus dining, a new parking garage, and an upgrade to the Parolini Music Center.

In early 2024, Aurora University's board of trustees approved funding to design the university's newest building, a Learning Commons, intended to house academic and career education programming to prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving world. The building is planned for completion in the Fall of 2026 and will be financed in part through a combination of fundraising and government appropriations.

LOCAL AREA

Aurora University is located on a tree-lined campus of 37 acres, nestled in a residential neighborhood in Aurora, Illinois. The Spartan Athletic Park, located about 1 mile from campus, is a 70+ acre multisport athletic park.

With a population of nearly 200,000 residents, Aurora blends the benefits of a small city with close proximity to the Illinois Technology and Research Corridor along Interstate 88 and easy access to Chicago via Metra train or car. Aurora's downtown is located on the Fox River and is enjoying a period of revitalization as new commercial, residential, dining, and entertainment venues open their doors.



REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION

The position of AVP for People and Culture at Aurora University requires certain talents, skills, and experiences that will enable continuing growth and development of the university, including the following:

Education & Experience:

- A bachelor's degree in human resource management, business administration, employment law, organizational leadership, or a closely related field is required. An advanced degree and equivalent experience are preferred.
- 5+ years of progressive HR leadership experience with a strong preference for experience in the higher education sector or a non-profit organization.

- Prior experience in an HR leadership role such as a director, vice president, assistant/associate director.
- Demonstrated experience translating vision into strategy, execution, and demonstrable results.
- Proven track record in managing people and organizational culture initiatives.
- Demonstrated experience forecasting, planning, maintaining, preparing, and evaluating organizational current and future workforce needs.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Master's degree in related field

Preferred Certification:

- SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP), SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP), or Senior Professional in HR (SPHR) certification highly desired.

Desired Skills and Attributes:

Leadership and Strategic Thinking

- **Visionary Leadership:** Ability to set a clear vision for the people and culture function, aligning it with the overall strategic plan of the organization.
- **Strategic Planning:** Experience in developing and implementing strategic HR plans that support enterprise-wide goals.
- **Change Management:** Skills in leading and managing organizational change initiatives, ensuring smooth transitions and employee buy-in.
- **Navigating Ambiguity:** Tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty while moving responsibilities forward quickly.

Human Resources Expertise

- **HR Knowledge:** Deep understanding of HR principles, including talent acquisition, performance management, compensation and benefits, employee relations, Title IX regulations, and compliance.
- **Labor Laws and Compliance:** Comprehensive knowledge of employment laws and regulations to ensure the organization's HR policies are compliant.
- **Talent Management:** Expertise in developing and implementing strategies for talent development, retention, and succession planning.

Cultural Development and Employee Engagement

- **Cultural Competence:** Ability to foster an inclusive and diverse workplace culture.

- **Employee Engagement:** Skills in designing and executing initiatives that enhance employee engagement and satisfaction.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Proficiency in resolving workplace conflicts and promoting a positive work environment.
- **Inclusivity:** Ability to interact respectfully with people across diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Interpersonal and Communication Skills

- **Communication:** Excellent verbal and written communication skills, capable of articulating HR policies and cultural values clearly.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** Strong ability to build relationships and collaborate with employees at all levels of the organization.
- **Negotiation and Mediation:** Skilled in negotiation and mediation to address and resolve employee issues effectively.

Analytical and Problem-Solving Abilities

- **Analytical Skills:** Ability to analyze HR metrics and data to inform strategic decisions.
- **Problem-Solving:** Strong problem-solving skills to address complex HR and organizational culture issues.
- **Decision-Making:** Sound judgment and decision-making capabilities.

Technological Proficiency

- **HR Systems:** Proficiency in using Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) and other relevant software.
- **Digital Literacy:** Comfortable with utilizing various digital tools and platforms to enhance HR processes.



HOW TO APPLY

The search for Aurora University's next Associate Vice President for People and Culture is being assisted by Maya Ranchod Kirkhope at Academic Search. Applications, nominations, and expressions of interest can be submitted in confidence to AuroraAVPPC@academicsearch.org.

Applications should consist of a detailed letter of interest that describes the candidate's interest and alignment with the agenda for leadership, and a current curriculum vitae, sent as separate PDFs.

The Search Committee will begin reviewing applications in early July and will review applications as they are received. Though applications continue to be accepted until the position is filled, only those materials received by **July 16, 2024**, are assured full consideration.

Aurora University is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

ABOUT ACADEMIC SEARCH

Academic Search is assisting Aurora University in this work. For more than four decades, Academic Search has offered executive search services to higher education institutions, associations, and related organizations. Academic Search was founded by higher education leaders on the principle that we provide the most value to partner institutions by combining best practices with our deep knowledge and experience. Our mission today is to enhance institutional capacity by providing outstanding executive recruitment services, executive coaching, and transition support, in partnership with our parent organization, the American Academic Leadership Institute.

