



UNIVERSITY OF
North Alabama

Where **Potential**
Becomes **Purpose**

2026 Academic Report

A Foundational **Legacy**

Founded

■ 1830

Alabama's First
Chartered College

State-Supported

■ 1872

First State-Supported
Teachers' College
South of the Ohio River

Officially "UNA"

■ 1975

Named University of
North Alabama

200 Years of
Excellence

■ 2030

Celebrating
Bicentennial



The **UNA** Student

- 10,700+ students
- 71% of students from Alabama
- 58 countries represented
- More than half receive financial aid





UNA has again been ranked among the South's best regional institutions in the **2026 U.S. News & World Report** Best Colleges rankings. This marks the fifth consecutive year UNA appears in the Top 20 among Southern public universities, and the first time entering the Top 40 for Best Value, reflecting rising academic quality and return on investment. These rankings affirm UNA's regional leadership in higher education and its effectiveness in preparing students for workforce success.



Florence, AL

Voted Best
Small College
Town by
USA Today
Reader's Choice

Gaining Academic Momentum

UNA's Strategic Plan, *Pride in the Gold Standard*, challenges our university community to expand experiential learning and deepen workforce development initiatives. This strategic alignment strengthens partnerships with businesses and organizations across Alabama and the world, equipping graduates for meaningful careers.

University of North Alabama has been named to the highest tier of the **Carnegie Foundation's** Opportunity Colleges and Universities: Higher Access, Higher Earnings. This honor recognizes UNA's commitment to expand access and improve graduates' earning potential and affirms UNA's ongoing work to help write the Shoals story - creating pathways to opportunity and strengthening the regional workforce.



The **Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions** was recognized in Fall 2025 as an Apple Distinguished School, a designation that reflects our commitment to a student-centered and personalized learning environment. Through the College's Apple One-to-One initiative, each student is provided with an iPad, supporting the integration of technology and fostering innovative learning experiences in the classroom.

Kilby Laboratory School was recognized by the Alabama State Board of Education as a nominated 2025 National Blue Ribbon School, a distinction reserved for top-performing schools statewide.



“As a child, Kilby was my elementary school, and years later, it became the place where I began to grow into an educator. Returning to Kilby in the spring of 2025 as a graduate assistant and now in the Alternative A Early Childhood Master’s program felt like coming home.”

– Lydia Snyder, '24

Graduate Assistant at Kilby Laboratory School

The University of North Alabama’s **Marching Pride** performed at the 2025 **Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade**, showcasing UNA on a global stage. Many faithful donors’ contributions helped offset travel and lodging costs for student musicians, reflecting a deep belief in the value of student engagement, excellence, and experiential learning in UNA’s music programs.

Participation in the parade provided students with transformative, high-impact experiences while bringing national visibility to the university and the state of Alabama. The Marching Pride’s journey demonstrated how private investment directly expands student opportunity and strengthens UNA’s cultural and educational impact.



Photo Credit: Samuel Camp



The Delores and Weldon Cole Honors College's Mentor Program pairs incoming freshmen with experienced upper-class students who help new students build connections and quickly access academic and campus resources. This early sense of belonging and support strengthens student engagement, which is a key driver of first-year retention and long-term persistence toward graduation.

The UNA Career Center prepares students for the workforce through experiential learning, professional development, and career readiness programs, engaging over 2,600 students in 2025. The Center also visits local high schools to provide resume reviews and mock interviews for hundreds of students. These efforts enhance student engagement and career preparedness while building strong relationships with prospective students and local school systems.



First Year Students

- **1,078** First-time freshmen enrolled in Fall '25
- More than **20%** of new freshman participated in UNA's Early College program
- **87%** First-year retention among Early College students
- **76%** Of new students receive an institutional scholarship



#1

First-Year Retention among Alabama public regional universities

#1

Six-Year Graduation rate among Alabama public regional universities

165%

Growth in University Scholarship support over five years



“My experiences have shaped me into someone who is driven, passionate, and committed to making a difference.”

- Zuleima Sanchez,
First-Generation Student

Delivering **Purposeful Impact**, In and Out of the Classroom

UNA has increased its number of graduates by **75%** over the past decade — one of the largest gains among Alabama universities. This sustained growth reflects UNA's commitment to workforce readiness and delivering transformational student experiences.



billboard

The **David and John Briggs Family Department of Entertainment Industry**, celebrating its 50th anniversary, was recognized by **Billboard Magazine** as one of the Top 50 Music Business programs in the country, affirming UNA's prominence in creative and professional arts education.

