



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

September 11, 2020

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

Budget for FY 21: Vice President Evan Thornton and his staff have completed work on the budget for FY 21. We have been fortunate in that enrollment has held up well at UNA despite the pandemic (more on that below) and that the state has not cut funding to higher education, as has happened elsewhere. Even so, international enrollment is down significantly across the country, and that has translated into fewer students living on our campus this fall. The loss of those international students, coupled with an increase in operating expenses tied to our coronavirus response and recovery, has left us with a \$3.9 million deficit in our budget for the new fiscal year that begins on October 1. The good news is that we have a plan in place to deal with this deficit through travel savings (expenditures on business and athletic travel remain much lower than last year), holding vacant positions open, and applying savings from FY 20. With these steps, and with a little luck as the year unfolds, we should be able to manage this challenge.

Priorities: One of the vacant positions noted above is in the Office of the President. I bring that up to let you know that I understand and appreciate firsthand the difficulty of moving through the year with a key position unfilled. It's not an ideal arrangement, but this is the type of shared sacrifice that will allow us to close the budgetary gap without impacting existing personnel or critical operations. On a related note, data in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* indicates that UNA spends less per-student on administrative overhead than any university in Alabama. That's a great commentary on our priorities as an institution. Even more important, we are not letting the pandemic stop us from keeping commitments to fully fund faculty promotions, move to midpoint adjustments, travel for research and presentations, and staff merit pay for FY 21. I am proud of how this campus has pulled together to make smart decisions, help each other, and use our limited resources wisely.

Enrollment: The pandemic is reshaping enrollment across higher education this fall. Most schools are down in international students, and most are down as well in traditional first-time, full-time freshmen. We have seen both of those trends manifest at UNA. However, our decrease in freshmen (currently about 7%) is less than what is being reported elsewhere. Moreover, the diversified "smart growth" enrollment strategy we launched two years ago is paying huge dividends this fall, as we have been able to offset decreases in some enrollment categories with big gains in others – notably growth in our online and graduate programs. Overall, we are far enough along in the fall semester to confirm that we will have increases in both headcount and credit hour production by the time fall census arrives. Those increases will put us into record territory again – final headcount should be in the 8,400 range – and we are sure to compare favorably with peer institutions both in and out of state.

COVID-19 Dashboard: Our updated dashboard on COVID-19 went live on September 1. Many thanks to Dr. Kimberly Greenway, the members of the COVID-19 Recovery Task Force, and the faculty members in Biology and Computer Science who worked so hard to bring this project to fruition. As the state's leading center for medical care, the University of Alabama at Birmingham has access to many resources on this topic and has been great to share guidance with UNA and other regional universities. We have and will continue to follow UAB's lead on best practices for reporting data.

Academic Profile: This summer, the Board of Trustees for the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) granted Level V membership status to UNA. This was the important and necessary final step in our transition to a doctoral-level institution. The College of Business will launch its Executive Doctor of Business Administration degree in Spring 2021, and the College of Education and Human Sciences will oversee the launch of the Ph.D. in Exercise Science and Health Promotion in Fall 2021. These are very important developments in the history of our University. Taken in context with other recent accomplishments – the establishment of the Honors College, the rise of our top-ranked MBA program, and our students’ success on national licensure exams and with the Fulbright Award program – we can all take great pride in the growth of our academic profile at UNA.

Update on Facilities and Campus Improvements: I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dean Pierce and the faculty and staff of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions for showing extraordinary patience as we have labored to finish Harrison Hall. The building is beautiful and will make a wonderful addition to the northwest corner of campus. We will share details on the date of occupancy as it becomes available. The second phase of the renovations to Norton Auditorium is underway and should be completed by the end of this semester. The University Success Center will move into its newly renovated home in Collier Library over the next two weeks. Finally, somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, the cargo ship *Sealand Michigan* is bringing our freshly carved marble fountain from Italy to the port of Mobile. It should arrive on campus in early October. We will install the new fountain as quickly as possible so that we can remove some of the fencing in the plaza. Remaining work in that area will be completed over the long holiday break.

