



August 6, 2021

Highlights:

- Invitation to join Town Halls
- Update on NAU's vaccine incentive program—Jacks are Vaxed
- Creating a mask-friendly community of care
- NAU's random testing program
- Employing strategies that work
- Looking back at the week

Dear Lumberjacks,

I had trouble this morning connecting with the Tokyo 2020 livestream to the Men's 5,000-meter finals. But after a few anxious minutes, I was able to witness [Luis Grijalva's momentous run](#)—a performance that represented a personal best, a Guatemalan record, and an NAU bright point of pride. What a great way to start the day!

Next week will mark many firsts. We are so excited to welcome all supervisors back in person on Monday and I am going to try to visit as many areas as possible over the next week to say hello and thank you for your commitment to being leaders of our university.

We continue to use the knowledge and resources of the President's Steering Committee and the Public Health Advisory committee to guide our continuous planning for the vibrant fall semester we have in store for our students, as well as prioritizing the health and safety of our entire community. And while I acknowledge that the [Delta variant is on all of our minds](#), I feel confident that together we will work to secure the conditions that will allow us to focus on what we do best: teach, learn, create, engage.

Town Halls

As I have promised, communicating our plans as well as listening to you and addressing your questions is the way we will do our work together—nothing in isolation. As such, we will be holding a few NAU Community Town Halls over the next two weeks to share the latest science information, provide details around our plans to identify and mitigate the spread of the virus, and engage our student leaders to model participation and the camaraderie of the Lumberjack Way.

The first Town Hall will take place on Wednesday, August 11, and will focus on the current state of the virus and the latest knowledge behind the best ways to protect ourselves and each other. We'll send the details next week, but I ask that you try to keep your calendars flexible so you can join the conversation.

In the meantime, please know that we remain committed to ensuring that our COVID-19 policies and practices are informed by the best public health guidance available, and that we adhere to the relevant State and Federal regulations, as described below.

Jacks are Vaxed

We must use every tool and resource available to fight this virus and its variants, and vaccines are our best defense. To this end—while we know thousands of our Jacks are already vaxed—we will continue to find ways to strongly encourage and incentivize voluntary vaccinations for all who are able and open to considering being vaccinated. More information can be found on the [Jacks are Vaxed](#) page.

Mask-friendly community

Wearing masks is also part of our community of care. Our strong recommendation to wear a mask indoors at

all NAU facilities applies to vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Masks are required in a number of specific settings, such as clinical locations, Campus Health, and public transportation, and that may evolve based on public health conditions. While masking is not a substitute for getting vaccinated, science suggests it can reduce the number of cases and help slow infection rates of those who are not vaccinated. Thus lowering the probability of spreading the virus. I will wear my mask and expect most members of our community to also choose to do so.

Random testing program

We will share more in the days ahead, but we will be launching a random mitigation-testing program. The objective is to reach the levels of testing that helped us mitigate COVID-19 transmission risks in the past. We will do so by appealing to our sense of community, rather than waiting until an outbreak certified by the Arizona State Department of Health opens the possibility of mandatory testing for the university.

Employing strategies that work

Coconino County is currently listed at High Community Transmission, and with our students returning in a few short weeks, we are revisiting existing protocols with the county, state, and hospital networks to collaborate on monitoring, contact tracing, isolation, and quarantine. As we have in the past, we remain committed to sharing our COVID-related health data with our partners as well as with the community at large.

Fortunately, we have a strong foundation to build upon. Many of the successful strategies we used last year will continue to serve us well as we enter this new phase of the pandemic. The fact that small percentages of our 6,100 residential students had to isolate or quarantine on campus—and that, to our knowledge, no residential students had to be hospitalized due to COVID-19-related illness—gives us reason to be optimistic about our ability to advance our university's mission while managing and mitigating the risks that lay ahead.

Highlights of the week

I have spent a productive week in Flagstaff, and this afternoon am headed to Phoenix to meet with corporate partners and celebrate the completion of the 8th class of our NAU Physician Assistant program. I am inspired by the commitment and resilience of this cohort and look forward to celebrating their accomplishments.

Earlier this week, I joined several other events, including the [New Academic Leaders' Orientation](#), where I shared our plans and the work ahead with academic administrators from across the university. I had the privilege of spending some time with high school students participating in [NAU's Andy Harvey Broadcast Journalism Workshop](#) yesterday. And I also joined our La Cuesta Society, which is composed of some of our university's most committed supporters, for engaging dialog around the potential of the university moving forward.

I also had a number of internal meetings with members of my team, working to move forward the important work in vice presidential areas and ensuring cohesion and collaboration throughout our university operations. Additionally, I participated in meetings of the Greater Phoenix Leadership Education Committee and the President's Council of the Big Sky Conference.

We have much to do in the coming weeks, but I am beginning to feel the energy and excitement building in anticipation of the start of the fall semester. It is coming from the students I meet during my walks, in meetings with the executive team and faculty leaders, and from the grounds crews and student affairs teams who are making sure we will be ready to welcome our Jacks back to each and every one of our physical and virtual settings, in Flagstaff, statewide, and online.

It is because of you—every Lumberjack—that I am confident that we will not only navigate the challenges of the virus, we will have one of the best semesters on record in our 122-year history.

Sincerely,



José Luis Cruz Rivera
President