UNA's **Public History** concentration of our **Master of Arts in History** program along with the Entertainment Industry Department and members of the Shoals music industry launched the **Shoals Music Archive**, a comprehensive repository preserving recordings, photographs, posters, handwritten lyrics, oral histories, and other memorabilia that document the Shoals region's rich musical heritage from the 19th century to today. This effort serves as a vital bridge connecting the area's iconic legacy with future generations of scholars, artists, and the community.



Photo Credit: Abraham Rowe

Faculty On a Mission



University of North Alabama music faculty have achieved notable artistic milestones with two recent album releases: **Dr. Martin Hebel's** Half Silver featured with the Brno Philharmonic Orchestra and **Dr. Meghan Merciers'** second studio album recording and research on clarinet works by composer Peter Temko, both enhancing UNA's creative footprint. These projects demonstrate the university's commitment to advancing professional scholarship and cultural contribution through faculty-driven artistic work.

Under **Dr. Fred Kindelsperger**, students actively manage a real-money portfolio exceeding \$500,000, fully funded by the **Tennessee Valley Authority**. Working under professional compliance standards, they analyze markets, make investment decisions, and present results to TVA's Corporate Investments team.



Mitch Hamm, Director of the **Joel R. Anderson Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurial Studies**, and eight UNA students attended the CEO Global Conference, gaining immersive, real-world entrepreneurial experience. The Center, through direct engagement with founders, investors, and industry leaders, translates classroom learning into practical venture development and strengthens workforce readiness.





Computer Science major (and UNA Baseball Player)
Jackson Ferrigno finished first place in the student research competition at the **Southeastern Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges** (CCSC) held at Mercer University in Macon, GA.

Students On the Rise

Hollie Hardin, an Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions - Bachelor of Science in Nursing student, was selected as a 2026 **Finley Scholar**. This prestigious statewide scholarship recognizes exceptional academic achievement, leadership, service, and a commitment to improving healthcare across Alabama.



James Wiegmann, an undergraduate majoring in Foreign Languages, has been named a U.S. Student **Fulbright** recipient. Selected by the U.S. Department of State's Fulbright Program, he is currently teaching English and engaging in cultural exchange in Germany.

Beyond the Field

University of North Alabama student-athletes, coaches, and staff completed more than **700 hours of civic engagement** across 20 community projects, partnering with organizations such as the Shoals Dream Center, local schools, Bank Independent, and Common Ground Shoals. Teams including baseball, softball, and beach volleyball provided hands-on service ranging from youth mentoring to community improvement initiatives. The effort highlights UNA Athletics' sustained commitment to leadership, service, and regional partnership beyond competition.

University of North Alabama student athletes achieved the **highest combined academic year GPA** in school history with a **3.28** for the 2024–25 academic year, including a **3.30** in Spring 2025, marking a new department record. This milestone reflects sustained excellence, with 57 student athletes earning perfect 4.0 GPAs and 73 % posting a 3.0 or higher, demonstrating a strong culture of academic success alongside athletic commitment. The achievement underscores UNA's dual focus on rigorous scholarship and holistic student development, enhancing the university's reputation and workforce readiness.





UNA was ranked a **Best College for Veterans** by **U.S. News & World Report**. The university supports nearly 400 military-connected students through its Military Veterans' Affairs office in the **ROAR Access Center**. By providing hands-on assistance with GI Bill benefits, advising, and transition services, UNA strengthens veteran success, workforce readiness, and regional stability.

UNA Esports hosted the **NECC** College Halo National Championship. The Esports program provides students opportunities to compete in intercollegiate gaming competitions while developing leadership and strategic decision-making skills through experiential learning in facility and event operations, broadcast production, marketing, and campus engagement.



Through an **Innovate Alabama** grant, the Sanders College of Business and Technology has selected thirteen local small businesses for the **Shoals Area Growth Engagement (SAGE)** program.

