



May 24, 2021

Dear Lumberjacks,

I am so excited that in just three short weeks, we will start our 17th Presidency. Rima and I continue to meet many interesting people and have received recommendations about hiking, dining, and relaxing in this most majestic city. Thank you so much for the warm welcome.

Hitting The Ground Learning Updates

It's been a little more than one week since I completed my third official campus visit, but I continue to reflect on what I have heard from so many students, faculty, staff, and members of the communities we serve since the start of the presidential transition.

In the coming days, I will share the balance of my hitting the ground learning activities with you.

In addition, I will describe what I have learned through this effort—in concert with the recommendations of our Presidential Transition Commission—and how it will inform, organize, prioritize, and pace our work moving forward.

Leadership Transitions

In any presidential transition, as a new administration begins charting a path forward, there is often a need to assess and reorganize leadership teams to ensure that the institution is well positioned to advance its priorities and enact its values. Our transition is no different. At NAU, the work of our 17th Presidency will need a strong and cohesive leadership team—able and capable of engaging, mobilizing, and propelling our broader NAU community to new heights. To this end, I aim to fill all current and emerging vacancies in leadership positions in a timely fashion.

Earlier today, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Diane Stearns announced to her team that she will step away from her position on June 30, when her

current contract ends. I have enjoyed meeting with Diane, recognize her service to the University, and support her decision. Many of you are already aware that Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) Erin Grisham has chosen to retire. And, finally, Interim Vice President of Research (VPR) Dean Smith, who has provided leadership support from the Registry, has recently announced that he will be stepping away in early June.

Consultation Process for Interim Appointments

After much consideration, I have concluded that the best way to fill these crucial positions is by creating a uniform and inclusive consultative process that will enable me to make interim appointments—with the Interim Provost appointment being subject to the concurrence of the Arizona Board of Regents—that reflect the values and input of the NAU community.

While not as rigorous as the process I am committed to implementing for subsequent permanent searches, I hope you will agree that the process described below for interim appointments is a thoughtful and purposeful one that recognizes the time constraints we face, while demonstrating our commitment to the values of consultation and transparency.

Please note that I will only consider using the services of an external agency for an interim placement when the consultative process and institutional needs suggest this to be the best course of action.

Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs

For the Interim Provost appointment, I will consult with the Executive Team, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Deans and Vice Provosts, Academic Chairs/Directors, Associate Deans, the Presidents of the Associated Students of Northern Arizona University and the Graduate Student Government, Regents' Professors, and the President's Distinguished Teaching Fellows.

Through these consultative meetings, I will seek input to develop the proposed priorities and scope of work for the interim period. For example, 1) prioritizing support for a safe, vibrant, and engaging in-person Fall 2021 semester that maximizes student learning; 2) providing strong and steadying transitional leadership to establish trust and transparency in Academic Affairs through a consultative approach; and 3) strengthening inclusive and collaborative engagement and communication across Academic Affairs that results in a productive shared governance system, among other strategic and operational priorities.

Interim Vice President of Student Affairs

For the Interim Vice President of Student Affairs appointment, I will consult with the Executive Team, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Deans and Vice Provosts,

Academic Chairs/Directors, Associate Deans, the Presidents of the Associated Students of Northern Arizona University and the Graduate Student Government, the VPSA's direct reports, and the Vice President of Enrollment Management's direct reports.

Through these consultative meetings, I will seek input to develop the proposed priorities and scope of work for the interim period. For example, 1) prioritizing support for a safe, vibrant, and engaging in-person Fall 2021 semester that maximizes student learning; 2) serving as a strategic partner with Enrollment Management, focusing on the immediate goal of achieving FY20 enrollment levels through comprehensive retention efforts; and 3) 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, among other strategic and operational priorities.

Interim Vice President of Research

For the Interim Vice President of Research appointment, I will consult with the Executive Team, the Faculty Senate Executive Committee, Deans and Vice Provosts, Academic Chairs/Directors, Associate Deans, the VPR's direct reports, and NAU Regents' Professors.

