



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

April 24, 2023

Colleagues: We are approaching the end of the 2023 spring semester, and with that in mind I would like to take this opportunity to share important updates from the University of North Alabama.

State Budgetary Process: Governor Kay Ivey and State Finance Director Bill Poole released the Executive Budget for FY24 on March 21. The budget includes a recommended increase of \$3.85 million in recurring state funding for UNA plus an additional \$15 million in one-time funding for maintenance and capital needs. The \$3.85 million is less than what we had requested and would leave us in last place in per-student funding. Even so, we fared well compared to other institutions. Our percentage increase is the second highest of the fourteen public universities in Alabama and, if enacted, would narrow the gap between us and several peer institutions of similar size. The budget now moves to the Alabama Senate, where the Finance and Taxation Education Committee will soon begin its deliberations. In the legislature, we have now met with the chairs of both committees that deal with higher education funding, and last week we hosted a dinner in Montgomery for lawmakers from across the northern tier of the state. We will remain engaged with key officials as the budget moves through the Senate and House. It will likely be early June before we know final details on the state portion of our budget for the upcoming year. Securing sufficient funding for a COLA remains a top priority for me and the members of the Executive Council.

Federal Relations: Our move into the Fourth Congressional District continues to pay dividends for our campus. This past week, Congressman Robert Aderholt informed us that he has made UNA a top priority for FY24 with a request to the House Appropriations Committee for a special \$15 million earmark to assist us with construction of a new Engineering/STEM building. The \$15 million compliments the \$3.5 million he was able to secure for UNA in the current fiscal year. If this new allocation comes to fruition – which we believe is likely, though it is dependent on eventual passage of the spending bill as a whole – we will be able to begin work on this new facility earlier than we thought. Bringing a new building online without having to borrow money or use operating funds helps all parts of campus and underscores the importance of our growing emphasis on federal government outreach.

Chief Diversity Officer: I am pleased to report that Ms. Minnette Ellis has accepted my invitation to join the ranks of the Executive Council as interim Chief Diversity Officer effective June 1, 2023. In this role she will succeed Dr. Ron Patterson. Minnette is already well-known to many of you by dint of her good work as AVP-Student Affairs and Dean of Students. With some repackaging of assignments, she will be able to serve as Chief Diversity Officer while also continuing with her leadership role in Student Affairs. I am working closely with Dr. KC White on the details of that division of labor. Minnette and I have mutually agreed that her interim appointment as Chief Diversity Officer will last for one year. This plan will allow us to maintain momentum with campus diversity efforts and continue the implementation of the new, decentralized DEI model that is serving our campus well.

Construction Updates: Work on the new Computing and Mathematics Building is on schedule with an anticipated completion date of Spring 2024. The final phase of that project will include a significant renovation of the Memorial Amphitheater as well as work on the hillside and pathways that connect that venue to the new building. Elsewhere on campus, crews will begin working in Harrison Plaza following spring commencement to correct the drainage issues on that site. That project will involve replacing some of the brick and concrete in the outer rings that surround the fountain and should be completed by August 1.

SACSCOC Review: Last week I received the official report from the SACSCOC Reaffirmation Committee that visited our campus in March. We have known since the conclusion of that visit that the news for our University is good, but receipt of this letter is nonetheless welcome. It confirms that we completed the review process with no recommendations for follow-up. This is the best possible outcome for any member institution undergoing decennial review. The only step remaining is final action on this report by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at its meeting in December, 2023. Please join me in thanking Provost Ross Alexander, Dr. Joy Borah, Dr. Lorie Johnson, and Dr. Chris Klein for their leadership roles in this effort. Thanks also goes to the many other individuals from across campus who gave so generously of their time in support of this important task. With these significant steps behind us, we can focus now on ensuring the success of our new Quality Enhancement Plan, *Preparing the Pride: Experiential and Work-Based Learning*.

Enrollment: The projections for Summer 2023 enrollment look very promising. Currently, we are running ahead of last summer's registrations by approximately 6%. The increases are broadly based and extend across undergraduate and graduate students, as well as both headcount enrollment and credit hour production. For Fall 2023, our freshman applications are up 13% over the same point last year. That level of interest from prospective incoming students, coupled with our rising retention rate and momentum in other enrollment sectors (graduate, online, adult education, international students, early college), bodes well for another strong enrollment showing in AY 2023-24.

Pine Street Bridge: As you know, we have been working with officials from the City of Florence to prioritize pedestrian safety issues on the municipal roadways that cross our campus. Last month, our Board of Trustees adopted a resolution on this issue that is complimentary of similar statements of concern and calls for action by constituency groups in our shared governance system. We have now provided all of those documents to municipal officials. Mayor Andy Betterton and City Council members share our concerns and have indicated a willingness to partner with us to resolve these issues. As a case in point, the City recently requested and received a \$250,000 grant from the Rebuild Alabama program to help jumpstart work on structural repairs and safety upgrades (that includes two-sided fencing) on the Pine Street Bridge that extends over Circular Road between Flowers Hall and the Burford Science Building. Work on the project should begin soon.

Commencement Speakers: Spring 2023 commencement ceremonies will be held on Friday, May 12, and Saturday, May 13. Our guest speaker for the the two ceremonies on the evening of May 12 (graduate COAS and COEHS; undergraduate ACONHP and COEHS) will be Dr. Eric Mackey, Alabama's State Superintendent of Education. Our guest speaker for the first three ceremonies on May 13 (graduate ACONHP and SCOBT; undergraduate SCOBT; undergraduate COAS) will be Senator Arthur Orr, chair of the Senate's Finance and Taxation Education Committee. Our guest speaker for the final ceremony on May 13 (also undergraduate COAS) will be our own Dr. Ron Patterson, whose seven-year tenure at UNA will conclude in early June as he prepares to assume the presidency at Chadron State College in Nebraska.

Important Upcoming Dates:

- May 3..... Spring Semester Classes End
- May 4..... Annual Faculty-Staff Luncheon / Employee Service Awards
- May 5-10.... Final Exams
- May 12-13.. Spring Commencement Exercises
- May 15..... May Intercession Classes Begin
- May 29..... University Closed for Memorial Day
- June 5..... SOAR I (first of five orientation sessions)
- June 7..... Summer I and Full Summer Session Classes Begin

Dena and I thank you for all you have done to make this another great year for UNA. We hope you have an enjoyable summer and look forward to continuing our work with you. Roar Lions!