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NMSU, city of Las Cruces are one community facing COVID-19 together

By Ruth A. Johnston
NMSU Vice Chancellor and Chief COVID-19 Officer

After a summer spent planning and preparing, New Mexico State University welcomed more than 1,900 resident students, thousands more commuter and online students, our outstanding faculty, and a limited support workforce back to the university last week for the start of the Fall 2020 semester. Every fall, our university brings thousands of new residents to the Las Cruces community, where they contribute to our local economy and become involved with organizations and programs. Many of our students find their long-term home here in our city, joining our workforce and raising their families here.

Our campus community and our city have always been closely connected, and our efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 are intertwined. The city of Las Cruces, the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce and NMSU share the same goal: to keep ourselves, each other and our shared community as healthy and safe as possible during this crisis.

The leaders of our university and our city are in frequent communication on these efforts, sharing information and ideas that benefit both organizations. We continue to explore opportunities to share innovations our researchers are developing in the areas of contact tracing, wastewater testing and increasing the COVID-19 test processing capacity for our region.

Our city created the Las Cruces Safe Promise, which asks residents to commit to showing we care about our community by remembering the actions we must take to reduce the spread, such as behaving as though we are carrying the virus, wearing a mask in public, maintaining appropriate distance from one another, and washing our hands frequently. Importantly, it also asks that we practice compassion, empathy and respect for one another, and continue to patronize local business that are also following these guidelines.

Similarly, NMSU created our Crimson Safety Commitment, an education and training program that everyone on campus – not just students – is required to take, so we are all aware of how we can help protect our community from COVID-19. We've established new rules on campus that everyone is expected to follow, and these mirror the actions outlined in the Las Cruces Safe Promise.

As NMSU's Chief COVID-19 Officer, I signed the Las Cruces Safe Promise, and I'm asking our campus community to do the same. While we're confident the majority of our students will continue to behave responsibly both on and off campus, we commit to work with you, our business and community partners, to ensure our students are complying with public health orders, meeting the expectations that we've set for them and ourselves, and respecting the guidelines you have in place for your businesses.

We're all members of the greater community, and it takes the participation and commitment of everyone to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to Las Cruces and our local economy. I encourage you to take a look at our NMSU Ready return-to-campus plan, available at ready.nmsu.edu, for more information about the steps we're taking to protect our students, employees and community. Please reach out to our NMSU COVID-19 Rapid Response Team at covid19@nmsu.edu if you have any questions, concerns or ideas.

From all of us at NMSU, thank you for your partnership in making sure we are #NMSUReady and #LasCrucesStrong.

Ruth A. Johnston, Ph.D., is vice chancellor of the New Mexico State University system and the university's chief COVID-19 officer.