Other Quick Hits:

- On July 22, we received notice from the [NCAA Division I Strategic Vision and Planning Committee](#) of their decision to advance UNA to year three of the four-year reclassification process. That means we are over halfway on this journey that began so many years ago. I commend AD Mark Linder and the staff in Athletics for guiding us through this process. There is still much work to be done, but for now let’s celebrate this excellent progress. Roar Lions! *(Also, as is required by the NCAA as part of the transition process, please see on the next page a letter to all faculty and staff that affirms our commitment to Division I rules and regulations.)*
- If you haven’t already done so, I encourage you to download the new [Mane Benefits App](#) provided by Dr. Tim Butler and the staff of the Steele Center for Professional Selling. Like its hard copy predecessor, the Mane Benefits Card, the app will give you access to great discounts at over forty area restaurants, retail outlets, and service providers. The app is available for download at the App Store or by special instructions for Android users. Contact the Steele Center for assistance.
- Stay tuned for additional announcements about [new businesses coming to our area](#). Many UNA officials have worked very hard behind the scenes to assist with these confidential recruitment efforts. Topics of discussion have ranged from workforce development to special certifications, and from diversity training to quality of life issues including athletics and fine arts programming. The future of the Shoals is bright, and we are laying the groundwork for a reciprocal relationship in which the University can assist our region while simultaneously benefitting from this growth.
- Earlier this week, University Advancement launched [The Legacy Initiative: Rebuilding the Heart of UNA](#). Throughout the month of September, faculty, staff, and current students will be given a special opportunity to secure a naming in Harrison Plaza before this campaign moves to the larger community of alumni and friends. Our heartfelt thanks go to all who have already chosen to help rebuild Harrison Fountain and Plaza. Please visit www.una.edu/legacy for more information on opportunities for giving through this program.

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



Office of the
PRESIDENT

September 11, 2020

Colleagues:

My office recently received notification from the NCAA Division I Strategic and Planning Committee that the University of North Alabama has been approved to advance to year three of the reclassification process. This is very good and welcome news. You may recall that this transition from Division II to Division I is a four-year process, and to date we have fared very well with all required steps.

With preparations underway to submit an updated strategic plan for Athletics next June, it is critically important for the entire campus community to be aware of and committed to complying with NCAA Division I rules. As the spotlight increases due to national competition and exposure to national media at the Division I level, so will the expectations of academic performance and faithful compliance with NCAA rules. We are already witnessing the academic excellence of our 300+ student-athletes who posted an all-time high GPA of 3.29 during the spring 2020 semester.

Athletics has long been integral to the UNA experience, both for our students and our campus community. Through athletics, we all learn indispensable life lessons and take tremendous pride in competition. In many respects, athletics is an application of the lessons we teach every day in our classrooms and laboratories. Those lessons include the importance of team work and the shared joy of succeeding as a team; the necessity of placing a higher priority on others rather than on one's own individual gain; the significance of discipline and repetition to learning; and finding a way to meet challenges when the odds seem stacked against you.

Unfortunately, athletics can also provide negative lessons, especially when individuals or groups become obsessed with winning at all costs. Such a focus is incompatible with our institutional values and the goals of intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, we must all commit to ensure the integrity of our athletics program and the well-being of those who participate in it.

For these reasons, I call upon all members of the UNA family to join with me in reaffirming our commitment to maintaining a culture of compliance with NCAA rules and regulations. Should you ever have a specific question regarding rules compliance in athletics, I encourage you to contact Dr. Jeffery Ray (Faculty Athletics Representative) or Mr. Todd Vardaman (Senior Associate Athletic Director – Administration).

Thank you for your service to the University of North Alabama. Roar Lions!

Best regards,

Kenneth D. Kitts

Kenneth D. Kitts, Ph.D.
President

KDK/rbs