

SEARCH PROFILE:

VICE PRESIDENT FOR PHILANTHROPY
AND ENGAGEMENT



**AURORA
UNIVERSITY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE OPPORTUNITY	3
ABOUT THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PHILANTHROPY AND ENGAGEMENT POSITION	4
LEADERSHIP AGENDA	4
RESPONSIBILITIES	5
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION	6
PREFERRED SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE	6
ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY	7
ACADEMICS	8
FACULTY	9
STUDENT EXPERIENCE	9
PRESIDENT	10
BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND CABINET	10
FINANCES	11
CAMPUS FACILITIES	12
LOCAL AREA	12
HOW TO APPLY	13



THE OPPORTUNITY

Aurora University (AU), a private university located in Aurora, Illinois, invites nominations and applications for the position of Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement.

Aurora University, a comprehensive independent university with its campus in the second largest city in the state of 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, and strategic philanthropic leader. 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. AU's Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement will enjoy the support of a president who has served in academic leadership roles across diverse public institutions and is ready to partner to move the university forward.

The new Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement will report to President Rivera-Mills as a member of the President's Cabinet. They will oversee AU's office of Philanthropy and Engagement, which includes Alumni Relations and Engagement, Annual Giving, Major Gifts and Planned Giving, Corporate and Foundation Giving, Comprehensive Fundraising Campaigns, Government Relations and Philanthropic Operations. AU is proud to have a growing network of over 39,000 alumni across Illinois and throughout the United States. The new Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement is expected to take office in summer 2025.



ABOUT THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PHILANTHROPY AND ENGAGEMENT POSITION

Aurora University is seeking a Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement who is an innovative and dynamic leader that will partner with the President, Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, staff, alumni, and the broader community to advance its mission, priorities and core values.

This position reports directly to Dr. Rivera-Mills and offers an extraordinary opportunity to shape Aurora University's philanthropic strategy, build partnerships, and lead impactful fundraising efforts in support of Aurora University's inclusive programs.

LEADERSHIP AGENDA

The Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement will be responsible for the vision, leadership, and direction for all initiatives aimed at enhancing Aurora University's development and philanthropic efforts.

The leadership agenda includes the following priorities:

- Develop and implement a comprehensive philanthropy strategy aligned with Aurora University's mission and strategic plan.
- Build and oversee a Philanthropy and Engagement team, fostering a culture of collaboration, excellence and innovation.
- Cultivate and steward relationships with alumni, donors, and institutional partners to strengthen engagement and philanthropy.
- Develop and strengthen corporate and government relations.
- Prepare for a future campaign effort while managing the current annual fund program.
- Collaborate with the President, Board of Trustees, and campus community to build a culture of philanthropy while identifying and pursuing major gifts, planned giving opportunities, and long-term fundraising goals.
- Establish a culture of accountability and business discipline within the Office of Philanthropy and Engagement, including a management style focused on performance and outcome metrics.
- Provide regular updates to the President and Board of Trustees, ensuring transparency and accountability in philanthropic efforts.



RESPONSIBILITIES

The Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement, is responsible for managing the University Philanthropy and Engagement division which includes:

- Alumni Relations and Engagement
- Annual Giving, Major Gifts and Planned Giving
- Corporate and Foundation Giving
- Comprehensive Fundraising Campaigns
- Government Relations
- Philanthropic Operations (Research and Prospect Management, Development, Scholarship and Stewardship, Donor Relations)

The Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement oversees all aspects of fundraising and alumni engagement to enhance the university's financial health and reputation. Key qualifications include:

