



Ronald Mason, Jr., J.D.
President

November 10, 2021

Dear Firebirds:

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to the University. It is a privilege to lead this great institution, and I am proud of the many achievements of our students, alumni, faculty and staff.

Given the numerous matters competing for our attention, I cautiously report that our return to campus this semester has held steady. Nine members of the University community tested positive for COVID-19 since the start of the semester, including several student cases from last week, which we are carefully monitoring. While any case of infection in our community is precarious, we remain confident in our safety measures. The University-wide cumulative positive cases this semester remain comparatively low to local institutions and the District. We have also settled into a successful balance of in-person and virtual functions, both in the workplace and classroom. The continuing presence of the virus requires us to remain vigilant in our safety practices as we prepare to return – as much as possible – to pre-pandemic operations. We will continue to build on what we have learned to move forward in the spring semester.

Through it all, we maintain our commitment to our students and their success. We are extending ongoing financial relief and support services to our students through a combination of CARES funding and institutional dollars. We have managed vital personnel changes and hired talented new staff. We have maintained a balanced budget and were awarded an increase to our base budget allocation in our district appropriation for FY22, signaling increased confidence in the University and what we are achieving through your hard work.

These milestones are significant and commendable as we emerge from the unprecedented circumstances of the past two years. It is positive news and cause for collective appreciation. Unfortunately, however, we have suffered significant declines in enrollment, particularly in the Community College, where students are more vulnerable to social and economic shifts. While we have

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ensured that the cost of attending UDC is not an obstacle, the pandemic has magnified underlying circumstances that relegate higher education to a lower priority among those families facing formidable challenges. Overall, declining college enrollment is a national issue to which we have devoted significant time, action and resources. We are called to do all we can to ensure our students do not abandon their higher education goals, which may be permanently eclipsed by the circumstances of trying times.

As a University, we remain forward-facing. I want to take this opportunity to share what you can expect in the upcoming weeks:

- We will increase in-person courses and operations for spring 2022. This will require us to continue to adhere to our institutional, District and national COVID-19 protocols and mandates.
- We will increase opportunities for COVID-19 testing and are working with an external contractor to support these efforts. Student-athletes and University housing residents will have mandatory weekly testing. Those with approved vaccination exemptions will continue weekly testing throughout the semester.
- We will host an in-person holiday gathering for employees on December 17 in the Student Center. Additional details are forthcoming.
- The Office of the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) recently shared an [update](#) on spring registration. **All students are required to submit proof of their COVID-19 vaccination to register for spring 2022 courses.** Students have until December 20, 2021, to [upload](#) their vaccination documentation to Pyramed.
- Students will continue to receive [RISE tuition support and scholarships](#) throughout the spring.
- The Community College will no longer be housed at 801 N. Capitol Street NE beginning in January 2022. Community College classes will primarily be held at the Bertie Backus Campus, and other classes will be held at the Van Ness Campus or online.
- Commencement is expected to be in person on May 14, 2022. Seating will be limited, and a virtual simulcast will be available.

We will continue to keep you informed and updated. Please join us for the next COVID-19 Town Hall on [Thursday, November 17](#), where the COVID Task Force will preview requirements for the spring semester and share adjustments to our policies based on the recent infections.

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You are also invited to the President's Town Hall on Friday, December 3, to be held on the Bertie Backus Campus and virtually. During the President's Town Hall, updates will be shared on the FY23 budget, FY22 Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) increases and administrative reorganization. Cabinet members and I will also answer questions and welcome your feedback.

Thank you for persevering on behalf of our students and especially for the support you extend to each other during these extraordinarily uncharted times. I look forward to seeing you during the upcoming town halls.

Sincerely,

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

Ronald Mason, Jr.