October 1, 2021

Dear Lumberjacks,

I know from my dear brother, Gabriel, that disabilities say less about an individual’s potential than about our collective inability to construct a world where differences in abilities make us stronger.

Today, with the start of Disability Pride and Heritage Month at Northern Arizona University, I invite all of us to engage in conversation and education around disability, inclusivity, justice, and accessibility.

Indeed, a commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion is a key element of NAU’s mission. These principles have long been espoused by our university community. And they are close to my heart. Hearing them foregrounded during my journey to NAU filled me with excitement and optimism for a bold future ahead, predicated on the hard, important work we are doing today.

Our Disability Resources Office helps students, faculty, and staff access resources they need to be successful—including in our labs and classrooms, residence halls, and offices. The Commission on Disability Access and Design (CDAD) is helping lead our efforts to create, maintain, and advance a welcoming, supportive, and inclusive environment. And NAU 4 All is a student organization that offers support and advocacy for all people and works to make our community a welcoming environment, which means being inclusive and accessible in all that we do. These groups are constantly striving for greater accessibility and inclusivity in our design, policies, and opportunities, and we are becoming a better university because of their efforts.

CDAD and NAU 4 All have worked hard to create events this month that will share how students, faculty, and staff can make a difference in assuring equitable participation for people with disabilities and illustrate the ways in which these efforts have transformed not just NAU, but also our society more broadly. These events are a mix of virtual and in-person activities that explore the lived experience of disability through conversation, film, adaptive sports, and a look at how accessible our virtual environments are. Engaging with disability in this way requires an understanding of the physical, attitudinal, informational, social, and political contexts within which people with disabilities navigate the world.

I am eager to participate in these events and to apply what I learn to our policies, procedures, and decisions throughout the rest of the year to make NAU an even more accessible and inclusive environment where we can all help each other find success.

I encourage you to engage in these events to better understand disabilities for yourself and for your neighbors, classmates, coworkers, family, and friends. Find the complete list of events at the Disability Pride and Heritage Month website. I
hope to see many of you there!

Sincerely,

José Luis Cruz Rivera
President