- Strategic Leadership: Create and execute a holistic philanthropy plan that supports the university's mission and strategic initiatives. Participate in institutional planning, policy-making, and executive leadership of the university. Create seamless relationship management and engagement strategies with University leaders, key donor and volunteer stakeholders and the campus community.
- Fundraising: Responsible for implementing long range development goals, programs and procedures to expand support. Develop and execute innovative fundraising strategies to meet ambitious financial goals and expand Aurora University's donor base. Develop and lead major fundraising campaigns, build relationships with donors, and identify new funding opportunities. Serve as senior fundraising officer responsible for organization and management of all fundraising efforts, including annual giving, major gift campaigns, capital campaigns, development and management of endowments, and planned giving. Integrate data-driven strategies and emerging best practices to enhance fundraising effectiveness.
- Alumni and Community Relations: Build, cultivate and steward relationships with our network of alumni to foster engagement with current students to encourage mentorship and build institutional pride, affinity and support within a larger culture of philanthropy. Build and steward relationships with community partners, representing Aurora University as a key ambassador and promoting its mission and values to external audiences.
- Corporate Partnerships: Engage corporate partners for PACER (President's Advisory Council of External Relations), advisory boards, internships, and externships. Leverage their financial resources, expertise, and networks to advance philanthropic efforts and build stronger community connections. Identify, cultivate, and nurture these partnerships to align with our mission and create mutually beneficial relationships that support both the students we serve and the companies involved.
- Collaboration and Team Management: Work closely with university leadership, faculty, and staff to align philanthropy efforts with institutional priorities. Lead, mentor and empower a team of philanthropy professionals, ensuring effective execution of programs and initiatives and fostering a collaborative, high-performing culture.
- Board of Trustees Engagement: Partner with the President and Board of Trustees to identify and articulate funding priorities. Drive increased board giving participation while helping board members leverage their networks for institutional advancement.
- Budget Management: Manage the divisional budget, ensuring resources are allocated effectively and in compliance with institutional, state, and federal policies and regulations.
- Perform other duties as assigned, including but not limited to participating in other university and community meetings or groups to represent the university or advocate for the needs of students and the community.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION

The position of Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement at Aurora University requires certain talents, skills, and experiences, including the following:

