






Susana Rivera-Mills is the new provost and executive vice president for academic affairs. **Karl Maasdam, Photo Provided**

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## New provost brings years of administration experience to Ball State

by *Mary Freda* (<http://www.ballstatedaily.com/staff/mary-freda>) / 12:00 p.m. April 19, 2018

When 12-year-old Susana Rivera-Mills moved to California from El Salvador, college wasn't the first thought on her mind.

**W** “I started working side-by-side with my parents when I was 12 years old because we needed the money, because we needed to figure out how to pay bills,” Rivera-Mills said. “What motivated me to go to college — to get a degree — is because I wanted to get a good enough paying job so that I could help my parents.”

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Rivera-Mills said her proudest career moment came when she was able to send her parents money from her first paycheck.

That was in the late '90s, when Rivera-Mills began working as a lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages at Northern Arizona University.

Since, she has held nine positions at Oregon State University including: department chair, associate professor of Spanish and diversity advancement, director of student engagement and diversity advancement, associate dean of the college of liberal arts, interim director of the center of Latin@ studies and engagement, executive associate dean for strategic initiatives, vice provost and dean of undergraduate students, professor of Spanish and diversity advancement and vice provost for academic programs and learning innovation.

Now, Rivera-Mills is the new provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Ball State. She will replace Marilyn Buck, who was named interim provost after former acting provost Robert Morris died in November 2016.

Her focus for the university? Improving retention and graduation rates and equalizing student success, she said.

Other questions Rivera-Mills plans to examine at the university are: What's working, what's not working for our students? How are we doing with advising, what things can improve there? What experiences are students having in the classroom? How can we begin to reach populations of students that normally may not have access to education?

Additionally, Rivera-Mills said she plans on examining financial aid, evaluating advising and ensuring students are having experiential learning experiences — opportunities in which students apply their knowledge hands on — at the university in order help retention and graduation rates and ensure students are better prepared for careers after college.

“The position of provost is really interesting because I will be the chief academic officer, which means that I'm going to be looking very closely at our academic programs, what we offer, building on our strengths, things that would do very well,” Rivera-Mills said. “I'm also tasked with implementing the president's vision, and the president's vision, really, is to make us a premier university that provides students with transformative learning experiences.”

Before she was an administrator, Rivera-Mills spent a majority of her career as a Spanish professor. She stopped teaching a year ago to focus on her administrative role at Oregon State University.

Although Rivera-Mills said teaching is her first love, she doesn't plan on teaching at Ball State.

"I think that I had two really influential teachers in my life, you know, a math teacher and a Spanish teacher, interestingly enough, that made the whole difference between my vision of what I could do ... they saw in me the potential before I even knew what it was," Rivera-Mills said. "It was because of them, really, that I was able to go to college and achieve as much as I have, and I credit them.

"I think that I really saw them as role models, and I wanted to be able to make a difference in people's lives in the same way that they had made a difference in my life."

Rivera-Mills earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish from the University of Iowa in 1992, then went on to get her master's degree in Spanish linguistics from the University of Iowa in 1994. In 1998, she received her doctorate in romance languages and linguistics from The University of New Mexico.

For Rivera-Mills, her degrees were revolutionary.

"I actually think education is the most powerful revolution because it changes minds, it changes mindsets and it provides people with a different perspective than what they know," she said. "I think that education has a transformative power on people in a way that other things do not, and it provides an opportunity for people to break cycles of poverty [and] for people to break cycles of ignorance."

Rivera-Mills will begin her role as provost July 1 and President Geoffrey S. Mearns said her commitment to "creating a learning environment that enables all students to reach their full potential" and "track record for developing the types of programs and building the necessary partnerships" will allow the university to reach its mission.

Contact Mary Freda with comments at [mafreda@bsu.edu](mailto:mafreda@bsu.edu) (mailto:mafreda@bsu.edu) or on Twitter @Mary\_Freda1. ([https://twitter.com/Mary\\_Freda1?lang=en](https://twitter.com/Mary_Freda1?lang=en))

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