



## President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

August 27, 2021

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**Greetings, Colleagues!** I hope the fall semester is off to a great start for you. I have moved slowly on the release of this initial communiqué in order to gather the latest information available on fall enrollment and coronavirus trends. Both of those topics are addressed below. With that, I extend a very warm WELCOME to each of you as we move deeper into the 2021-2022 academic year. It's good to have everyone back on campus!

**Enrollment:** The final census for Summer 2021 represented another record for UNA, both in terms of headcount and credit hour production. That marks the tenth consecutive term the University has set enrollment records. We are still many weeks away from census date for Fall 2021. Even so, I am pleased to report that we are already in positive territory with current headcount of 8,550. That's 200 more students than we enrolled in Fall 2020, and I believe our lead over last year will increase as we bring in new registrants with our 8-week classes and other late-reporting programs. Our freshman numbers have rebounded from the hit we took last year with the pandemic and should be close to a class of 1,000, if not slightly higher. International enrollment is recovering more quickly than we anticipated, and our overall on-campus population of residential students is back to pre-pandemic levels. Our online and graduate programs continue to grow at a fast clip. This is great news for me to be able to share with you. Enrollment is and will remain everyone's responsibility, and I want all faculty and staff to feel empowered and validated by the way students are responding to what we have to offer at UNA.

**Year of the UNA Woman:** Our yearlong celebration of the Year of the UNA Woman officially kicked off in June. The celebration is timed to coincide with the sesquicentennial of the admittance of the first women into the student ranks at our forebear institution, the State Normal School at Florence, in 1872. As with our founding in 1830, this is another of the historic milestones that sets us apart from our peers and adds to the richness of our history. We will use events throughout this year to celebrate the impact that women have had in our faculty, staff, and student ranks, in addition to the many alumnae who have helped broaden UNA's reputation through notable achievements, community service, and career success. Stay tuned for details on events and opportunities to support this effort.

**Academic Initiatives:** Suffice it to say that we continue to make good on our promise of realizing "Division I Academics" at UNA. Provost Alexander shared with campus an excellent and thorough update on academic developments in his own message of August 18. I encourage you to review that email for details. Among the highlights in this area are the vertical expansion of our degree offerings, the launch of our first Ph.D. program this fall, the growth of the Cole Honors College, and enhancements that will build on our reputation as Alabama's Workforce Development University – a tagline that aligns well with state economic development initiatives and supports our governmental relations effort.

**New Athletic Director:** Dr. Josh Looney has agreed to join us as the next Director of Athletics with an effective start date of September 1. At UNA, he will inherit a program that has been cleared to enter its fourth and final year of transition in the reclassification process for Division I. Josh brings to UNA seven years of experience as an AD, and also has worked in the NCAA national office as well as for professional

sports organizations. Most recently, he has served as Athletics Director at Missouri Western University, where he assembled an enviable and broad record of success in engagement, fundraising, compliance, marketing, and in intercollegiate play by the teams under his supervision. Joining Josh in Florence will be his wife, Jenna, and their two young daughters, Parker and Perry. Please join me in welcoming Dr. Looney to our campus community.

**UNA Foundation:** At its meeting last month, the Board of Directors for the UNA Foundation elected alumnus Jason Thomas ('95) as the new chair of that body for a two-year term. Jason is joined by Dr. Stephanie Teichmiller ('84) as vice chair and by Cathy Miller ('83) as treasurer. With over 30 members, the Foundation Board is a large and diverse group composed of highly accomplished alumni and friends who are committed to supporting UNA by creating and empowering a culture of philanthropy at the University. Under the leadership of outgoing chair Harry Smith ('64), the Directors have also done a fine job of helping to solicit new gifts, and are joining their colleagues on the University's Board of Trustees in taking a leadership role in giving as we enter our next major fundraising campaign. The combined weight of these efforts is significant. Private giving to the University is up 43% over the previous year, and the total endowment for the University, which was below \$30 million in 2015, is now very close to \$50 million and will likely pass that mark in the near future.

**Coronavirus:** It is now clear that the pandemic is going to be more of a factor in our campus life this fall than we hoped would be the case. We followed the recommendations of our COVID-19 Recovery Task Force in amending the campus guidance for fall semester, resulting in the temporary reinstatement of a face covering requirement for indoor activities. There is ample reason to continue with caution as the rate of community transmission in Alabama remains high, as is the number of hospitalizations across the state. On a more positive note, ADPH data indicates that the number of new cases in Alabama is once again in decline and is less than half the daily rate recorded just two weeks ago. On campus, the most recent count of weekly cases is 18, which is far below the 60+ weekly cases with which we had to deal last fall. We will continue to work closely with the CRTF to monitor these data points and make the best decisions possible for our campus.

**Facilities:** Thanks to the success of Project 208 and the generosity of state and local funding entities, we can expect to begin work on important capital projects during the next year. First will be construction of a new state-of-the-art building to house Computer Science and Mathematics. The location for this new facility is still to be determined but, assuming we can work out final details, our plan is to construct it on the site currently occupied by the Math Building (built in 1921 as the first home to Kilby Laboratory School). The second major project this year will involve the demolition of LaGrange Hall, which has been unoccupied now for over five years. In its place we plan to build a modern facility that will offer residential space for honors students in addition to a separate wing with campus recreational facilities that can supplement our existing Student Recreation Center, the capacity of which is no longer adequate for our growing campus. Finally, we have assembled the funding to begin work on a major and long-overdue renovation of the Music Building. We will share additional details on these and other construction projects as the year unfolds.

I hope you find this information useful. As detailed above, we have every reason to be excited about the direction of our University and the prospects for continued growth. Dena and I thank you for contributing to this success and look forward to seeing you soon. Roar Lions!