



# Office of the President

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY

September 18, 2020

Dear Lumberjacks,

NAU remains vigilant in its efforts to test, trace, and isolate, as health authorities believe these actions are our best approach to mitigating health risks from COVID-19.

Since September 2, NAU has tested more than 4,800 people through free saliva-based mitigation testing at the University Union Fieldhouse. In the last 48 hours alone, more than 900 tests have been administered. Results from our mitigation testing are provided within 24-72 hours. Prior to saliva testing, NAU administered more than 3,000 nasal tests during a 21-day testing surge. Since mid-August, approximately 8,000 total tests have been provided through NAU to our campus and the greater Flagstaff community.

NAU is committed to significant ongoing testing this semester to further our efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Our weighted randomized required testing ramped up to full implementation this week, with 2,000 members of our Lumberjack community testing, and additional testing provided free of charge to our community.

We are currently managing 273 positive cases (including both on- and off-campus students), and we are using less than 50 percent of designated on-campus isolation space to manage care for these individuals. While we have planned for increases in the number of positive cases, we also believe that mitigation testing, combined with appropriate isolation and quarantine practices and ongoing education and student support, will support the health of our campus and community and help us limit community transmission. In addition, we are finalizing our contact tracing partnership with Coconino County, which will expand identification and tracking efforts.

Testing will remain key to our ability to slow the spread of COVID-19 and we need everyone's participation. We just released a [step-by-step video guide](#) that explains how our free saliva-based testing works.

Education is also vital to reducing the spread of the virus, and, with this in mind, our Campus Health Services has developed a [one-page summary](#) of what to do if you have tested positive for COVID-19. I urge everyone to review this document and keep it handy to refer to if necessary.

Another important tool in our mitigation efforts are the gains our researchers are making in their study of COVID-19. This week, the Arizona COVID-19 Genomics Union (ACGU), led by NAU Regents' Professor Dr. Paul Keim, [published findings of a study](#) tracking strains of COVID-19 in the state of Arizona. The study reinforces the importance of testing, early mitigation, and isolation—which have been the focus of NAU's efforts since the spring—and will help public health officials more effectively manage future outbreaks.

Our efforts to help promote the health and safety of our communities in order to enable our students to have a successful fall semester are grounded in [NAU's Mission, Vision, and Values](#). These are at the core of everything we do, and student success is at the forefront of all the planning and actions we are taking. In this extraordinary time, it is particularly gratifying to share that this work has been recognized this week by U.S. News and World Report, which released their annual rankings of Best Colleges. For the first time, NAU was ranked among the top public schools in the nation, coming in at No. 144. Additional recognitions include:

- NAU was listed among schools with the least student debt load at graduation—the only university in Arizona to achieve this distinction.
- NAU was ranked No. 46 in undergraduate engineering programs at schools without a doctoral program in engineering. (NAU has since added a doctoral program.)

The key metrics used in the rankings include class sizes, student to faculty ratio, achievement of Pell Grant recipients and social mobility index, institutional resources, retention and graduation rates, and peer assessment of an institution's academic reputation. Breaking into the rankings highlights NAU's remarkable achievements in these areas and our commitment to student access and success.

Last year, NAU's first-time, full-time freshman retention rate was 77.5 percent—an all-time high. Graduation rates rose 4 percent this year over last—another best-ever. These successes are a result of campus-wide efforts and the many student success strategies we have implemented. Our reputation is enhanced by the exceptional research and scholarship conducted by our faculty that has seen NAU's research expenditures more than double—reaching all-time highs each year—over the last six years.

I am so proud of all of our dedicated faculty and staff who, together, have supported student success and worked to bolster our institution's national profile and reputation.

Meanwhile, the academic year is in full swing, and I am encouraged by the positive comments from faculty and students about how the year is going thus far. My congratulations to all who have done so much to continue to support the excellence, achievement, and health of the Lumberjack family. You have my sincere thanks.

Sincerely,

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

**Rita Hartung Cheng**  
President