



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

October 12, 2017

Colleagues: Please see below for updates on projects and developments of interest to our campus community.

Enrollment: Final census headcount for this fall semester was 7,457, the second highest tally in our institutional history and just 35 students below last year's record enrollment, a difference of less than one-half of one percent (-0.47%). The decrease in credit hour production was even smaller. This is a good showing in light of the large number of students who graduated in 2016-17. As recently as June, we thought enrollment could be down 1-2% from last year, but we continued to close the gap in July and August. Our retention rate increased from 75.1% last year to 75.8% this year (peer average is 71.2%), and our six-year graduation rate rose from 43.5% to 44.5% (peer average is 43.9%). We should be encouraged by these trends, as they reflect positively on student satisfaction with UNA. For next year, we have targeted a 3% enrollment increase that would place our headcount over 7,600 for fall 2018. That's a tall order in light of budgetary uncertainties and the highly competitive environment of higher education. However, we are the University of North Alabama, and we have the right people, programs, and processes in place to continue to grow.

SEDA: Some of you may have seen recent news stories regarding the possibility that UNA could receive \$5 million in funding from the Shoals Economic Development Authority (SEDA). This opportunity arose late in the last legislative session. With help from members of our legislative delegation and our governmental relations representatives, UNA administrators were able to secure passage of a bill in April that opened the door for SEDA to consider funding for educational facilities and equipment that support programs tied to workforce enhancement and economic development. To date, our quest for that funding has cleared two of three hurdles in the approval process. The last step is approval by the Shoals Industrial Development Committee (SIDC) that will meet later this month. While this funding is non-recurring, the delivery of \$5 million in support of specific projects is very significant for a campus of our size. This underscores a theme I discussed in my opening address in August: we must think outside the box when it comes to "public funding" and not be slow to seek support from local sources, when available.

Mane Room: The UNA Board of Trustees authorized the administration to move ahead with plans to purchase the property at 122 W. Tombigbee Street that is currently the (leased) home of the Department of Entertainment Industry and the Mane Room. The purchase price as authorized is \$2,400,000, an outlay that also includes acquisition of the state-of-the-art recording studio and equipment that exist within that facility. To be clear about the rationale for this purchase, the staff in our Division of Business and Financial Affairs analyzed the numbers and concluded that purchase of this property would end up saving the University money – and sooner rather than later. As with the purchase last year of the Keystone Business Centre, we will continue to be selective and strategic in decisions to acquire needed properties.

Program Analysis: The work of the two task forces involved in administrative and academic program analysis is complete, and I commend the individuals who served so ably on those panels. The administration is analyzing the data provided by the task forces and considering how it can inform our thinking about resource allocation and strategic priorities. As with the initial construction of the task forces, we will continue to place great emphasis on making sure that our decisions in this area are as deliberative, transparent, and collaborative as possible. Understaffing is a common problem across our campus. As we grow and new dollars become available, this exercise can help us identify which offices and programs should receive first consideration for additional personnel lines and resources. Similarly, we will share information as we are able to identify cost-saving measures that make us more efficient. Our focus throughout this process will be on making good decisions that enhance UNA rather than on downsizing for the sake of downsizing.

Quick Hits:

- The redesign work on Harrison Hall, future home of the Anderson College of Nursing, is coming along well. We will submit a preliminary redesign to the Alabama Building Commission within the next two weeks and, pending state approval, will submit a final design in February 2018. The project then will be rebid in March 2018 in anticipation of an April 2018 construction start. At the former Keystone building – now home to the McKinney Department of Human Sciences, Hospitality, and Design – work on Phase II renovations are set to be complete by the end of October in coordination with the 100-year anniversary celebration of that building on November 2.
- For some years now, the UNA College of Business has enjoyed excellent results in working with the Collegis Education firm to enhance its online offerings. Based on that experience, we are expanding the scope of our relationship with Collegis to include programs in all of the other academic colleges.
- The Board of Trustees voted to approve a new B.S. in Information Technology and an online M.S. in Mathematics. Both of these programs now go to the Alabama Commission on Higher Education for final approval. Speaking of new programs, stay tuned for exciting news about the possibility that UNA could soon add chemical engineering technology to our list of academic offerings.
- Our athletic teams continue to represent us very well as we move deeper into our final year of competition as a Division II program. Scheduling for athletics occurs years in advance, and it is exciting to watch schedules for 2018 and beyond begin to populate with historic rivals such as Jacksonville State and Alabama A&M. Because of our transition to Division I, future schedules include contests not only against opponents from the ASUN and Big South Conferences, but also from the American Athletic Conference, Southern Conference, Atlantic Coast Conference, Sunbelt Conference, and Southeastern Conference.
- Provost Ross Alexander and I are approaching the midway mark of our visits with individual academic departments. We hope to complete that tour this fall. In the spring, I will work with my EC colleagues to arrange a time for us to visit with administrative units on campus for the same purpose – to share information, to get to know individual faculty and staff better, and to listen to questions and concerns.

In closing, Dena and I extend our thanks to all of those who had a hand in making Homecoming 2017 a great success. It is affirming to meet so many loyal alumni and to witness the large community turnout for the parade. The excitement continues to build around the many good things going on at the University of North Alabama. Roar Lions!