



Office of the President

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

May 15, 2020

Dear Lumberjacks,

I offer my continued thanks to all members of the NAU community for the leadership and commitment you have shown throughout the semester. Your ability to pivot quickly and embrace new ways of fulfilling your roles and engaging with our students resulted in a gratifying and successful end to what may have been the most challenging semester in our school's history.

As we turn our attention to summer and fall, I would like to share a few pieces of news with the NAU community.

First, we successfully hosted our first-ever virtual commencement last Friday. I am so proud of the Class of 2020 for all they have accomplished.

Commencement is the culminating achievement for our students and one of the most rewarding moments for our faculty and staff. It reminds us of the importance of our mission and the impact that higher education has on individuals' lives as we celebrate the hard work, passion, and perseverance of our students. I was inspired by the graduation of a record 6,000 Lumberjack students who succeeded in the face of formidable challenges and uncertainties. My sincere thanks to the faculty and staff for the thousands of social media messages that you posted celebrating our graduates and for all you have done to ensure they are successful as they move on to the next chapter of their lives.

I am also gratified to have shared the good news with our students that we received our Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding from the federal government. We have established procedures that will enable us to quickly and effectively disburse this much-needed funding to our students.

On Tuesday, we sent emails to students and parents informing them of the CARES Act funding available through NAU. By Thursday, we had already distributed more than 25 percent of the total student-directed funds to more than 6,400 eligible students. More information is available at nau.edu/coronavirus/caresact.

Finally, as you may know, Arizona's current executive order expires today and will be replaced with the new executive order: *Stay Healthy, Return Smarter, Return Stronger*. This decision from the governor balances risk mitigation through appropriate measures with the need to get Arizona's economy moving again. Given our importance to the economic well-being of our region and our state, we will play a significant role in making the state's reopening strategy a success.

Our foremost objective, as it has been throughout this pandemic, is to maintain the measures necessary to address the health and safety concerns of our students, faculty, staff, and the larger community. Our actions will continue to closely track guidance from local, state, and federal health experts and government officials. Since early March, NAU has operated with essential personnel onsite only—approximately 15 percent of our total workforce—who provide critical services to our current and incoming students and support campus operations. I am grateful to all of our faculty and staff for your continued attention to health and safety and for maintaining operations and services for our students. Preparations to transition our faculty and staff back to full on-campus

work in Flagstaff and at our statewide locations will be rolled out in a careful, phased approach.

As highlighted in last week's message to campus, our Executive Team task forces are working with constituents across campus to gather information and develop plans for the reopening of campus in accordance with the most up-to-date health and safety best practices. This information will continue to be presented to the COVID-19 Recovery Workgroup tasked with advising on planning efforts. These measures include instituting a range of physical distancing policies across campus, such as adjusting guidelines for public spaces and scheduling classes to ensure appropriate distance is maintained in classrooms, planning for cleaning and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) needs across campus, and protocols for testing, monitoring, and quarantining members of the NAU community. Specific protocols for housing and dining are under development. In addition, we will leverage the investments we have made to upgrade our online instruction to supplement these efforts and provide further flexibility in our ability to deliver a high-quality educational experience.

We will be sharing more next week about how we will accomplish a phased-in return to campus life. We also will give an important update on financial and budget planning efforts.

Even before COVID-19, colleges and universities were facing unprecedented enrollment challenges as a result of demographic changes, shifting attitudes about the value of a college degree, and declining numbers of high school graduates. COVID-19 and the economic effects of the pandemic have exacerbated these challenges, resulting in unforeseen expenses and revenue losses. NAU is not immune. We have been carefully evaluating the impact of these circumstances on our university and have been developing various budget options. As I have shared in earlier messages, we will be financially stretched moving forward, with estimates of a revenue shortfall approaching \$100 million, representing nearly 20 percent of our overall operating budget. Keep in mind that the proportion of our total revenue received from tuition, fees, and room and board has increased significantly over the past ten years. In our commitment to transparency, we will provide updates to our community on the status of our planning efforts and implementation of action steps to address the very real challenges we face, both in the short- and long-term.

This is a difficult time, and I am grateful for your patience and willingness to stay engaged and offer feedback as we work together to prepare our community for the fall semester and our budget for the next fiscal year.

We hope you and your loved ones are healthy and safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rita", written in a cursive style.

Rita Hartung Cheng
President