



June 15, 2021

Dear Lumberjacks,

The work of our 17th Presidency is underway, and today I am pleased to announce interim appointments to complete the leadership team that will guide our NAU community to the bold future we seek.

### **Appointment process**

As I shared a few weeks ago, as part of our transition, we needed to fill three key leadership positions with interim appointments: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Research. To do so, I engaged in a uniform and inclusive consultative process that allowed stakeholders to help shape the priorities for each role and nominate interested individuals whose experiences matched the needs identified for each position.

I appreciate the thoughtful engagement and feedback of the following stakeholder groups who I met with throughout the consultative process:

- Executive team
- Faculty Senate Executive Committee
- Deans and vice provosts
- Academic chairs/directors
- Associate deans
- Presidents of the Associated Students of Northern Arizona University and the Graduate Student Government
- Regents' professors
- President's Distinguished Teaching Fellows
- Center and institute directors
- Direct reports to each interim vice president position

These meetings reaffirmed the priorities I have heard from our NAU community during the transition. In addition, I was impressed with the background, experience, and enthusiasm of the many qualified candidates who were nominated for these positions. I wish to thank all of them for their willingness to engage and lend their support to our university.

After many interviews and consultations—and much deliberation and reflection—I have asked three exceptional individuals to serve our university in an interim capacity. They will support the mission and values of our 17th Presidency, ably attend to the day-to-day responsibilities of their roles, fit well with the teams they will lead and collaborate with, and have all the professional qualifications, leadership characteristics, and personal qualities expected by me and the NAU community. While we are still finalizing details regarding their official start dates, all three appointees are hitting the ground running, engaging immediately with key staff and stakeholders to get the work underway.

I know you will join me in thanking them for their willingness to serve in these important roles at this pivotal moment in our university's history.

### **Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs**

**Karen Pugliesi** has accepted the role of Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Karen is currently a professor of sociology, and she brings an impressive depth and breadth of experience in leadership roles throughout Academic Affairs. She has served as Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, where she spearheaded numerous student success initiatives, and her most recent administrative appointments include serving as dean of the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and chair of the Department of Sociology and Social Work.

Her appointment as Interim Provost is subject to formal approval by the Arizona Board of Regents at an upcoming meeting; however, I have consulted with the Regents and they have indicated their support, allowing us to announce Karen and let her begin the important work of leading Academic Affairs.

The list of priorities that we collectively identified for the Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs are:

- Enhancing support for a safe, vibrant, and engaging Fall 2021 semester that maximizes student learning and success, sense of belonging, and well-being across all statewide sites and teaching modalities;
- Providing strong and steady transitional leadership to establish trust and transparency through a consultative approach and respect for faculty and staff and their many contributions;
- Strengthening inclusive and collaborative engagement and communication that results in productive shared governance policies and practices and the empowerment of department chairs and directors and college deans;
- Contributing to the evaluation of existing policies, practices, processes, and structures with an eye toward modifications that recognize unique circumstances and the need for nimbleness and efficiency on the one hand, and the identification of circumstances where uniform, consistent processes are needed for equity, accountability, resource constraints, and compliance on the other hand;

- Setting the foundation for an inclusive, collaborative review of NAU's portfolio of academic programs and delivery models, including discussions of in-person, statewide, and online offerings and workforce development strategies to best serve our current and future students;
- Collaborating closely with the Interim Vice President for Research in facilitating inclusive discussions regarding NAU's distinctive excellence;
- Providing university wide support for diverse scholarship and creative activity, maintenance of our existing pillars of excellence, and operationalization of a student-centered teacher/scholar model that embraces a wide scope of interdisciplinary research and creative activities; and
- Strengthening the partnership with Enrollment Management and Student Affairs—alongside deans, chairs/directors, faculty, and staff—to provide an integrated and holistic approach to culturally relevant student recruitment, retention, and success efforts.

### **Interim Vice President for Student Affairs**

**Margot Saltonstall** has agreed to serve as Interim Vice President of Student Affairs. Margot is an accomplished and experienced leader at NAU who has most recently served as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and previously served as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, director of analytics and assessment, and coordinator of the Institute for Future Workforce Development. I look forward to drawing on her extensive knowledge of our university and her skills in collaborating across units to enhance our student success efforts.

The priorities that we collectively identified for the Interim Vice President for Student Affairs are:

- Prioritizing support for a safe, vibrant, and engaging Fall 2021 semester that maximizes student learning and success, sense of belonging, and well-being across all statewide sites and teaching modalities;
- Building bridges and serving as a strategic partner with Enrollment Management and Academic Affairs, focusing on the immediate goal of achieving FY20 enrollment levels through comprehensive, culturally relevant recruitment, retention, and student success efforts that will advance educational attainment;
- Attending to matters of operational effectiveness and collaboration throughout Student Affairs that include supporting NAU's compliance with Title IX and leadership in the Office of the Dean of Students, and strengthening cross-unit collaboration and partnership to enhance communication and operations;
- Leading an inclusive, collaborative review of NAU's portfolio of student success

programs, support services, and initiatives to identify how to best serve our current and future students; and

- Collaborating on a review of organizational and programmatic linkages with Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and other relevant units across the university.

### **Interim Vice President for Research**

**Jason Wilder**, who currently serves as dean of the College of the Environment, Forestry, and Natural Sciences, has agreed to join our leadership team as Interim Vice President for Research. Jason has extensive administrative experience including service as chair of the Department of Biological Sciences and director of Biomedical Science. He will continue in his role as dean, and we have discussed how he can leverage his experience and expertise while balancing these two important roles. I will look to his insight as we advance our university's endeavors in research, scholarship, and creative activity.

The priorities that we collectively identified for the Interim Vice President for Research are:

- Attending to matters of operational effectiveness and collaboration that include stabilizing office staffing and supporting staff in their efforts to ensure regulatory compliance and improvements in the pre-award and post-award processes for faculty and student researchers;

- Strengthening TRIF funding planning, communication, and advocacy as we consider the recalibration and nimbleness of NAU's investments to ensure that a broad portfolio of scholarly and creative activities is supported in alignment with ABOR policy and state and federal priorities;

- Celebrating and promoting the research, scholarly, and creative accomplishments of the university's faculty and students; and

- In collaboration with the Interim Provost and other senior leaders, facilitating inclusive discussions regarding NAU's distinctive excellence, university wide support for diverse scholarship and creative activities, maintenance of our existing pillars of excellence, better organizing for innovation, investing in library resources, reviewing indirect cost recovery policies and practices, engaging with tribal leaders, and operationalizing a student-centered teacher/scholar model that embraces a wide scope of interdisciplinary research and creative activities.

### **The road ahead**

As I mentioned previously, these interim appointments will help to provide strong and stable leadership, allowing us to stagger searches for the permanent senior leadership positions throughout the academic year ahead and ensure broad input and feedback throughout the process for each. I look forward to working alongside stakeholders

throughout the university to define and formalize the consultative process that will guide these searches and ensure we have a high-quality, diverse pool of candidates and that the final position profiles match the needs and mission of NAU moving forward.

Based on all that I have learned during this consultative appointment process, I am even more confident in NAU's future. Countless individuals provided insight and feedback that has clearly demonstrated that they prioritize the well-being of our students and our university. At every level, we have talented and committed people willing to step up to help or support those who have been selected for these positions. And finally, we have a shared vision for the priorities that will guide the work of each of these important positions in advancing our mission.

Thank you to all of you for your thoughtfulness and engagement. I am energized and invigorated by having a passionate and determined team at my side to propel NAU forward.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "José Luis Cruz Rivera". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

**José Luis Cruz Rivera**  
President