



## News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Easing the Transition to Arizona’s Public Universities for State’s Graduating Senior Class**

(Phoenix, Ariz.) – Amid an atmosphere of uncertainty and financial instability during the COVID-19 pandemic, Arizona higher education and K-12 leaders are reaching out to graduating high school seniors to encourage them to take their next steps toward success as degree-seeking students at the state’s public universities.

A joint letter signed by Arizona Board of Regents Chair Larry E. Penley, Arizona State University President Michael Crow, Northern Arizona University President Rita Cheng, University of Arizona President Robert Robbins and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman has been sent to this year’s Arizona high school graduates encouraging students to begin planning for higher education by taking key steps in June and July to enroll in the fall semester. (Follow these links for the letter in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).)

“This is an uncertain time for many students, but it should not be one where plans for higher education are delayed or deferred,” said ABOR Chair Larry E. Penley. “Benefits to students who earn their degrees last a lifetime, including higher wages and lower unemployment and an increasing need for university educated workers in the New Economy. Admissions to the universities are still open and financial aid is available. I encourage all of our graduating seniors to pursue their degrees through the learning modality they are comfortable with from online to on-campus options.”

During a recent meeting of the Arizona Board of Regents Academic Affairs and Educational Attainment Committee, university enrollment and admissions administrators said this year’s high school graduating seniors experienced unprecedented challenges during their last year of high school, challenges that the universities realize and are working through to ensure access to higher education for these students.

“The goal is to hold these students harmless,” said Kasey Urquidez, University of Arizona Vice President of Enrollment Management and Undergraduate Admissions Dean. “We want to make sure that we are serving them and providing them with the things that they need to be successful.”

During the committee meeting, Regents expressed concern regarding students who may plan to take a “gap year” during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period of time that could inadvertently result in an extended break from higher education or – worse yet – completely foregoing college.

“I’m hearing that phrase - gap year - being used out in the community at all different income levels, and I have a concern that this may result in students never entering a university at all,” said Regent Kathryn Hackett King.

Enrollment administrators at the universities want prospective students to know that they are meeting students where they are in their lives during this pandemic, taking into account their circumstances and helping students access financial aid. All of the universities are stressing flexibility in working with students on admissions to the institutions while addressing concerns such as paying for college, what life is like as a student and how campuses will be different during the upcoming semester.

“There is no reason ... that a family even in the middle of a massive disruption cannot have their child go to a public university. We have unbelievable mechanisms to make things work – from financial aid, to flexible courses,” President Crow said.

Flexibility applies to students whose financial situation may have changed dramatically since they completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), said Anika Olsen, Northern Arizona University vice president of enrollment management. “A lot of students and their families are just unsure at this time,” she added. “Our national data suggests 30 to 40 percent of students are kind of in a wait and see mode.”

Arizona’s public universities provide robust financial aid for students - \$863.3 million in gift aid from the universities alone during 2019. Moreover, data indicates the benefits of earning a degree over a lifetime are considerable including better quality of life for university graduates with Arizona median wages of \$65,573 for an individual with a graduate degree, \$51,197 for a bachelor’s degree and \$28,821 for a high school diploma, according to the 2018 Wages of Graduates Report.

More information on admissions to Arizona’s public universities may be found through the following links:

- [Arizona State University](#)
- [Northern Arizona University](#)
- [University of Arizona](#)

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