



June 17, 2021

Dear Lumberjack community,

In recent days we have talked about the bold and boundless future that awaits us and invoked the challenges we must meet and the opportunities we shall seize.

### **Fall 2021—Jacks are back!**

The first test of our sense of purpose and steeled resolve will be to secure the conditions that will 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.

To this end, we will build on the foundation established through the hard work and dedication of our faculty, staff, and students during this past academic year when, against all odds, our university continued to advance its mission by exhibiting the grit, resilience, and ingenuity that, from its beginnings, have become hallmarks of its dedication to inclusive excellence.

### **The (evolving) strategic context**

Today, the strategic context within which we must plan for a healthy and vibrant living and learning community for Fall 2021 is vastly different from what we have faced in the past three academic terms since COVID-19 forever entered our lexicon.

The wide availability of vaccines scientifically proven to largely protect the vaccinated from COVID-19 associated illnesses and reduce substantially the likelihood of asymptomatic infection or transmission to others now exists. Indeed, we have all seen how communities have opened, the stress on our medical infrastructure has been relieved, and our personal relationships have been rekindled as the proportion of people vaccinated increases.

Guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has fueled the confidence that has allowed for many of the local policies and practices that are quickly bringing us from the virtual world that many of us have been inhabiting to the physical world for which we have yearned.

## The path forward

While we acknowledge that the road ahead will require us to continue to be nimble in our ability to adapt to changes in our strategic context, conditions today suggest a clear path to a healthy and vibrant living and learning community for our faculty, students, and staff this fall.

We at NAU will continue to offer free COVID-19 vaccinations in partnership with the state through at least June 26, and we encourage our entire Lumberjack community to consider receiving the vaccine.

We will continue to monitor CDC guidance and factor it into all of our COVID-19-influenced decisions regarding academic and administrative policies and practices.

We will fully comply with **Executive Order 2021-15**.

And we will do all of the above with the deep conviction that the best way to advance our university's mission and be true to our identity as a remarkable residential university known for its high-engagement, experiential approach to teaching, learning, and creating is to continue our planning for a primarily in-person Fall 2021 semester while adhering to all of the requirements set forth above.

## Next steps

I am working with senior university leaders to establish a group of health care and scientific professionals who will assist the NAU community as we work together to further develop and ultimately implement plans for Fall 2021. The well-being of the Lumberjack and our partner communities will be at the forefront of considerations in our planning.

We will have more information on this front—including a series of town halls on the current science around COVID-19, available vaccines, and the evolving public policy landscape—in the next several days.

In the meantime, immediate updates to university protocols—in light of recent CDC guidance and state policy changes—will be communicated to the campus community via email, and the **Jacks are Back website** will be updated to continue our commitment for transparent leadership.

I very much look forward to the hard but important work ahead.

Sincerely,

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

**José Luis Cruz Rivera**  
President