October 26, 2021

Dear Lumberjacks,

There are a lot of great reasons to work at Northern Arizona University, including being part of the dedicated faculty and staff who aim every day to advance the university’s 122-year legacy as an engine of opportunity.

NAU: A truly exceptional place to work

But we know we can and must enhance our workplace policies and practices to sustain our commitment to excellence and accelerate progress in our quest to become a national leader in equitable postsecondary value.

This is why in the initial days of our 17th presidency, I asked Josh Mackey, vice president and chief human resources officer, for an initial set of policy recommendations that would help position NAU as a truly exceptional place to teach, learn, discover, create, and engage—all in the service of advancing our mission.

It is also why we have focused on the issue of recruiting, retaining, and developing highly-qualified, mission-aligned faculty and staff as part of our Strategic Roadmap efforts.

In my July 15 message to the university, I foreshadowed the creation of the New NAU Workplace Committee—which I am happy to report has been duly constituted under the leadership of VP Mackey and has begun important work to help us update and enhance flexible work options and other workplace practices.

A new NAU winter closure policy

Today, I am pleased to announce the first result of these efforts: Effective immediately, Northern Arizona University is instituting a new University Closure Policy.

Full details about the policy are posted online, and I encourage you to review them for more information. The highlights are below:

- The annual scheduled period of university closure will correspond to the dates between the Winter Holiday/President’s Designated Holiday (Christmas Eve) and the New Year’s Holiday Observance, December 24 through January 1.

- During this period, most employees will not have to report to work, and eligible employees will receive regular pay during the university closure period.

- Employees whose services are needed during this period will be compensated with equal time to be taken before the end of the same fiscal year (June 30), as
described in the policy statement and explained in the corresponding FAQs.

- The university’s Executive Team is evaluating the minimal levels of support needed to ensure essential services are available during the closure days. Notifications will be made by area vice presidents no later than November 15 to employees who may need to work full- or part-time during the closure period in-person, remote, or on an on-call basis.

This policy is an important step in redoubling our efforts to ensure NAU is an exceptional place to work because 1) it reflects a months-long effort of vetting, research, and consultation led by our HR colleagues, 2) it responds to recommendations dating back to the Presidential Transition when many in our NAU community talked about the importance of finding ways to recognize the hard work of our dedicated employees, even as we create the conditions for sustained fiscal responsibility, and 3) it is largely consistent with suggestions recently received via our IdeaScale platform as part of the Strategic Roadmap process.

Indeed, I am confident this policy will do much to improve our collective morale and boost productivity as we wrap up the year that was and recharge for the year that will be.

Note of appreciation and next steps

Much work remains, and I look forward to considering additional recommendations from our Human Resources team, the New NAU Workplace Committee, and our Strategic Roadmap efforts.

In the meantime, please join me in expressing sincere appreciation for the work our colleagues in Human Resources have done during the past few months to develop and implement this policy.

And let’s thank the following members of the New NAU Workplace Committee for their thoughtful input in helping to put this policy in place, as well as for their ongoing work:

- **Josh Mackey**, vice president and chief human resources officer (Chair)
- **Sanjam Ahluwalia**, director, Women's and Gender Studies; professor, Department of History and Women's and Gender Studies Program
- **Chris Holthe**, assistant librarian, Cline Library
- **Astrid Klocke**, interim vice provost, Faculty Affairs
- **Erin Kruse**, director, Center for Service and Volunteerism
- **Pam Malone**, student development coordinator, intermediate, First-Generation Programs
- **Jessica Melton**, associate vice president, Campus Operations
- **Chris Mott**, director, Enrollment Management
- **Wendy Swartz**, associate vice president, Financial Administration
- **Heidi Toth**, assistant director, NAU Communications
- **Suzette Yaezenko**, associate vice president, Human Resources

I expect to share more throughout the fall and into spring on the work we are doing to ensure that NAU is a truly exceptional place to work.

In partnership,