



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

January 4, 2021

Colleagues: Welcome back to the University of North Alabama for the 2021 spring semester. Please see below for important information and updates.

Pandemic Response: With the concurrence of the Shared Governance Executive Committee, I have extended the life of the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force to allow that group to continue its operations through the spring semester. Members of that Task Force took the lead in updating our *Guidance Plan* for the spring semester. Through Dr. Kimberly Greenway, the Executive Council receives reports on state and regional trends with coronavirus case counts and related indicators at each meeting. The EC also met by Zoom over the holiday break to discuss the latest developments with the pandemic. We continue to feel very good about how our campus fared last fall and desire to continue with the same protocols and precautions that have served us so well as we welcome students back to campus for spring term. Please continue to follow all health guidelines and encourage others to do the same.

Enrollment: UNA is on track to set a new record for spring enrollment this semester. With registration for spring term continuing, we are up over 4% in credit hour production and up over 8% in headcount compared to Spring 2020. If these trends continue, we should see an increase of approximately 500 students over last spring's census headcount of 7,285. Early indicators for Fall 2021 enrollment are similarly encouraging. The latest report from our Office of Admissions shows freshman applications up 18% over last year. That growth, coupled with the significant increase in our retention rate, which rose from 75% in 2019 to 77% in 2020, bodes well for the future. We are planning for enrollment in the 8,500 to 9,000 student range for Fall 2021 – and we will get there by continuing to emphasize smart growth strategies that do not overtax our campus infrastructure or detract from our commitment to offer a highly personalized educational experience for our students. My thanks to Dr. Ross Alexander and his team in Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management for leading this exemplary effort.

Athletic Conference: Talks are now underway to bring three additional universities into the ASUN Athletic Conference of which UNA is a member. Significantly, the three institutions involved in this expansion discussion are all public regional universities that, like UNA, sponsor the sport of football. Should this move come to fruition, the addition of these new members would hold out the prospect for UNA to get all of our sports under one conference umbrella and reduce travel time and expenses by playing more games against opponents in our general geographic area. I would caution that this proposal is just that – a proposal – and that several key steps remain before any of this can be pronounced done. Still, it's an exciting development for our sports programs and our fans.

Bibb Graves Hall: The sign in front of Bibb Graves Hall has been updated to reflect the new array of offices located therein. Significantly, the new sign identifies the building by its street address, 601 Cramer Way, rather than by its official name. This step is consistent with both our campus values and with the resolutions passed by the Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, and Student Government Association with regard to the building name. Replacement of the sign does not constitute a renaming of the building, as such a move is not permissible under the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act (AMPA). Our Board of Trustees is aware of campus sentiment and shares many of the concerns of the faculty, staff, and students on this issue. Board leaders remain engaged with state officials to share UNA's perspective, discuss related developments at other universities, and determine what the future holds for AMPA. Until such time as this issue can be resolved, we will utilize the street address 601 Cramer Way as an alternative designation for this administrative and academic facility.

Campus Enhancements: The pandemic has affected plans for the formal opening of Laura M. Harrison Hall, the new home of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions. Because large campus gatherings are not possible, we have opted to host a small, invitation-only ribbon cutting ceremony on January 11 to officially open the building. A larger and more inclusive grand opening celebration will be held at a later date. Elsewhere, the new marble fountain is now up in Harrison Plaza. It is a beautiful, hand-carved work of art that is based on the same design, dimensions, and color scheme as the original. There is still work to be done in the plaza, however, and we can expect the construction to continue for the next month or so. We have developed tentative plans for a Light the Fountain ceremony in early March, the size and scope of which will depend on the course of the pandemic and recommendations from our COVID-19 Recovery Task Force as the semester progresses.

Doctoral Programs: As I wrap up this communique, it is important to note that we are making history this spring with the launch of the first doctoral classes in UNA's history. The first cohort of students in the Executive Doctor of Business Administration program is already enrolled and will begin classes this week. Recruitment for the PhD in Exercise Science and Health Promotions is going well, with that program slated to officially begin in the fall of 2021. The launch of these programs – coupled with the growth of our Honors College, success with national awards, and increase in our graduation and retention rates – underscores the growth in our academic profile and emergence as a leader among public regional universities.

Like you, Dena and I are monitoring news reports on the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and hoping that the pandemic will begin to lift this spring. Until that happens, please stay safe and know that we continue to appreciate all you have done to keep this wonderful University moving ahead despite the many challenges of the past year. Roar Lions!