November 1, 2021

Dear Lumberjacks,

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

Since today marks the beginning of Native American Heritage Month, I feel it is important to start our celebration with an acknowledgment of the land upon which we live and work and a recognition of the relationships and connections that Native American tribes currently maintain with the area we know as Flagstaff.

Recognizing and celebrating Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples and their proud heritage is a longstanding tradition at NAU. We are among the leading universities in the nation for undergraduate and graduate degrees awarded to Native American students. We have partnerships and affiliations with Tribes throughout the state and country, and we work with Tribal colleges and universities to deliver a quality, culturally responsive education to the communities we serve.

This is a strong foundation. But as we look ahead, NAU has a bold vision for a future where we will build on the good work that has come before and take the steps necessary to truly live our mission of serving Native American and Indigenous students and Tribal and Indigenous nations. We must strive to close opportunity gaps, enroll, retain and support more students, ensure postgraduate success has been achieved, and provide support and services that make the NAU experience one that is exceptional and transformative.

This work is already underway. As I shared on Friday, input from Native American communities has helped refine and shape the second draft of the Strategic Roadmap, which will foreground our commitment in both a distinct goal and a guiding principle that informs all of our work—making clear our ongoing commitment to Native American students, Indigenous Peoples, and Tribal nations is central among our institutional priorities.

We have a bright future ahead. Let’s start by joining together to honor Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples, recognize their achievements and stewardship, and truly appreciate how fortunate we are that NAU students, faculty, and staff represent more than 120 Native American Tribes. The Native American Cultural Center and the Office of Indigenous Student Success have created a variety of events and programs to help students, staff, and faculty
celebrate and foster awareness of Indigenous cultures and contributions over the course of the month. Those include Celebrating Foods of Native Americans, Elders Program Storytellers, and Indigenous Agents of Change Series, among many other events.

Please join me and the entire NAU community in recognizing and celebrating Native American Heritage Month throughout the month of November.

Sincerely,

José Luis Cruz Rivera
President