January 14, 2022

Dear Lumberjacks,

Today marks my seven-month anniversary as president of Northern Arizona University, and I am so proud to be part of the Lumberjack community.

Acknowledging the continued specter of COVID-19

As someone who lived and worked the first nine months of the pandemic in lockdown at its epicenter in New York City, I am very sensitive to the fears and trauma we have all lived through.

Last fall, through a thoughtful, science-driven approach, we successfully navigated the challenge of the Delta variant together, culminating in our first in-person commencement since 2019 and a jubilant celebration of our graduates’ achievements. The optimism of the fall has been tempered by the emergence of the Omicron variant, however, and the arc of experience—from lockdown to the rollout of vaccines to the new challenges of today—weighs heavily on the decision-making framework described in my message to our NAU community on Monday, January 10.

As we enter the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend, we need to continue to lead with empathy and flexibility as we face Omicron—just as I know our faculty have been approaching accommodation requests from students, academic leaders those from faculty members, and supervisors those from employees. Together, we seek to mitigate health risk and expand the excellent educational experience that characterizes NAU’s promise to all Lumberjacks.

With this context in mind, below is our COVID-19 Community Briefing for January 14.

Summary of Public Health Advisory and AY21-22 Steering Committee recommendations

- NAU’s Public Health Advisory Committee met on Wednesday, January 12. The committee reviewed NAU’s latest COVID-19 data, as well as options for enhanced mitigation measures to help slow the spread. Further, updates were provided from Coconino County on test availability, community spread, and educational resources, from Northern Arizona Healthcare on impacts of Omicron on hospital capacity and availability of critical health care services, and from our scientific advisors on the continued developments and prevalence of the virus.
NAU’s AY21-22 Steering Committee met on Thursday, January 13. The committee reviewed the information from the Public Health Advisory Committee and considered implementation protocols to be enacted by NAU’s leadership team.

After careful consideration of the recommendations of the Public Health Advisory and AY21-22 Steering Committees, as we ready for the second week of our spring semester, NAU will:

- Continue to deliver instruction and support services in their originally designated modalities (in-person, hybrid, remote) to sustain student academic momentum.
- Continue to provide accommodations for individuals who need to quarantine or isolate due to testing positive or being exposed to COVID-19 or experiencing other COVID-19 related circumstances.
- Enhance mitigation efforts outside of classroom settings to help slow the spread of the Omicron variant.

Operating status unchanged with new temporary mitigation measures enacted

NAU’s operating status for the week of January 17 will remain unchanged—with primarily in-person instruction and support services on the Flagstaff Mountain Campus and at statewide sites with in-person modalities, and full residential capacity on the Flagstaff Mountain Campus.

However, the following temporary mitigation measures will extend through January 31, pending weekly review.

- **Non-academic meetings and events:** The university will postpone or shift to hybrid or remote attendance whenever possible. For in-person participation, masks will be required and only grab-and-go meals allowed.

- **Campus Recreation:** Additional mitigation measures will be implemented, including adding a second round of comprehensive cleaning each day, requiring masks, publishing fitness classes on YouTube for remote access, spacing in classes but offering similar capacity with mirrored classes, and delaying the start of intramurals/sport clubs/group events to February.

**Ongoing mitigation measures**

- **Masking guidance:** Masks are required on NAU campuses in all classrooms and academic buildings and other locations where physical distancing is not possible, and strongly encouraged for outdoor events and gatherings. In addition, masks are required at university events. **Please be vigilant and aware of the updated masking guidance and support our community in working to slow the spread.** “Masks required” signage has been placed at the entrances to all applicable buildings. In addition, you can download locally printable **Masks required** signage templates.

- **Masking resources:** The **CDC provides resources** about types of masks and their benefits, as well as how to wear and care for your mask. We encourage you to educate yourself about mask types and fitting
instructions, and choose one to help best protect yourself and our community at large.

- **Masking availability:**
  - NAU cloth masks with filters have been delivered to most students, faculty, and staff throughout the state.
  - Disposable masks are available from Campus Supply (Facility Services, Building #77) on request and are available in most departments and in large classrooms.
  - NAU has a limited supply of N95 and KN95 respirator masks available through Campus Supply that are available on request.
  - Questions related to masks or other supplies can be directed to Campus Supply by calling 928-523-6414 or emailing NAU-CampusSupply@nau.edu.

- **Testing resources:** NAU strongly encourages individuals randomly selected for mitigation testing or who have been exposed to COVID-19 to be tested at any of the sites identified through the following links. Note that in Flagstaff and throughout the state there is heightened demand for testing. **If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and cannot get tested immediately, please stay home and work with your instructor or supervisor on accommodations.** Below are resources for testing at NAU and throughout the state:
  - NAU Fieldhouse and Campus Health Services
  - Coconino County
  - Arizona Department of Health Services
  - Covidtests.gov: Starting next week, the federal government will ship at-home COVID tests to Americans at no cost. These can be ordered at covidtests.gov. I encourage you to take advantage of this resource.

- **Vaccination resources:** NAU strongly encourages all individuals in our community to get vaccinated and receive a booster shot if they are eligible. **Vaccines are a proven and effective means of reducing the risk of infection and lowering the risk of adverse health effects.** More information about vaccines and their benefits can be found on the CDC website. Visit the following links for information on where you can be vaccinated:
  - NAU Fieldhouse and Campus Health Services
  - Coconino County
  - Arizona Department of Health Services

**COVID-19 data**

The following data informed the approach described above.

- **COVID-19 cases:** The number of Arizonans testing positive for COVID-19 have reached an all-time high, having been high since late December. **Coconino County’s most recent weekly report** shows high transmission.

- **Isolation and quarantine:** As of Friday, January 14, NAU is managing 590 COVID-19 cases among students on- and off-campus on the Flagstaff Mountain Campus, representing 3.1% of the total Flagstaff Mountain
Campus student enrollment. This number will serve as the baseline for the Spring 2022 semester.

- **Testing results at the Flagstaff Mountain Campus**: For the week ending January 7, testing at the Fieldhouse, Campus Health Services, and self-reported COVID positives yielded the following results:
  - 4,959 tests
    - 2,002 tests by NAU students, faculty, and staff
    - 2,957 tests by non-NAU community members
  - 1,503 positives (30.3%)
    - 539 positives (26.9% positivity rate among NAU students, faculty, and staff)
    - 964 positives (32.6% positivity rate among non-NAU community members)

- **Ongoing mitigation testing**: Today, 2,500 members of the NAU community were called for mitigation testing to be completed next week.

**The week ahead**

We plan to share a similar briefing next Friday, following the same process of review and advisement by our Public Health and AY21-22 Steering Committees. If emergent conditions require a more rapid update, we will inform our NAU community accordingly.

Thank you to all in our community for doing your part to slow the spread and working to secure the conditions for a successful and enriching spring semester.

Sincerely,

José Luis Cruz Rivera
President