President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

October 23, 2020

Colleagues: Please see below for important updates from the University of North Alabama:

Athletics Self-Study: I mentioned in my last communique that the NCAA voted in July to advance UNA into year three of the four-year transition required of institutions reclassifying to the Division I level. A central feature of this year's effort will be the compilation of an extensive self-study on Lion Athletics that must be submitted to the NCAA on or before May 15, 2021. That self-study sets the stage for the final step in our reclassification, which will be a peer team site visit during the 2021-22 academic year. Work on the self-study is being overseen by a 13-member Division I Transition Team chaired by Dr. Eric Kirkman. In addition, the Team has established several subcommittees to assist in this effort. To those serving on this steering committee or one of the subgroups, thank you! And to all members of the campus community, please note the importance of this self-study process and be prepared to provide information if called upon to do so.

Enrollment Update: As of this morning, total headcount for Fall 2020 is 8,353 students. That number will grow closer to 8,400 between now and census date on October 30, and our final percentage increases over Fall 2019 should be approximately 4.0% for headcount and 1.3% for credit hour production. This represents another enrollment record for UNA! It's an outcome of which we can all be especially proud, given current conditions with the pandemic. By way of comparison, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reports overall enrollment in higher education to be down by almost 2% this fall. Graduate enrollment continues to lead the way for UNA with a current increase of over 30% versus 2019. At the undergraduate level, we received unexpected but very welcome news that an impressive 77% of the freshmen who entered UNA last year opted to return this fall. That's a record retention rate for the University, and it places us well ahead of our peer group in the persistence of first-time, full-time students. More important than the record is the great commentary this increase offers on student satisfaction with our instruction, campus life, and extracurricular programming.

VPSA Position: Dr. Kimberly Greenway left retirement in 2018 to return to her alma mater as interim Vice President for Student Affairs. Last January, I had begun to organize a search to fill that position on a permanent basis, but that effort was derailed by the pandemic. I reopened plans for the search last month and met with key leaders in Student Affairs to discuss committee composition and logistics. Those individuals expressed concerns over trying to mount a major search in a division already stretched thin by the pandemic. Moreover, they pointed out that Dr. Greenway has performed very well as interim VPSA and is carrying great responsibility as chair of the University's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. Other stakeholder groups provided similar feedback and attestations of support. Accordingly, I have decided to forego the VPSA search for now. Effective with the end of this semester, I will transition Dr. Greenway from her current interim position to a fixed term arrangement that will allow her to serve as VPSA for another two years – hopefully seeing us through the remainder of the pandemic and the recovery steps which will follow. Please join me as we thank Dr. Greenway for her great work on behalf of UNA and congratulate her on this extension of service as Vice President for Student Affairs.

Harrison Hall / ACONHP: We received final approval this week to begin occupying Harrison Hall, the new home of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions. Dena and I visited the new building yesterday and can attest that it is a marquee facility for the University of North Alabama. We look forward to arranging opportunities for other members of the UNA family to tour the building. Faculty and staff from the ACONHP began relocating offices from Stevens Hall yesterday, and the plan is for the first classes to meet in Harrison Hall next week. Speaking of the Anderson College, we can share great news that recent graduates of the UNA nursing program posted a first-time passage rate of 98.17% on the national NCLEX exam. That's a phenomenal mark that places UNA second among all public institutions in the state of Alabama. Finally, I wish to note our sadness that Joel Anderson – the prominent local philanthropist, alumnus, and member of the UNA Board of Trustees – passed away last week. While Joel did not get to see the new home of the Anderson College officially open, he was well aware of the progress there and had seen pictures of the beautiful interior and exterior spaces. He was very pleased. Joel loved this University deeply and was proud to join with others in giving generously to provide funding for the new building and the programs therein.

Strategic Plans: As you know, we are now in the second year of our Strategic Plan for 2019-24, *Roaring with Excellence*. That plan was created "bottom up" with extensive input from faculty, staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders. The Board of Trustees approved the Plan in December 2019. In March, the Board followed that action by approving a new, corollary Strategic Diversity and Inclusion Plan for 2020-25. The themes and goals in the D&I Plan align closely with the University's Strategic Plan. We promised all of those who worked so diligently in the construction of these documents that we would honor their efforts by calibrating our day-to-day decisions with those plans and by developing related action steps. My purpose in sharing this information is to let you know that we remain fully committed to both plans and are pleased with the progress we have been able to make on key recommendations. I have asked Provost Ross Alexander and Vice President Ron Patterson to keep campus advised of key developments by sharing updates and constructing dashboards with which to monitor our progress on the goals set forth in these guiding documents.

COVID Monitoring and Health Protocols: The coronavirus pandemic has been with us for eight months now and, unfortunately, shows few signs of slowing down. Our COVID-19 Dashboard is updated regularly. To date, the weekly number of new cases on campus has ranged from a high of 61 to a low of 6. We are currently between those two points. Even at the upper end of that range, however, the number of cases represents only 1% of the 6,000 individuals who work or study on this campus on a weekly basis. I attribute this low percentage to our collective compliance with health and safety protocols developed by our COVID-19 Recovery Task Force. But we can take nothing for granted and must remain vigilant. We must continue to wear face coverings, practice social distancing, and avoid mass gatherings that do not follow approved *Recovery Plan* protocols. Our attention to these measures will go far in ensuring the continuity of our campus-based operations, which in turn will help us avoid the serious financial shortfalls that have led to furloughs and layoffs at other universities. On a related note, the plan we utilized for summer commencement ceremonies worked very well. Upon the recommendation of the Registrar and the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, we have decided to retain that model for winter commencement exercises on December 11 and 12. For more details, see https://www.una.edu/registrar/.

I hope you find this information helpful. Dena and I appreciate you and thank you for all you do for UNA!