



# Office of the President

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

October 30, 2020

Dear Lumberjacks,

There is much to celebrate as we move closer to the end of the fall semester. These events and accomplishments underscore our ability in this uncertain time not only to persist, but also to thrive and succeed. What follows are some of the high points.

## **NAU a finalist for APLU's 2020 Degree Completion Award**

We have been named one of four finalists for the Association of Public and Land-grant University's (APLU) 2020 Degree Completion Award. The award recognizes institutions that use innovative approaches to improve degree completion while maintaining a high-quality education. The winner will be announced the week of November 9.

NAU was lauded for going above and beyond in its support of first-generation and underserved students, ensuring that these students have access to a high-quality education and the tools they need to complete their degree and fulfill their academic aspirations.

I am so pleased that our faculty and staff efforts in this area have been recognized on a national stage. APLU made special note of NAU increasing overall four-year graduation rates by 13 percentage points and six-year graduation rate by more than 7 percentage points in the past six years, as well as making significant improvements in first-generation student retention and degree completion. **[Read more about the award and NAU's efforts.](#)**

## **First-Generation College Celebration Week**

Next week, NAU will participate in the **First-Generation College Celebration Week**. The activities culminate on November 8 with the national First-Generation College Celebration day, which commemorates the 55th anniversary of the signing of the Higher Education Act in 1965. This act has helped millions of first-generation, low-income/under-resourced students achieve academic success. With 46 percent of our students identifying as first-generation college students, it is important for us to celebrate their accomplishments.

## **Native American Heritage Month**

Another important recognition for our NAU community is Native American Heritage Month, which begins November 1. Look for a special message from me on Monday with an invitation to a number of opportunities to honor the culture, heritage, rich ancestry, contributions, and traditions of Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian people throughout November.

## Gold Axe, President's Prize, and Distinguished Senior Awards

Last night, we honored 23 students with Gold Axe Awards, including our three President's Prize recipients, as well as Distinguished Seniors from each of our colleges. These awards recognize graduating Lumberjacks for outstanding achievements and distinguished service to the university and the greater community.

The President's Prize is the highest honor NAU has for undergraduates. This year, that award went to Monica Blauser, Denise Ocampo, and Skylar Weber. Highlights can be found in [NAU News](#).

Congratulations to all who were recognized last night—you embody the Lumberjack spirit of achievement and service.

I'd like to conclude with a few words about your commitment to citizenship and to each other. First is a reminder to vote. Today is the last day to vote early in-person. **Visit the Coconino County website for a list of early voting locations.** You can also drop off your mail-in ballot at **drop box locations throughout Flagstaff and Coconino County.**

On Election Day, the Walkup Skydome is the NAU campus official polling place. It will be open from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on November 3. If you are not sure where your polling place is, please refer to the [Coconino County Elections Office](#) or the [State of Arizona](#).

With Halloween coming up, it is particularly important to stress our continued commitment to protecting our community from COVID-19. We ask that you continue to follow the health and safety protocols NAU has had in place since before the start of the semester—practice physical distancing, avoid large gatherings, wear a mask, and practice good hygiene.

The Office of the Dean of Students has and will continue to enforce mask and physical distancing requirements through the Student Code of Conduct, and we expect students to be responsible for their actions. **Campus Health has created a webpage that can help you assess risk and act accordingly.**

This brings me to the latest update on our COVID-19 mitigation efforts. As of this afternoon, NAU is managing 62 cases among students on- and off-campus, up slightly from last week. Updates can be found on [NAU's COVID-19 page](#).

I am happy to join with you in celebrating these milestone events safely with an eye toward finishing the semester strong.

Sincerely,



**Rita Hartung Cheng**  
President

