October 11, 2021

Yá’át'ééh,

Northern Arizona University sits at the base of the San Francisco Peaks on homelands sacred to Native Americans throughout the region. We honor their past, present, and future generations who have lived here for millennia and will forever call this place home.

But we at NAU recognize that land acknowledgments and statements of belonging are insufficient, albeit necessary, expressions of the respect for and valuation of the lived experiences of the first peoples of this land and their many and varied contributions to the betterment of the world.

The history of inequity and systemic injustice endured by our Indigenous communities requires action in support of our words, and that is why today, in observance of Indigenous Peoples' Day and in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of our Native American Cultural Center (NACC), we proudly commit to redoubling our efforts to better partner with and serve Indigenous communities in Arizona and beyond as a core part of our mission. We will do so by expanding access to Native American students and supporting their success, exploring opportunities to decolonize and indigenize our curricula, and working to eradicate the educational, health, and climate inequities that disproportionately affect Indigenous communities.

Already, I have met with several tribal leaders—including from the Navajo, Hopi, and Havasupai tribes—to discuss how we can best partner and advance our work as an Indigenous-serving institution. I look forward to sharing more details about specific actions as things evolve.

My address on the first day of my presidency at NAU was delivered from the Native American Cultural Center in the heart of our Flagstaff campus because I knew I wanted to talk about the future of our university in a setting that spoke to the values by which we live. All that I have heard within our community speaks to a desire to realize and embody diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in all that we do. Those principles are grounded in a sense of place and history around our location in northern Arizona.

So, it is only fitting that on Indigenous Peoples' Day we will gather at the NACC to celebrate 10 years of service by supporting our students, offering education about the histories, cultures, and issues facing Native American and Indigenous communities, providing enhanced spiritual connections for those away from their tribal lands, and fostering important relationships with tribal communities.

I am proud of all the students, faculty, and staff who are a part of NACC and am honored to work with them to advance their goals and dreams. I am excited to see what the next 10 years will bring.
Please join me in recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ Day and congratulating the Native American Cultural Center on 10 outstanding years of service to NAU.

José Luis Cruz Rivera
President

Twitter  LinkedIn  Instagram