

SEARCH PROFILE:

ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR
PEOPLE AND CULTURE



**AURORA
UNIVERSITY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PEOPLE AND CULTURE POSITION	4
RESPONSIBILITIES	5
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE	6
ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY	7
PRESIDENT	8
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION	9
HOW TO APPLY	10



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).

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. This position represents a strategic opportunity to reimagine how a university can demonstrate its commitment to its workforce, through service excellence while creating innovative programs and initiatives that not only attract and retain exceptional talent but also cultivate an environment where every individual can reach their full potential.

The new AVP for People and Culture is expected to take office in Fall 2025.



ABOUT THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PEOPLE AND CULTURE POSITION

The AVPPC serves as the Chief Human Resources officer for Aurora University with responsibility for university-wide strategic, people-centered human resources leadership. Reporting directly to Sharon Maxwell, Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, this role represents a pivotal position in advancing President Rivera-Mills' vision of transforming Aurora University into an institution renowned for its exceptional treatment of faculty and staff.

As a strategic partner to the leadership team, the incumbent will spearhead the university's evolution toward becoming an employer of choice, recognizing that people are indeed the university's greatest asset. The AVPPC will establish and implement comprehensive strategies designed to create a culture of belonging and community that aligns with both the mission and strategic plan of AU. This leader will serve as the primary architect of workplace culture transformation, identifying, recommending, and advancing initiatives that enable all community members to excel professionally and personally.

The position requires a visionary leader who understands that effective people and culture work transcends traditional HR functions. While foundational HR competencies are

essential, Aurora University seeks someone who can reimagine how a university invests in its people, creates pathways for advancement, and builds a reputation that attracts top talent because of its commitment to employee growth and development.

Central to this role will be the implementation of the strategic plan's "Engage and Value" pillar, which provides a clear framework for the AVPPC's work in establishing Aurora University as an employer of choice through comprehensive talent management strategies, policy improvements that support shared governance, and the creation of an inclusive learning and working community where all members thrive.

Across the university, the AVPPC will provide direction and thought leadership on matters involving recruitment and retention, comprehensive onboarding experiences, leadership development and succession planning, employee relations, total rewards, performance management, and human resources technology and data. The AVPPC will serve as a strategic leader, innovative thinker and planner, and change agent where continuous improvement and forward-thinking approaches are vital aspects of this important leadership position.



RESPONSIBILITIES

The AVPPC will play a key role in providing strategic leadership and transformational vision for leading the human resources team as a high-functioning office of people and culture. Central to establishing a culture of excellence is developing and building the HR team into subject matter experts who are well-positioned to provide exceptional human capital support that reflects Aurora University's commitment to its workforce.

Operational Excellence and Compliance

The AVPPC's foremost responsibility is to ensure delivery of timely, effective, responsive, and customer-focused HR services, including oversight of HR policies, practices, and programs that comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws. The incumbent will lead continuous improvement initiatives, advance HR technology solutions that reduce manual processes, and enhance the accuracy, efficiency, and timeliness of services provided for the benefit of the AU community. Critical to this responsibility is conducting comprehensive reviews of handbooks, policies, and processes and making clear, strategic recommendations that strengthen operational effectiveness.

Data-Informed Decision Making and Strategic Partnership

The AVPPC will conduct comprehensive data-informed HR analysis to guide decisions and demonstrate the measurable impact of people and culture initiatives. By providing accurate, actionable workforce insights, the incumbent will enable senior leadership to make informed choices that balance institutional priorities with employee experience and organizational reputation. The AVPPC will actively seek input on policy changes from stakeholders and act as a trusted consultant on employment-related matters.

Culture of Investment and Growth

The AVPPC will foster an affirming and welcoming workforce through people-centered programs and inclusive engagement strategies that enhance workplace culture with the university's strategic plan. Such strategies include establishing comprehensive professional development pathways, supervisor development programs, and compensation and benefit analysis and programs that demonstrate the university's commitment to its people. The incumbent will work to expand Aurora University's reputation as a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive learning and working community where all members feel seen, safe, and affirmed, directly supporting the strategic plan's vision for campus culture.

Central to AU's culture of investment and growth is building a strong talent pipeline. The AVPPC will oversee end-to-end talent acquisition processes to ensure the university attracts individuals who align with AU's mission and values. Equally important is talent retention, achieved by creating clear career pathways, responsive employee support systems, and effective onboarding and engagement strategies that reduce turnover and reinforce AU as an employer of choice.

