

North Park University Selects Francisco X. Gaytán, Ph.D. as New Vice President for Student Engagement (VPSE)

August 2, 2021

Dear members of the North Park University campus community,

I am delighted to announce today that the Executive Committee of North Park University's Board of Trustees, acting on behalf of the full Board, has approved the nomination and appointment of Francisco X. Gaytán, PhD, as Vice President for Student Engagement (VPSE). Dr. Gaytán will join the President's Cabinet, partnering with and reporting directly to the President, beginning August 23, 2021.

As the University's chief student development officer, the VPSE provides leadership for the development and implementation of all student engagement planning and policy as well as the budget management and overall supervision of staff in the Center for Student Engagement. Within this role, the VPSE coordinates across all Student Engagement units—Dean of Students, Student Activities, Housing and Residence Life, Health Services, Counseling Support Services, University Ministries, Diversity and Intercultural Life, Student Success, and Career Services and Internships.

Dr. "Frank" Gaytán is a person of expressed Christian faith and has been an active member of St. John's Episcopal Church for nearly 10 years. He is very enthusiastic about the mission and opportunity to serve North Park, to lead our student engagement staff, and to be a strong strategic senior partner with the president and her Cabinet now, and in the years to come. A skilled and strategic student life administrator and a champion for student success, Dr. Gaytán has a proven track record of dramatically improving student retention rates, closing equity gaps in retention, and improving student completion and success. Dr. Gaytán brings deep understanding and connection for our Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) in Chicago, and has proven experience in successfully managing the external funding available to HSI's through federal grants.

Dr. Gaytán emerged as the premier candidate from a strong pool of finalists, after well-attended campus forums and dozens of submitted feedback forms that overwhelmingly supported his candidacy.

I have full confidence in Dr. Gaytán's leadership and our partnership -- and in his ability to support and advance our Christian mission and our commitment to the success of every student.

Dr. Gaytán comes to us from Northeastern Illinois University, where he served most recently as Associate Provost for Student Success and Retention -- the University's lead student engagement strategist.

Through innovative advisor training, and strategic management of financial aid, academic and financial barriers, and improved coordination and communication, he and his team improved first year to second year retention rates by 20.5 percentage points (a 44% increase in retention) in just three years. He earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from Loyola University, master's degrees from Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley, and his PhD in Applied Psychology from New York University.

A highly engaging team-builder and collaborator, he brings more than 20 years of professional experience in higher education, more than a decade of teaching experience and eight years of progressively more complex administrative responsibilities. He has drawn on his own experience as a first-generation college student from a Mexican immigrant family to be a culturally competent role model for students and colleagues. He is an accomplished researcher, a proven administrator, and the right person to engage our students and staff at this important time in the history of our 130-year-old institution, as we create our future together through **North Park Next** and emerge as a model for Christian higher education in 21st Century America.

During his interview process, Dr. Gaytán expressed admiration for what he called “the parallel history” that Swedish immigrants to Chicago in the late 19th Century share with the current wave of immigrants from Latin America – education, community, shared values and a sense of purpose -- students seeking a life for themselves that they could translate to leadership and service to their communities.

Dr. Gaytán shared his enthusiasm for our future in this way: “I am delighted to join the North Park University community during this exciting time in its history. As a first-generation college student from an immigrant family, I know firsthand the path that twenty-first century students take in pursuit of their dreams of a better life through education for themselves and their families. North Park’s Christian values, commitment to the city of Chicago, and its increasing diversity called me to this position. I look forward to working with the Student Engagement team to make North Park a university that is known for providing all students an opportunity for growth and success that they can then carry out and share with the world.”

I have full confidence in his ability to lead our excellent student engagement staff as we bring new energy, focus and strategies to student success through enhanced intercultural connections, improved retention rates, graduation rates, and career placement. His Curriculum Vitae will be posted to our web site.

Dr. Gaytán was selected after a national search conducted by a diverse committee of colleagues representing North Park faculty, staff, administrators, and students, in partnership with Academic Search.

The University is deeply grateful to Dr. Mahauganee Shaw and Dr. Thomas Shandley of Academic Search; to our Search committee co-chairs Melissa Vélez-Luce, Chief of Staff and Ingrid Tenglin, Assistant Vice President for Human Resources; and to our search committee members, Joseph Butler, Director of Student Services; Laura Ebner, Director for Health and Wellness; Dr. Al Kamienski, Professor of Finance; Dr. Richard Kohng, Director of Civic Engagement, Catalyst Hub; Ja’Vida Morris, Associate Director of Admission Services; Dr. Gwendolyn Purifoye, Associate Professor of Sociology; and Brooklynn Seals, President, Student Government Association.

Finally, my deepest gratitude and respect goes to Vice President Andrea Nevels. VP Nevels returned to North Park just as she was settling into a well-earned retirement, and she has served our students and our Cabinet with dedication, compassion, and wisdom. I am grateful for her leadership.

Dr. Gaytán’s appointment accelerates our momentum as we approach the 2021-2022 academic year. Please join me and the Cabinet in welcoming him to our community!

Mary K. Surridge
President