



# ARIZONA BOARD OF REGENTS

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Feb. 24, 2021

Dear Members of the NAU Community,

The last few days have been exciting and an absolute pleasure for the two of us as we visited the campus introducing the NAU community to the finalist for the 17th President of Northern Arizona University. As co-chairs of the search committee, we could not be more pleased with our selection of Dr. José Luis Cruz to lead the bright next chapter of an extraordinary institution in our state.

As you have likely read, Dr. Cruz is an electrical engineer and a patented inventor; was a Department Chair and Dean at the University of Puerto Rico; and was recruited to take a senior position at the Education Trust, one of the premier higher education think tanks in the country focused on student access and attainment. Dr. Cruz then became Provost at California State Fullerton and was recruited to be the President of Lehman College in New York City. Most recently he served as Provost of the CUNY System, overseeing seven graduate colleges, 11 undergraduate colleges, one honors college, and seven community colleges serving almost 275,000 students.

Dr. Cruz has many reasons for accepting this position, but let us cite just two. Like so many, he was inspired by this extraordinary place. He and his wife, Rima, traveled here some 17 years ago, fell in love with Flagstaff, extended their visit, and expressed the hope that their lives might bring them back. He is enamored with this place and how it has manifested in so many of NAU's academic strengths. Second, the core of his work and source of his passion is access, engagement, and success for all students. He recognizes that neither Arizona nor the United States will succeed without more post-secondary attainment, particularly among under-served communities, and he was captivated by NAU's particular commitment to Indigenous and Latino students and their communities.

As co-chairs of the search committee, it was important to us that we land the right leader, but also that the NAU faculty and broader community be as engaged in the process as COVID-19 would allow. ABOR appointed a 14-member Advisory Committee in October to help identify the essential attributes we sought based on what we heard from the NAU community: most notably transparency, collaboration, shared governance, commitment to undergraduate excellence, focused research, and a strong town-gown relationship. Committee membership included a significant number of faculty to ensure that your essential voice was strongly heard throughout, and also included additional representation from the campus and community.

To gather input we hosted a town hall, had dozens of group calls on Zoom, met with over 300 faculty members during a Zoom meeting arranged by the Faculty Senate, and have had more calls and coffees than we can count. We have also received and absorbed over 192 emails and letters of thoughtful input.

The committee examined prospects, engaged in discussions with many at length, hosted confidential on-campus recruiting visits and meetings, and ultimately recommended the two prospects who best embodied the desired attributes to the Board of Regents. Both prospects had the unanimous and enthusiastic support of the full committee. We are grateful for Faculty Senate Secretary and

committee member Kate Ellis's missive to the Faculty Senate wherein she described the process as "ideal." She describes how throughout the process the campus representatives felt fully engaged and heard. This is what we were going for.

From the outset, two goals above all motivated the search. First, that it would maximize engagement and second, that it would result in a success. The first goal dominated the first two months of our work, narrowing the field from almost 150 interested individuals to two candidates. The second goal dominated the last three days of the search. Our two candidates are outstanding leaders nationally known for their commitment to student success and were being recruited elsewhere. We knew the public announcement of their names would accelerate that activity and also likely produce immediate retention offers from their existing institutions.

In the final three days, both candidates participated in large Zoom calls with faculty, students, and community members. From those calls, the Regents received over 70 letters with feedback. A larger and more extended engagement process was limited by both COVID-19 and competitive pressures. Keeping both candidates in the search was essential and accomplished.

In his recent visit last Friday and Saturday, Dr. Cruz promised to "hit the ground learning," and that he would "hear all voices and seek out the silences." Dr. Cruz mentioned multiple times during his campus visit that communication, cooperation, and collaboration make us better. The fact that he gave out his cell phone number to multiple groups of people he met while on campus makes it clear he means it!

As evidenced by the reception he received here, it is also clear that we have the right 17th President of NAU.

Thank you for your service to this great university, your passion for our students and to knowledge creation, and for your commitment to building an even brighter future for Northern Arizona University.

Sincerely,



Regent Fred DuVal  
Search Co-Chair



Regent Lyndel Manson  
Search Co-Chair