

Next president chosen for Aurora University

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Megan Jones

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Susana Rivera-Mills has been selected to be the next president of Aurora University. (Aurora University / HANDOUT)

Aurora University has named its next president, who hails from Ball State University, and who will serve as the first Latina to lead the university since it was founded in 1893.

Susana Rivera-Mills will take over as president when outgoing Aurora University President Becky Sherrick steps down at the end of the 2022-23 school year after more 22 years of leading the university.

Sherrick was the first woman to be president of Aurora University.

The national search for the university's next president lasted six months, and Rivera-Mills was unanimously approved by the Board of Trustees, officials said in a news release Monday from Aurora University.

Rivera-Mills, 52, currently serves as the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and will begin her presidency at Aurora University on June 1, officials said.

"She is a dynamic, authentic leader and a thoughtful listener who has lived the experience of many of our students," said John Ammons, chair of the Aurora University Board of Trustees and chair of the presidential search committee, in the release. "With her servant leadership

style and passion for bringing education to a broad population, her vision and values align with AU's inclusive, student-centered mission. She is the clear choice for president at this time in the university's history."

Rivera-Mills, a native of El Salvador, came to the U.S. at age 12 after her family fled a civil war in their home country. Like many immigrant students, she learned English and became her family's "linguistics broker," Aurora University officials said.

She said her high school Spanish teacher changed the trajectory of her life by her word choice of asking "when you go to college" instead of "if you go to college."

She became a first-generation college student and is now committed to providing access to education to diverse populations, officials said.

While serving at Ball State since 2018, Rivera-Mills supported first-generation college students, helped develop and implement a strategic plan and guided academic units through a new incentive-based budget model, according to the release. She also engaged with university leaders to encourage equity and inclusion in hiring, promoting and retaining faculty and staff members, the release stated.

In the release, Rivera-Mills said she is humbled to be selected as the next president of Aurora University.

"This is a special place and a special time for AU," Rivera-Mills said in a statement. "President Sherrick has positioned the university for a bright future and her innovative leadership has created a firm foundation for us."

Rivera-Mills also previously served as 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 at Oregon State University from 2007 to 2018. Before that, she was a faculty member at Northern Arizona University for 13 years.

"President-elect Rivera-Mills has worked diligently throughout her career to put students first, and that was our biggest priority as a search committee," Matthew Kneller, professor of communication, director of general education and a member of the presidential search committee at Aurora University, said in a statement. "We saw her great potential to work as a partner with faculty to support and develop AU's academic programs."