Strategic Vision and Planning

The AVPPC will design and implement a comprehensive HR strategic plan and timeline for execution that addresses current and future workforce needs based on research, data, and best practices. This roadmap will transform AU's reputation as an employer, aligning HR initiatives with the university's strategic plan—especially the "Engage and Value" pillar—and ensuring HR contributes meaningfully to employee success, retention, and satisfaction.

RESPONSIBILITIES (CONT.)

Academic Community Partnership

Understanding the unique nature of higher education, the AVPPC will cultivate healthy and supportive relationships with the university academic community through deep appreciation of unique hiring needs and shared governance structures inherent to higher education. This includes serving on the university's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, acting as liaison to the university Staff Executive Council, and participating in other committees and task forces as requested.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Leadership

The AVPPC will ensure that inclusive principles are realized in all aspects of workforce development and management.

This includes creating pathways for advancement that are accessible to all community members and developing initiatives that support the success of individuals from all backgrounds. The incumbent will champion Aurora University's commitment to being a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive community in alignment with the university's mission, vision, and values.

Team Development and Mentorship

The incumbent will coach and mentor HR team members to build a high-performing team focused on people and culture excellence. This leadership approach will model the same investment in growth and development that the university seeks to provide all employees.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

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, ensuring that foundational HR services support the broader people and culture vision.

Talent Acquisition Manager - responsible for managing the candidate lifecycle from sourcing and recruiting talent to screening, guiding hiring managers, performing pre-employment checks, and creating exceptional onboarding experiences that set the stage for long-term success.

Human Resource Generalist - responsible for data integrity and analysis, management of the student employment process, as well as assisting the department with the administration and execution of human resource services to the university community.

Human Resources Assistant - responsible for front desk operations including managing walk-ins, emails, student workers, and general office support that reflects the welcoming, service-oriented culture of the department.





ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY

Aurora University, a comprehensive independent university, 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, promoting these future-oriented traits with a deep commitment to putting students first.

Under the leadership of Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, Aurora University's 14th and first Latina President, the institution is embarking on a transformative journey to become a recognized employer of choice in higher education. Dr. Rivera-Mills envisions Aurora University as a place where faculty and staff thrive through meaningful investment in their professional growth and personal development. This commitment extends beyond traditional human resources management to encompass a comprehensive culture of care, advancement opportunities, and genuine support for every member of the university community.

This vision is formally articulated in Aurora University's strategic plan "AUunity: Fulfilling Our Promise" which positions the university for a successful future. The five-year plan charts a path to 2030 that ensures AU will continue to meet its mission of providing affordable and adaptive high-quality education that is student centered and teaching focused, while also stretching to meet the challenges of modern learners, future employers, and the new higher education marketplace. The strategic plan has four pillars, one of which is the "Engage and Value" pillar, which focuses on strengthening Human Resources by promoting a culture of

inclusion, collaboration, and active participation that values and leverages the experience, diversity, and expertise of the campus community.

The Engage and Value pillar establishes clear goals that will guide the new AVP for People and Culture's work, including establishing Aurora University as an employer of choice, developing a comprehensive approach to talent management focused on employee retention and work satisfaction, reviewing and improving current handbooks, policies, and processes to support shared governance, and expanding the university's reputation as a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive learning community where all members feel seen, safe, and affirmed.

Aurora University is a four-year, private, nonprofit, accredited higher education institution offering students an excellent education that prepares them for success beyond AU. Founded in 1893 in Mendota, Illinois as a seminary college before moving to Aurora in 1912, the university is located in Aurora, the second largest city in Illinois, 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 60 undergraduate majors and minors. Today, AU enrolls nearly 4,000 undergraduate and 1,800 graduate students and is home to approximately 425 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, with graduate programs in athletic training, business, education, criminal justice, nursing, and social work.

ABOUT AURORA UNIVERSITY (CONT.)

AU is organized into 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 maintains both a Faculty Senate with supporting committees that considers all proposals affecting academic programs, academic policies, and faculty personnel policies, and a Staff Executive Council that provides professional development and social engagement opportunities. This shared governance structure reflects Aurora's commitment to collaborative decision-making and employee engagement.

