

Dr. Melissa Gonzales named next chair of Environmental Health Sciences

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Dr. Melissa Gonzales will become the next chair of the Department of Environmental Health Sciences at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, effective July 1st. Dean Thomas LaVeist made the announcement earlier today.

“Dr. Gonzales is an accomplished researcher who also has excellent experience in the classroom,” he said in his announcement. “Her background focuses on community-engaged translational research with a commitment to addressing health disparities, rural and minority health, and improved health equity through informed policy. I know she will be a great addition to the school and an excellent leader for the Department of Environmental Health Sciences.”

“The intersection of health and the environment is complex and dynamic,” said Gonzales. “I’m excited to take part in Tulane’s commitment to develop scientists and leaders in environmental health to be conversant across disciplines and relevant to the settings in which they operate.”

Gonzales received her Bachelor of Arts in chemistry, biology, and Spanish, as well as her Master of Science in toxicology and industrial hygiene from the University of Arizona. She earned her doctorate in environmental health from the University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health. She also completed a 3-year postdoctoral fellowship at the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Research and Development.

She comes to Tulane from the University of New Mexico (UNM) School of Medicine where she has served as a professor of epidemiology, biostatistics, and preventive medicine and the associate vice chancellor for research and evaluation in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion with the UNM Health Sciences Center. She also served as a professor of internal medicine.

Her research portfolio includes the Albuquerque Hispanic Moms Study, the Zuni Exposure Study, the Colorectal Disease Prevention Study, and the UNM-UTEP ARCH study of asthma and air pollution among children living on the U.S. Mexico border. Her research and leadership roles at UNM also include the METALS (Metal Exposure and Toxicity Assessment on Tribal Lands in the Southwest) Superfund Center and the TREE (Transdisciplinary Research, Equity and Engagement) Center for Advancing Behavioral Health. Dr. Gonzales is a founding director of the UNM Center for Native American Environmental Health Equity Research.