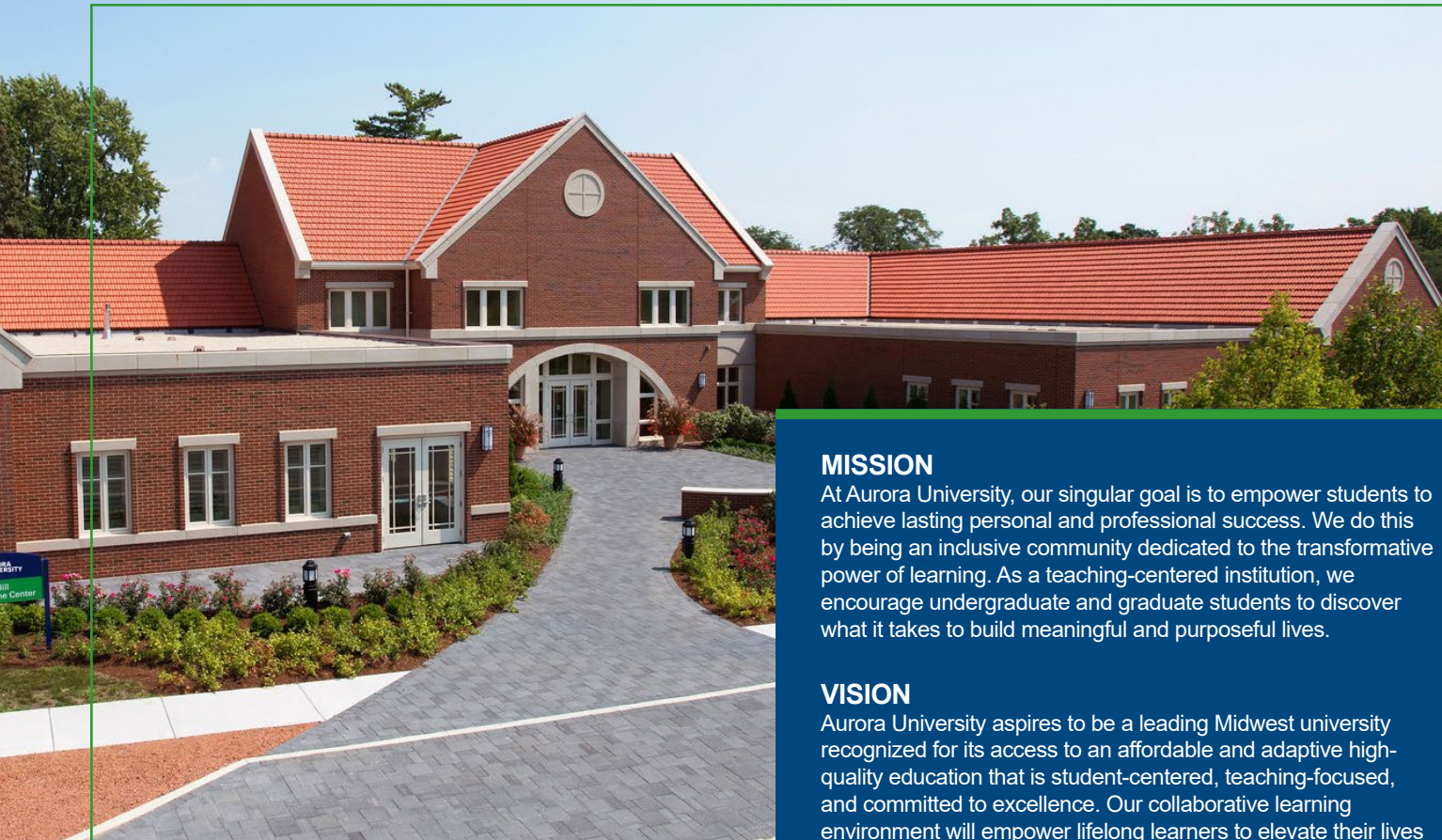
Required Qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree
- Minimum of five (5) years broad-based leadership experience at a progressively increasing level, so as to serve as a member of the President's Cabinet and participate in institutional planning, policy development, and executive leadership of the university **AND** minimum of ten (10) years of nonprofit fundraising experience.
- Experience working with data to inform capital and comprehensive campaigns, major gifts, donor research, alumni relations, and corporate and foundation relations, or related equivalent experience.
- Outstanding managerial skills with the demonstrated ability to recruit, lead and supervise a team of professionals. Experience managing a small fundraising team.
- Demonstrated commitment to fostering a diverse working and learning environment.

PREFERRED SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

- Master's Degree
- Demonstrated potential as an effective senior executive in a large and complex organization.
- Demonstrated track record of taking a highly collaborative and respectful approach with colleagues, supervisors, and team members, especially when working on large and complex problems.
- Knowledge of fundraising must include awareness of IRS requirements, the understanding to develop trust agreements, bequests, and planned giving instruments, such as charitable gift annuities and charitable remainder trusts.
- Demonstrated ability to personally establish, cultivate, solicit and receive major gifts of at least six figures and above, with a proven track record of fundraising success, including major gift cultivation and donor stewardship.
- Evidence of clear commitment to continuous improvement and adoption of best practices, with the ability to innovate in a changing landscape.
- Outstanding interpersonal, presentation, written and oral communication skills, including the ability to articulate and embody Aurora University's mission and values, inspiring support for its vision.
- Knowledge and experience in managing complex budgets, facilities, and resources.
- Demonstrated ability to effectively lead in an environment of shared governance.
- Demonstrated ability to build and maintain a culture of philanthropy that values genuine and authentic relationships with community partners, donors and alumni.
- Demonstrated understanding of the interdependent relationship between the institution and the surrounding community.
- Demonstrated ability to foster a culture of philanthropy throughout the university community engaging faculty, staff, and volunteers in advancement efforts.
- Experience in using Raiser's Edge.





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. The university, which was designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution in 2018, enrolls approximately 5,900 degree-seeking students. AU students participate in a wide range of on- and off-campus learning experiences. They can join more than 60 musical, literary, religious, social and service organizations and play active roles in campus governance. In addition, the university fields 26 NCAA Division III intercollegiate athletic teams.