Through these consultative meetings, I will seek input to develop the proposed priorities and scope of work during the interim period. For example, 1) focusing on strengthening the pre-award and post-award support for faculty and student researchers and on a recalibration of the University's investments to ensure that a broad portfolio of research and creative activities is supported; 2) in collaboration with the Interim Provost, facilitate inclusive discussions regarding NAU's Distinctive Excellence, as we emphasize the importance of our regionally connected research mission and enhance scholarly opportunities for faculty and students; and 3) providing support for sponsored and non-sponsored scholarship in disciplines across the University, among other strategic and operational priorities.

Selection Process for Interim Appointments

In order to ensure we have a strong pool of candidates for each position, during the stakeholder meetings I will share the names of individuals who have already been brought forth for consideration and invite those in attendance to nominate other potential candidates they feel are qualified and who have agreed to be considered for an interim appointment.

Armed with the invaluable input from the above referenced stakeholders, I will then review the curriculum vitae of recommended candidates as a first step in deciding who to interview for the position.

In assessing each candidate, I will consider the scope of work developed in consultation with the relevant stakeholder groups and the result of due diligence, as well as rely on

my own experience recruiting and hiring executive leaders who can serve as strong strategic partners in launching our 17th Presidency. In evaluating candidates, I will be particularly interested in the following:

- The experience, skills, and attitude the candidates would bring to the interim position, as well as the areas in which they may need additional support;
- How well they embrace the tone and values expected by me and the NAU community more broadly and complement my own leadership style and experience;
- How well they fit with the teams they would be interacting with across the University;
- The organizational ripple effects arising from the vacancies an interim appointment may generate.

I will also view each candidate through the following set of preferred professional qualifications and leadership style and personal qualities:

– **Professional Qualifications:** The successful candidate will have a history of successful leadership and experience in administrative positions of increasing responsibility in the academic, research, or student affairs area, as appropriate; demonstrated leadership in advancing student success through cross-divisional collaboration; and proven effectiveness in managing complex budgets, fiscal planning, resource allocation, strategic planning, organizational development, and other administrative functions. In addition, the candidate must be a champion of the academic mission, core values, and future success of NAU and its faculty, students, and staff.

– **Leadership Style and Personal Qualities:** The successful candidate will have a leadership style that is collaborative, thoughtful, confident, honest, transparent, effective, energetic, trusting, engaging, decisive, fair, and equitable; a demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and a sincere respect for faculty teaching, scholarship, service, academic freedom, and the value of creative learning environments; a passionate commitment to student success; strong communication skills with demonstrated expertise in interpersonal, active listening, and conflict management skills; and exceptional ethical standards and strong moral values befitting a trusted senior leader. The successful candidate is expected to be a strong proponent of data-informed decision-making, continuous improvement, and effective change management leadership aimed toward fulfilling our institutional mission and ensuring a sustainable financial future for NAU. Transparent communication and an enthusiastic commitment to consultative leadership and decision making will be critical considerations.

Temporary Pause on Other Administrative Appointments

To ensure procedural consistency, I want to inform you that I have asked that appointments associated with current or pending searches for Associate Vice President, Dean, Associate Dean, and academic Chair/Director positions be paused for three weeks until I take office on June 14.

At that time, in consultation with senior leadership, the state of each administrative search will be assessed to determine how best to ensure access to the broad and thoughtful input needed to make successful appointments. Any gaps in leadership created by this short pause will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, but generally speaking, Interim Chief of Staff and Vice President for Human Resources Dr. Josh Mackey would convene the relevant direct reports to ensure they are supported as we move our University's work forward.

Those currently conducting searches impacted by this temporary pause will be duly informed, and President Cheng and I will evaluate exceptions in those cases in which a pause could potentially derail a search (e.g., losing candidates) or a delay in filling a vacancy could have an adverse effect on the corresponding unit.

Please note: this pause in appointments will not affect faculty searches.

Process for Searches

To provide stability, engagement, and operational continuity, I intend to stagger the searches for the permanent senior leadership positions throughout academic year 2021-2022 and will consult with relevant stakeholders about the composition of the search committees, the timing and structure of the search processes, the efforts needed to ensure a high-quality, diverse pool of candidates, and the corresponding position descriptions and search profiles. I look forward to these conversations.

The Road Ahead

Listening to you throughout this transition has brought forward the desire for consultative leadership, and I believe this will be the first of many opportunities to adjust our processes and procedures to increase participation and foreground transparency in how decisions will be made during our 17th Presidency.

I look forward to the hard, important work ahead.

All the best,

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

José Luis Cruz
President-designate