AU is a relationship-intensive institution, fostering a culture of collaboration and partnership among faculty, staff, and students. This approach 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 genuine sense of belonging.

Central to Aurora's identity is active engagement with the community. Whether responding to evolving academic needs, addressing workforce demands, providing enriching cultural experiences for neighbors, or participating in acts of service throughout the Fox River Valley, community interaction is at the heart of what the university does.

Aurora University is proud to be a "private university with a public purpose," working 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, AU offers students an outstanding educational experience at an affordable price while remaining committed to welcoming new populations to higher education by supporting programs essential for serving diverse learners.



PRESIDENT

Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills is Aurora University's 14th president and the first Latina to lead AU since its founding in 1893. Before taking office at AU in June 2023, Rivera-Mills served as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Ball State University since 2018, where she oversaw all aspects of the academic mission.

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 high-quality education and succeed in reaching their full potential. She remains committed to connecting universities to their communities for the benefit of both individual students and the community as a whole.

Under President Rivera-Mills' leadership, Aurora University is committed to becoming an institution that genuinely invests in its faculty and staff, creating meaningful opportunities for growth and advancement while building a reputation as an employer of choice in higher education. This vision drives the university's approach to human resources and people development, emphasizing that the success of students is intrinsically linked to the success and satisfaction of the faculty and staff who serve them.



REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POSITION

The position of AVP for People and Culture at Aurora University requires specific talents, skills, and experiences that will enable continuing growth and development of the university as an employer of choice.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

A bachelor's degree in human resource management, business administration, employment law, organizational leadership, or a closely related field is required, with an advanced degree and equivalent experience preferred. Candidates should possess five or more years of progressive HR leadership experience with strong preference for experience in the higher education sector or nonprofit organization. Prior experience in an HR leadership role such as director, vice president, or assistant/associate director is essential.

Critical to success in this role is demonstrated experience translating vision into strategy, execution, and measurable results. Candidates must show a proven track record of organizational excellence, strong team development, and managing people and organizational culture initiatives, along with demonstrated experience in forecasting, planning, maintaining, preparing, and evaluating organizational current and future workforce needs.

PREFERRED QUALIFICATIONS

A master's degree in a related field is preferred, along with SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP), SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP), or Senior Professional in HR (SPHR) certification.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES

Proven Leadership and Strategic Thinking

The successful candidate will be a proven administrator who brings strong leadership capabilities and a steady focus on delivering excellence in people and culture services that aligns with Aurora University's strategic goals and President Rivera-Mills' commitment to making the institution an employer of choice. This includes experience in developing and implementing strategic HR plans that support enterprise-wide goals and skills in leading organizational change initiatives while navigating ambiguity and uncertainty. Essential to this leadership approach is the ability to operationalize the strategic plan's "Engage and Value" pillar goals through concrete initiatives and measurable outcomes.

Comprehensive Human Resources Expertise

Deep understanding of HR principles is essential, including talent acquisition, performance management, compensation and benefits, employee relations, and compliance. Candidates must possess comprehensive knowledge of employment laws and regulations along with expertise in developing and implementing strategies for talent development, retention, and succession planning that go beyond traditional approaches to create genuine pathways for advancement.

Cultural Development and Employee Investment

The ability to foster an inclusive and diverse workplace culture is fundamental to this role. Candidates must demonstrate skills in designing and executing initiatives that enhance employee engagement and satisfaction while showing proficiency in conflict resolution and promoting positive work environments. Essential to success is the ability to interact respectfully with people across diverse socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Communication and Relationship Building

Excellent verbal and written communication skills are required, with the capability of articulating HR policies and cultural values clearly. Candidates must show strong ability to build relationships and collaborate with employees at all levels of the organization while demonstrating skill in negotiation and mediation to address and resolve employee issues effectively.

Analytical and Innovation Capabilities

The ability to analyze HR metrics and data to inform strategic decisions is essential, along with strong problem-solving skills to address complex HR and organizational culture issues. Sound judgment and decision-making capabilities are crucial, as is comfort with utilizing Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS) and 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 alignment with President Rivera-Mills' vision for transforming Aurora University into an employer of choice, along with specific examples of how

the candidate has successfully invested in employee growth and development in previous roles. A current curriculum vitae should accompany the letter, with both documents sent as separate PDFs.

The Search Committee will begin reviewing applications on a rolling basis and will continue to review applications as they are received until the position is filled.

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.

