



President's Communique

Dr. Ken Kitts

February 9, 2024

Colleagues: I hope the Spring 2024 semester is progressing well for you. Please see below for important updates on our campus community.

Legislative Session: The Alabama Legislature returned to Montgomery on Tuesday of this week to begin its annual session. Governor Ivey released her executive budget on Wednesday, which includes a recommended 8.87% increase in annual funding for the University of North Alabama. This is a promising start for us in the FY 25 budgetary cycle. The next stop for decisions on the Education Trust Fund is the state House of Representatives. After that the bill will go to the Senate, then Conference Committee (if needed), then back to both chambers before finally ending up back with the Governor for final approval. It will be May before we know the final details on our state appropriation for the next fiscal year. Between now and then, we will continue to advocate for UNA with vigor. To date, my team and I have met with the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the State Finance Director, and the chairs of both House and Senate ETF committees to make our case for UNA's appropriation. We are also in close contact with members of our local delegation and will soon travel back to Montgomery to meet with lawmakers from across the northern tier of the state.

Federal Government: Congress has not yet approved the federal budget for the current fiscal year. U.S. government operations have been funded since last July 1 (the start of the federal fiscal year) via a series of continuing resolutions which have the effect of "kicking the can down the road" on budgetary battles that are playing out in the context of a presidential election year. For UNA, there are implications to this impasse as we have received preliminary approval in the FY 24 budget to receive \$13 million in federal funds toward development of a new STEM/engineering building. Congressman Robert Aderholt has been instrumental in getting that provision added to the budget and shepherding it through the process, and the proposed \$13 million comes on top of \$3 million we received last year for the same purpose. However, if the FY 24 budget is not approved soon, then the \$13 million earmark will disappear, and we will have to renew the request for FY 25. The takeaway here is that although we are a state-chartered institution, what happens in Washington, DC, also has a significant impact on our campus.

Lion Care: We announced with sadness the death of Anne Howard on January 22. Anne's passing ended an era in lion care at the University of North Alabama. Along with her husband, Dan (who died in 2022), Anne had cared for Leo III and Una from the time they arrived on our campus over two decades ago. Even as we give thanks for the Howards and all they meant to UNA, I want to offer broad assurance that Leo III continues to receive outstanding care. Anne had trained and prepared volunteers who, with the recent decline in her health, had already begun taking over more and more of the day-to-day duties at the habitat. Those volunteers work in close concert with VP Kevin Haslam and University personnel from Advancement and Facilities to ensure that the needs of Leo III are well met. The care regimen is robust, as evidenced by the fact that we received a perfect score from USDA -- our 21st in a row -- following the Department's annual inspection of the lion habitat last month.

Provost Search: Our search for the position of Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs went public last month. The search committee is led by Minnette Ellis from the Executive Council and includes excellent representation from across campus with a majority of the members coming from within the Division of Academic Affairs. The committee will commence its initial review of applications soon with the goal of making decisions about which candidates will be selected for an initial round of interviews that will be conducted remotely. The results of that process will determine who is invited to campus for in-person interviews. Ms. Ellis is working on a website now to share information about the search, and we encourage you to stay tuned for that information so that you can take advantage of opportunities to meet our finalists for this important position.

Construction Updates: Work on the new Computing and Mathematics Building continues on schedule. That new academic facility should be ready for occupancy at the end of this semester, but we will likely delay the formal opening until August so that as many faculty and staff as possible can attend the ceremony. Renovation of the Memorial Amphitheater and adjacent walkways is part of that same project and will occur during the summer months. Demolition of LaGrange Hall is almost complete and should be wrapped up in the next few weeks. If you haven't done so, I encourage you to take in the view of campus looking north from Harrison Plaza. The removal of LaGrange has opened up that vista and created a better aesthetic for our beautiful campus. The new residence hall planned for that site will be situated so that we are able to create better pedestrian flow between the residential/athletic areas on the northwestern corner of our footprint and the academic buildings that constitute the core of campus.

Enrollment: As we enter the middle stretch of the recruiting cycle for Fall 2024, I am pleased to report that we are up in both applications and acceptances for new students. This strong degree of student interest in UNA, coupled with our record retention rate this year, speaks volumes about the great work going on in our enrollment management offices as well as across campus. It also bodes well for continuing enrollment success. I continue to believe we can stay above the 10,000-student threshold for Fall 2024 and beyond, even as we revise our scholarship program to limit the growth of expenses in that area. For the current term, we expect to have good news to share when census date for Spring 2024 arrives next month.

New Campaign: We are now five months into the public phase of the new "Shine On, Gold" comprehensive campaign and have already secured \$65 million in gifts and pledges toward the overall goal of \$100 million. Next month we will kick off a special 1830 Giving Initiative as part of this larger campaign. Please stay tuned for details on that program. Dena and I invite you to join us in taking advantage of this opportunity to support our students by giving to the activity or area that best reflects your interests and priorities.

Important Dates:

- February 16-18 Winter Break
- February 29 First Eight-Week Classes End
- March 1 Midterm
- March 7 Second Eight-Week Classes Begin
- **March 14 Light the Fountain**
- March 25-31 Spring Break
- April 1 Registration Opens for Fall 2024

Dena and I thank you for all you do for the University of North Alabama!