



NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE  
PRESIDENT

July 15, 2021

[Watch highlights from President Cruz Rivera.](#)



Dear Lumberjack community,

Thank you for your attentiveness to my previous communications and to your engagement, feedback, and participation in the planning and preparation process for a vibrant, in-person Fall 2021 semester at NAU.

Last Thursday's [public health and fall planning-focused town hall](#) served as a forum to discuss the scientific findings and public policy that have guided the [President's Fall 2021 Planning Steering Committee](#) and the related Public Health Advisory Committee and the decisions we have made in response. My thanks to everyone who watched the town hall. The thoughtful questions that were submitted before, during, and after the event have helped inform our ongoing work.

Earlier this week, both committees met again to review our plans to date and critical next steps—framed around an understanding that our university's focus on student access and success is paramount and will be best served by all of us assuming responsibility and committing to our institutional culture of care. Today, thanks to their advice and guidance, I am pleased to share a more comprehensive and clarified vision of what Fall 2021 will look like at NAU.

#### **Fall 2021 public health protocols**

On June 25, the following public health protocols went into effect at all NAU facilities throughout the state:

- NAU **will not** require vaccinations, **will not** require the use of masks (except inside Campus Health Services and NAU buses), and **will not** require testing except with the concurrence of the Arizona Department of Health Services in the event an outbreak is detected.

- NAU **strongly recommends** that all members of our community be vaccinated. In addition, NAU **recommends** that masks be worn indoors in university facilities throughout the state by individuals who have not been fully vaccinated.

Today, the following additional protocols will go into effect immediately at all NAU facilities throughout the state:

- **Capacity:** NAU will operate at full capacity for all indoor and outdoor spaces. This includes classrooms, laboratories, meeting spaces, dining facilities, and performance and athletic venues.

- For individuals, departments, and groups holding events at NAU, please refer to the [Campus Events website](#) for the latest guidelines. Capacity limitations are now removed; however, events must still be submitted through the [online form](#) for space scheduling and coordination.

- **Physical distancing:** NAU will remove physical distancing requirements and encourage individuals to review [CDC guidelines around distancing](#) to inform their personal decisions.

- **In-person staffing:** NAU will operate at pre-pandemic levels of in-person staffing. As we prepare to welcome our students back to full in-person learning, NAU will implement a sequenced return to in-person work locations using the following timelines:

- *No later than the week of August 9:* [All supervisory staff](#) will return to in-person work locations. More details will be shared directly with our supervisors by Human Resources and division leadership in advance of this date.

- *No later than the week of August 16:* [All NAU staff](#) will return to in-person work locations in preparation for the start of the fall semester. More details will be shared directly with staff by Human Resources and unit supervisors in advance of this date.

- *Week of August 16:* [All NAU faculty](#) begin their academic year contract and will report to in-person work locations as required by their individual teaching assignments, research, scholarly, and creative activity commitments, and service expectations. More information will be shared directly with faculty by Human Resources and Academic Affairs in advance of this date.

We welcome your questions, comments, and suggestions as we work together to make Fall 2021 a successful semester. Your feedback to date has helped inform and focus our work, and your continued engagement ensures that we move forward together as a community committed to excellence.

## **The context and philosophy that inform NAU's approach**

### Context as we approach the fall

The evolution of our protocols is grounded in the current context of COVID-19 science. We also are mindful of impacts the pandemic has had on the students and communities we are devoted to serving. Since Spring 2020, our students, faculty, and staff have been united in the quest to secure the advancement of NAU's mission while facing the many challenges brought forth by a history-bending pandemic. Even as we continue to grapple with the pandemic, the context in which we operate has shifted dramatically.

We have vaccines, and they are widely available. Vaccinated individuals have been scientifically proven to be at very low risk of infection from COVID-19 and its variants—with masks or without, in large crowds or small gatherings, indoors or outdoors, among vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. And, our understanding of detection, mitigation, and management of the virus has advanced tremendously. Last week, the CDC [updated guidelines for K-12 schools](#), noting these factors—alongside the immeasurable benefits of in-person classroom instruction to facilitate student development and success—as reasons for updating guidance.

Together, we have cause for optimism and a clear path to the future.

### Our institutional culture of care

NAU will encourage all members of our Lumberjack community to be responsible and thoughtful, reaffirming our institutional culture of care. As we move forward, we will leverage this integral part of our Lumberjack community's identity—a shared sense of belonging and a deep and authentic desire to

support and care for each other—when designing the university's policies and practices for the post-COVID vaccine era. Below are some examples of what we will do this fall to support a universitywide culture of care.

- **If you feel sick, stay home:** If you are experiencing symptoms associated with COVID-19, please stay home to limit the risk of exposure to others. We encourage individuals to get tested and consult with their primary health care provider if they feel unwell. In addition, continue to maintain good hygiene at all times.

- **Vaccinations:** NAU is offering free COVID-19 vaccines at the Fieldhouse every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday through the month of August. For hours of operation, please visit the [vaccine website](#). We continue to encourage our entire Lumberjack community to get vaccinated and will offer incentives for fully vaccinated NAU students.

- **Masks and physical distancing:** NAU will nurture a mask- and physical distancing-friendly environment, encouraging everyone to exercise their individual choice regarding mask wearing and distancing from others.

- **Public health monitoring:** NAU will implement preventative public health monitoring strategies that will allow us to respond early and effectively to potential outbreaks. These include voluntary participation in the daily [NAU HealthCheck](#), which helps screen for COVID-like symptoms, and the completely anonymous exposure alert app [COVIDWatch](#).

- **Testing:** NAU will encourage and facilitate testing for individuals to monitor their health. Members of our NAU community can take advantage of testing resources to quickly test and receive results if they suspect they have been exposed to the virus or are experiencing symptoms. Testing is free and will open at the NAU Fieldhouse beginning July 19. For hours of operation, please visit the [testing website](#).

### The New NAU Workplace

As staff return to in-person work to help support the success of our students and the full operational effectiveness of our university this fall, we also are mindful of the evolving context of work practices and flexibility that have been highlighted throughout the pandemic. Our foremost concern today is to meet our stated goals and deliver on our educational mission for the academic year ahead. At the same time, I am committed to working together with our university community to assess best practices in flexible and remote work.

To this end, I will soon announce the establishment of a committee that will be charged with engaging the NAU community in a participatory process that will yield recommendations on how we can best position ourselves to be at the leading edge of flexible work arrangements among institutions of higher education. I appreciate the dedication of all our faculty and staff to a successful fall semester and look forward to sharing details about this signature institutional initiative soon.

### **Jacks are Back**

In order to provide a streamlined and centralized source for the latest information, our [Jacks are Back website](#) has undergone a full refresh to reflect all policies and communications to date for Fall 2021. For the latest developments on our ongoing planning efforts, please visit the [Fall 2021 Steering Committee webpage](#).

### **The road ahead**

In my [June 17 message](#), I acknowledged that the first test of our sense of purpose and steeled resolve would be to secure the conditions to allow Northern Arizona University to flourish in the fall, with the vitality and vibrancy that characterizes the way we pursue learning, create knowledge, unleash creativity, and serve our communities.

The challenge is real, but I am confident we are up to the task—a confidence that is fueled by the kind of optimistic outlook that being a part of the resilient, dedicated, and determined Lumberjack community can instill.

I look forward to the hard, important work ahead.

In partnership,

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

**José Luis Cruz  
Rivera**  
President