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## **Arizona Board of Regents Names Rita Cheng 16<sup>th</sup> President of Northern Arizona University**

(Phoenix, Ariz.) The Arizona Board of Regents voted today to approve the contract of [Rita Cheng, Ph.D.](#) as the next president of Northern Arizona University. The vote follows an extensive nationwide search and the announcement last week of Cheng's selection as the sole finalist. Dr. Cheng, who replaces President John Haeger, will begin her term on August 15, 2014.

Dr. Cheng is currently the chancellor of Southern Illinois University. Dr. Cheng has previously served as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Her [previous accomplishments](#) include serving as associate vice chancellor and interim dean of the School of Continuing Education at UWM, and associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at UWM.

"On behalf of the Regents, I extend a warm welcome to Dr. Cheng to Northern Arizona University and to Arizona's public university system," ABOR Chair Rick Myers said. "Dr. Cheng's impressive career in higher education and her transformative leadership will advance NAU to even greater heights, enable the achievement of the university's ambitious goals, and foster enhanced student success. This is the beginning of a legacy that will serve the entire state."

Dr. Cheng visited the NAU campus last week, meeting with key members of the NAU and business community. In a public address on the NAU campus, Dr. Cheng had a chance to discuss her values and her vision for NAU, and shared her appreciation for expanding the horizons for women and first-generation students. She emphasized her priority on service to others and to her community. "I have always believed I have a responsibility to help others through service," she said. "I firmly believe we have an obligation to give back, and I try to live by that value." Her address also included themes of shared governance, transparency, communication, accountability and inclusiveness. She noted her support for a strong, academically focused athletics program, but also emphasized "music, art, theater, distinguished speakers, and other cultural and recreational activities that contribute to the vibrancy of our campus."

She acknowledged that NAU's upward trajectory—much to the credit of current President John Haeger—was no secret nationally and had been noticed by her from afar. Visiting in person only confirmed that view, she said. "At the heart of it all resides a talented faculty and staff that makes it possible."

“I am truly honored to become the next president of Northern Arizona University and to be a part of the rich tradition and culture that has made NAU the university of choice for so many outstanding students and faculty,” Cheng said. “I look forward with great anticipation to working with the NAU community, as well as the local and statewide business and education communities to build upon the great successes NAU has achieved and continue its forward momentum.”

A 28-member search committee of ABOR members, NAU faculty and staff, and community, business, tribal and educational leaders contributed to the decision to choose Cheng as the presidential finalist to replace NAU President John Haeger.

In addition to her role as NAU president, Dr. Cheng also will be part of the ABOR Enterprise Executive Committee, which includes ABOR President Eileen I. Klein, Arizona State University President Michael M. Crow, and UA President Ann Weaver Hart as the executive leadership of the Arizona public university enterprise system responsible for implementing regent policies and driving the achievement of statewide goals.

Cheng has served as chancellor at SIU since June 2010. She oversees an operating budget of more than \$750 million at a university of about 18,000 students. The 2013 freshman class at SIU was the largest in 20 years, including double-digit percentage increases in undergraduate international enrollment. Cheng implemented the “Mobile Dawg” initiative, which provided pre-loaded computer tablets to all new on-campus freshmen, and she established a distance learning program that powered a 36 percent increase in online course enrollment from 2012-13. Also under Cheng, a University College was created to centralize and coordinate support services for incoming freshmen and transfer students.

In addition, Cheng stabilized the university’s financial condition during a period of declining public support, developed a strong university fund-raising team and strengthened partnerships with the university’s foundation and alumni association. She has also overseen the development of a new strategic plan for the university, improvements to academic and research facilities, and construction and opening of a new student services building. Cheng also has extensive experience working effectively with public and private business and industry partners to align her strategic plan to support economic development.

Before moving to SIU, Cheng spent 22 years in teaching and administrative roles at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, including five years as provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

Cheng, who is also a professor of accounting at SIU, earned her Ph.D. in management from the Fox School of Business and Management at Temple University. She earned her MBA degree from the University of Rhode Island and a bachelor of business administration degree with honors from Bishop’s University in Quebec. Details on Cheng’s NAU presidential contract are available [here](#).

Under [President John Haeger’s leadership](#), enrollment at NAU has grown by more than 40 percent and the campus has undergone a physical transformation that is ongoing. He leveraged public-private partnerships and implemented efficiencies that resulted in 24 new buildings and 16 major renovations at a time of steep declines in state appropriations. His commitment to accessibility and affordability brought about innovative programs that benefit transfer students, bolster online education and open the door to higher education for students at NAU-Yavapai, NAU-Yuma and other branch campuses. Haeger’s 13-year presidency leaves NAU ideally positioned to maintain its status as a premier undergraduate institution with a promising foundation in research.

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