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.

MISSION

At Aurora University, our singular goal is to empower students to achieve lasting personal and professional success. We do this by being an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of learning. As a teaching-centered institution, we encourage undergraduate and graduate students to discover what it takes to build meaningful and purposeful lives.

VISION

Aurora University aspires to be a leading Midwest university recognized for its access to an affordable and adaptive high-quality education that is student-centered, teaching-focused, and committed to excellence. Our collaborative learning environment will empower lifelong learners to elevate their lives and those of others, foster critical thinking, and prepare learners to be catalysts for societal advancement. Aurora University will continue its tradition of integrating the liberal arts with STEM and professional credentials. We will maintain our growth and financial strength by ongoing development of a hybrid campus, that responsibly embraces emerging technology and the AI era, meeting the needs of modern learners and future employers. Recognizing the essential role of faculty and staff in fulfilling our mission, Aurora University will seek to be an employer of choice. Together we will redefine the landscape of higher education and make a lasting impact on our society.

VALUES

We are committed to student success through collaboration, working across departments and eliminating silos to help students realize their personal and professional aspirations.

We commit ourselves to continuous learning by adapting and growing along with our students. We are dedicated to helping students achieve their full potential through lifelong support that provides opportunities to learn and grow.

We define inclusivity broadly so that all members of our community are welcome and authentically belong, and we actively work to foster understanding and appreciation of diversity as an institutional strength.

We adhere to the highest standards of integrity in every aspect of institutional practice and operation. Through this proven dedication to honesty, fairness, and ethical conduct, we lead by example and inspire our students to do the same.

We are committed to shaping the future with our students and our community through innovation that sparks creative solutions to encourage continuous improvement, adaptation, and evolution in a rapidly changing world.

ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY (CONT.)

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 mission” 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.



ACADEMICS

Today, AU enrolls over 4,000 undergraduate and 1,800 graduate students and is home to approximately 425 full-time faculty and staff and 1,000 part-time faculty and student workers. The university awards degrees at the baccalaureate, master’s, and doctoral levels and offers more than 60 undergraduate majors and minors. 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.

There are three colleges: the College of Education and Social Work, the College of Health and Sciences, and the College of Liberal Arts and Business, and a School of Nursing; each entity is headed by a dean who works closely with school, department leaders, and with the provost.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK

- [George Williams School of Social Work](#)
- [School of Education](#)

COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND SCIENCES

- [School of Health Sciences](#)
- [School of Natural Sciences, Technology, and Math](#)

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND BUSINESS

- [Dunham School of Business](#)
- [School of Humanities](#)
- [School of Social and Behavioral Sciences](#)

SCHOOL OF NURSING

In addition to its regional accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission (reaffirmation was completed in 2023), AU maintains a number of professional program accreditations. The university also has a growing number of articulation agreements with area graduate and professional institutions, which facilitate vibrant pathways for faculty collaboration and student advancement.

FACULTY

AU has 125 full-time faculty at the lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor, and professor ranks in addition to 398 adjunct faculty. At present, 46% of full-time faculty have tenure or long-term clinical appointments.

The faculty at Aurora is a robust mix of full- and part-time professionals, many of whom have been active at Aurora for

many years. This blend provides enough full-time faculty to enact the governance and student support functions of the university, as well as a strong cadre of part-time individuals who bring their scholarship and experience to the classroom. The university has a Faculty Senate with seven committees. The senate considers all proposals affecting academic programs, academic policies, and faculty personnel policies.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

As our mission states, at Aurora University, our singular goal is to empower students to achieve lasting personal and professional success. We do this by being an inclusive community dedicated to the transformative power of learning. As a teaching-centered institution, we encourage undergraduate and graduate students to discover what it takes to build meaningful and purposeful lives. Aurora University is a federally designated Minority-Serving Institution. Nearly 40% of our 4,000 undergraduates are the first in their families to enroll in a college or university. Latina/o students comprised 41% of the institution's undergraduate population in the fall of 2023, with white students accounting for 39%. Black, Asian, and international students constituted the remainder of the full-time enrollment. Women outnumber men at Aurora University by a margin of 2:1.

