



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

September 2, 2022

Colleagues: I hope this note finds you well and that the new academic year is off to a good start. Please see below for important campus updates and information.

Fall Enrollment: We continue to track fall enrollment daily. As of today, our overall headcount stands at 9,843, which represents a 15.3% increase in headcount and an 8.7% increase in credit hour production over last year. With additional registrations still to come, it is increasingly likely we will exceed the 10,000 mark before census date arrives at the end of October. This is shaping up to be a fantastic finish to a record enrollment cycle. Even as we celebrate these numbers, it is important to remember that *we are achieving these milestones in ways that are strategic and that make sense for UNA*. Our smart growth strategy means that the increase in our campus-based population of students remains at a manageable level. We will continue to protect UNA's identity and ensure that growth in this sector does not overburden our infrastructure. Similarly, our qualitative growth is every bit as impressive as the final tally of students. The markers of excellence are all around us, from growth in the Cole Honors College to record scholarship acceptances, and from student success in national competitions to an expanding array of program accreditations. UNA's academic reputation is growing as quickly as our headcount, and rightfully so!

Scholarships: The fall enrollment increase brings with it a record number of students living on campus and in campus-affiliated housing. While we all enjoy the energy that comes from having so many students in the area, it is also true that the per-student cost to recruit and maintain these students is much higher than is the case for online students. We have increased our scholarship budget significantly in recent years in order to compete with other universities in Alabama for traditional, residential students. The strategy has worked, but it also puts a strain on our budget that is unique to UNA because of the funding gap that separates us from our peers. Our ability to continue to recruit on-campus students at current levels hinges on our ability to secure additional assistance from state and local governments. This is an important decision for both our University and the region we serve. The on-campus students we bring to this area represent an important part of our \$340 million annual economic impact on the Shoals.

Governmental Relations: Last year's redistricting process has set in motion a move for UNA from Alabama's 5th Congressional District to the 4th Congressional District. We believe this will increase our prospects for securing more federal support for our campus. Although the change does not take effect officially until January, Rep. Robert Aderholt (AL-4) has already proven instrumental in helping to prioritize our funding needs in the area of STEM education. Elsewhere, the state elections of 2022 are at the midway point with primaries and runoffs behind us. The results of the general election on November 8 will finalize the slate of state lawmakers for the next four years. The 2023 legislative session will begin in March, later than usual due to the need for the two chambers to organize themselves after the election cycle, select leaders, and orient new members. At the municipal level, a change in state law last year has added one year to the terms of most local office holders in our area. The local terms that began in 2020 will now end in 2025 instead of 2024.

SACS: The site visit for our decennial reaffirmation review by SACSCOC is set for March 13-16, 2023. We have now submitted the self-study required as part of the compliance certification for that visit, and special thanks go to Dr. Joy Borah and Dr. Lorie Johnson for overseeing that effort (with assistance from many others!). UNA's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), "Preparing the Pride: Experiential and Work-Based Learning," will be launched this fall and implemented over the next five years. The topic is in line with the Governor's Work-Based Learning Initiative and revolves around four domains: work-based learning, mentored research, service learning, and immersive learning. Dr. Chris Klein serves as the QEP Director.

Organizational Moves: Effective with the beginning of this fall semester, the Mitchell-West Center for Social Inclusion, which now includes the Center for Women's Studies, has rejoined the Division of Academic Affairs. The University Police Department has been assigned to the Division of Business and Financial Affairs. Disability Support Services and the Military and Veterans Service Center have both been moved to the Division of Student Affairs. In the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Vice President Ron Patterson has agreed to direct the Presidential Mentor's Academy for the 2022-23 academic year. Dr. Patterson will also continue to coordinate diversity efforts across campus and will work with talented faculty and staff who share his passion and work within their respective colleges and offices to promote DEI as an important part of UNA's identity.

State Budget: The source of our annual appropriation from the State of Alabama is the Educational Trust Fund (ETF) budget. State officials announced over the summer that tax revenue coming into this budget is 22% greater than last year. Accordingly, the state is well-positioned to meet its current obligations and still have a surplus to work with for future budgets. There is some movement in Montgomery to consider a tax rebate that would return some of that surplus to individual taxpayers. Even with that possibility in play, it is likely that the ETF deliberations this year will take place with additional funding available for lawmakers to allocate. This should bode well for Project 208. It opens the door for officials to bring UNA closer to equity using surplus dollars – i.e., without taking money away from other institutions. We are already engaged with state officials on this topic and will remain so throughout the year.

Quick Hits:

- **COVID:** The recent surge in COVID cases is abating, with the positivity rate and number of hospitalizations both in decline and far below the levels we saw last spring during the Omicron phase of the pandemic. Dr. K.C. White, our new Vice President for Student Affairs, has already shared one campus update on this topic and will continue to do so periodically throughout the year.
- **Lion Athletics:** On August 3, the NCAA's Board of Governors voted to grant final approval for our transition to the Division I ranks. Effective with the new season that is just getting underway, all fourteen of our sports teams are now fully eligible to compete for championships and engage in post-season play. Thanks to all who played a role in keeping us on track for this milestone achievement.
- **Computing and Mathematics Building:** Work on the new facility atop Founders Hill began with the groundbreaking ceremony held at the end of spring semester. The building will feature 44,000 square feet of space and should be ready for occupancy by the spring or summer of 2024. The scope of this project includes renovation of the Memorial Amphitheater as well.

Thank you for your attention to these updates and notices. Dena and I appreciate you and hope that you have a great year!