August 27, 2021

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Dear Lumberjacks,

The smiles of students greeting each other along the pedway, engagement back in classrooms, a welcome walk into the historic neighborhoods adjacent to our campus, pulled pork waffle cones and cookies, and the shock of cold water thanks to the students and staff with excellent aim at the dunk tank made this a most memorable week. Thank you all for making our comeback to in-person engagement an exceptional one and for setting the tone for what I am confident will be a great year ahead.

So, what does NAU look like this year? If you combine the graduate and undergraduate students at the Flagstaff Mountain campus, our 20 locations throughout the state, and all the programs we offer online, there are more than 28,000 Lumberjacks starting classes this fall. I can also tell you that many of our students are Arizona residents, many are the first in their family to attend college, and our students are diverse in culture, background, and experience. NAU is proud to provide opportunity, access, and success for each and every one of these students. So mask up, get vaxed, and let’s have a great semester!

Highlights of the week

I was excited to join our NAU family in re-engaging in our traditions and enjoying the spirit of community that has often been a challenge throughout the pandemic. Here are some highlights from my Twitter feed this week, including my participation in various events, including the Freshman and Sophomore NAU Letters photos, the Welcome Back BBQ, and the Community Welcome Walk.

It was an honor to meet with President Emerita Clara Lovett early in the week and catch up with her again at the Welcome Back BBQ. I also was privileged to meet with community college presidents and chancellors from across the state—we shared ideas for how we can work together to expand access to higher education for more students. And yesterday, I traveled to Phoenix to join an Arizona Board of Regents meeting convened to discuss the important work of our state’s public universities.

Finally, other events this week included executive meetings regarding a provisional branding campaign for our university, discussions on our future capital infrastructure plans, and an interview on the future of higher education with the EdUp Experience.
COVID-19 information

Our first round of voluntary mitigation testing started this week. This helps us monitor the health of our community and instances of COVID-19 and helps reduce community spread. Today, we sent out another call for testing; if you are selected, I encourage you to respond and get a COVID-19 test at the NAU Fieldhouse.

We are committed to sharing regular updates on COVID-19 information. Check nau.edu/coronavirus for weekly updates on NAU's testing results, as well as other important dashboard data.

We will continue to inform and educate our community—with a focus on encouraging vaccination and other healthy behaviors—while leveraging the mitigation measures at our disposal and promoting the Lumberjack community of care to enjoy a successful academic year.

Looking ahead

While this week has been tremendously busy, it also has been an opportunity to reflect on where we have come and the future direction of our university. We are already looking ahead at how we can improve and advance our institutional mission. I look forward to sharing more with you next week, as we trace the arc from the work learned this spring and summer over the presidential transition and the early weeks of our 17th presidency, to the bold and boundless future before us.

There is a great deal of work ahead; however, let us take this time to celebrate the renewal of a new academic year and the vibrancy, excitement, and potential it brings for all of us.

My best,

José Luis Cruz Rivera
President