Nearly 100% of this year's full-time, first-time AU freshmen received some form of financial aid. Overall, 94% 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 26 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 bowling and women's flag football. AU continues to climb the rankings in the prestigious Learfield Cup competition. Recent years saw the Spartans boast 81 conference titles and 120 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 60 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 serves as the 14th president of Aurora University and is the first Latina to hold this position since the institution's founding in 1893. Since beginning her tenure in July 2023, she has prioritized fostering a collaborative culture. Working alongside faculty and staff, she has developed and implemented a strategic plan emphasizing innovation, inclusivity, and collaboration. The plan is

designed to empower students, strengthen communities, and position the university as a model for higher education. Her commitment to supporting underserved and first-generation students drives her efforts to promote inclusivity and meaningful learning outcomes.

As a first-generation college graduate, Dr. Rivera-Mills embodies the transformative power of learning. She believes in education for the public good. Under her leadership, the establishment of the Future Promise Fund underscores this mission, making higher education more accessible for all.

Dr. Rivera-Mills brings over 25 years of higher education experience, having served in numerous leadership roles. Central to her presidency is a commitment to empowering others to lead from where they are. She is particularly passionate about developing future leaders who are innovative, courageous, and passionate. This approach frames a new model for higher education rooted in radical collaboration and partnership.

When she is not busy at work, Dr. Rivera-Mills enjoys being with family and friends, reading, walking, and spending time outdoors with her English Cream Golden Retriever named Scout.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND CABINET

Aurora University is governed by a 20-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 Governance — to discharge its responsibilities. The VP for Philanthropy and Engagement engages with both the Finance and Administration Committee and the Governance Committee. The Governance Committee is charged with managing the process of trustee selection and reappointment in consultation with the Office of Philanthropy and Engagement. The Governance Committee also works in

coordination with and in support of the Office of Philanthropy and Engagement to identify and promote activities to enhance philanthropy directed toward the University.

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. Dr. Rivera-Mills looks for cabinet members to be thought partners and future-minded leaders who help to advance the university's strategic plan, *AUnity: Fulfilling Our Promise*.

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 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 \$85 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 2.8.

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 approximately \$54 million.



FAST FACTS

- Over 39,000 alumni
- Student-faculty ratio of 19:1
- Average class size of 26
- Room and board for 2023-2024: \$13,240 (average)
- Tuition and fees for 2023-2024 (full-time): \$28,000 per year
- Over 500 instructional faculty, including 125 full-time faculty
- 94% of undergraduate students received generous financial aid packages for the 2024-2025 academic year
- 52% of first-year students are eligible for Pell Grants
- 41% of the undergraduate student body is Latinx, and Aurora University has been recognized by the federal government as a Minority-Serving Institution
- 36% of AU undergraduates are first generation
- 15% of undergraduates are student-athletes
- Ranked #56 in top performers on social mobility (U.S. News & World Report)
- 84% of Class of 2023 graduates are employed or attending graduate school
- 91% of Class of 2023 graduates, with a known state of employment, are working in Illinois

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 Center for Student Success houses the Office of Career Services. Furthermore, there is a new multi-purpose building at 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 our 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 — the 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 through a combination of fundraising, debt, institutional resources and government appropriations.



LOCAL AREA

Aurora University is located on a tree-lined campus of approximately 40 acres, nestled in a residential neighborhood in Aurora, Illinois. Spartan Athletic Park, located about 1 mile from campus, is a 70+ acre multisport complex.

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.



HOW TO APPLY

The search for Aurora University's next Vice President for Philanthropy and Engagement is being assisted by Maya Ranchod Kirkhope at Academic Search. Applications, nominations, and expressions of interest can be submitted in confidence to AuroraVPPE@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.

Though applications will continue to be accepted until the position is filled, only those materials received by **May 2, 2025** 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.