Impacting Alabama

60%

of graduates remain
in Alabama to build
their careers

\$340M

annual economic
impact in the
Shoals region



UNA leads a tri-state alliance with University of Tennessee at Martin, Mississippi University for Women, and Northwest-Shoals Community College through a **\$2.5 Million National Science Foundation LSAMP** grant that seeks to support students in need through bridge programs, tutoring, and mentorship, strengthening Alabama's STEM workforce pipeline.



"UNA's MBA program isn't just about earning a degree — it's about gaining the tools to succeed in the business world. I'm grateful for the experience, and I highly recommend it to anyone looking to elevate their career."

- Sam Mashburn, '20

Master's in Business Administration



The Center for Learning and Professional Development served more than **3,500** adult learners and professionals.



Through a **NASA** grant, faculty members from the **Spencer College of Education and Human Sciences** and the **College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering** are studying the physical and cognitive changes associated with zero gravity in spaceflight.



UNA's **School of the Arts'** commitment to community collaboration is reflected in the George Lindsey UNA Film Festival, I2E2 Conference, and Urban Music Symposium, attracting broad community participation that fostered civic dialogue through storytelling, exhibitions, and public lectures.

The Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions are addressing critical perinatal care needs in the local community through the **Tiny Cubs Community Baby Shower**, which provides essential supplies to new families. Building on this work, a generous **Women of Influence** grant has enabled them to expand the program to support expecting UNA students, combining community engagement with student-focused research and service.



The Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area is working on several projects with numerous local groups helping establish the Tennessee River as a 652-mile recreation trail as part of the **Tennessee RiverLine Project**.

Pioneering Faculty

The Gatlin Endowment for Innovation has allowed **Dr. Alisha Horky**, Associate Professor of Marketing, to create the Agile Marketing course.



In this course, digital marketing students are able to work with local businesses and organizations to run real-time digital marketing campaigns using the latest tools and technology.



Dr. Eric Becraft and students are advancing sustainable agriculture through hands-on research on soil microbiomes and organo-fertilizers in collaboration with the USDA and the **International Fertilizer Development Center** (IFDC). The work informs environmentally responsible fertilizer practices, supports global food security, and demonstrates UNA's impact through student-driven research that directly serves industry and community needs.

Dr. John Parnell, a Professor of Management and Eminent Scholar, was selected for the prestigious Fulbright Specialist Award and completed a collaborative project at **Emanuel University of Oradea**



in Romania to strengthen faculty expertise in ethics, entrepreneurship, and academic research.



Trailblazing Students

Lydia Uptain, a biochemistry and molecular biology double major, was UNA's first recipient of the prestigious **Barry Goldwater Scholarship**, which recognizes her academic excellence and her potential to be a leading researcher in STEM.



A leading participant of UNA's **CODE** program, Lydia's research seeks to uncover potential diagnostic tools and treatments for neurodegenerative diseases.

"UNA gave me the freedom to explore many options. I ultimately found that biology and chemistry were what I was most passionate about. Eventually, I'd like to work in research and help advance some field of knowledge." - **Lydia Uptain**

Sport and Recreation Management students, **Elijah Hartnett**, **Ja'Larris Williams**, **Savannah Mims**, and **D.J. Prance**, captured first place at the **2025 Applied Sport Management Association Conference**, showcasing top industry-level strategy and applied real-world problem solving.



Photo Credit: Dan Busey, Times Daily

A woman with short dark hair, wearing aviator sunglasses, a green blazer over a white shirt, a silver chain necklace, and a pearl earring. She is looking upwards and to the right. A black backpack strap is visible over her shoulder. The background shows a brick university building and green trees.

“Going back to school while working wasn’t easy, but UNA made it manageable. The program was designed to be flexible for working professionals, which allowed me to balance my coursework with my career and personal responsibilities.”

- Trinda Owens, '22

Master's in Social Work

Lecturer, University of North Alabama



UNA has **1,904** students engaged in experiential learning courses including internships, research, service learning, and study abroad.



“Creativity is something that I’ve always had within me, and being at UNA has helped me bring that out and use it in some type of tangible form so that I’m able to succeed in my career.”

- Kenneth Davies, ‘25
BA Interior Design

16

Fulbright student awards since 2017

979

Cole Honors College students

70,000+

alumni Worldwide





UNIVERSITY OF
North Alabama

**GROW
YOUR
WORLD**

una.edu/growyourworld