



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

April 22, 2025

Colleagues: Please see below for important information and updates as we near the end of spring semester.

Live Lions: With the concurrence of the Shared Governance Executive Committee, I have extended the life of the Special Committee on Live Lions through the end of this spring semester. I met with the committee some weeks ago, and it appears that there might be a good path forward on this question. My plan is to share a more complete update on this topic once the committee concludes its work and I am able to discuss key findings and recommendations with the Board of Trustees.

Enrollment Outlook: We finished the spring semester with new records being set for both headcount and credit hour production. Accordingly, we can turn our attention to enrollment for the upcoming academic year. New student interest in UNA is strong, as evidenced by an increase in applications at both the undergraduate (+10%) and graduate (+4%) levels. There are five SOAR sessions scheduled across the summer. The first session, scheduled for June 2, is already full. SOAR II on June 9 is reserved for those students bound for our Cole Honors College.

Advancement Campaign: In recent months, graphics have been placed at key locations on campus to show progress on the "Shine On, Gold" comprehensive campaign. Although the campaign went public less than two years ago, we have already raised almost \$87 million of the goal of \$100 million. For a regional university of our size to be making this type of headway on such an ambitious goal is nothing short of remarkable. It sends a compelling message about the overall trajectory of our University and the strong support provided by our alumni and friends. Dena and I invite you to join us in making gifts to advance campaign priorities. Of the nearly \$87 million raised to date, two-thirds of that amount is marked for support of our core mission through academic program enhancement and student scholarships.

State Budget: Governor Kay Ivey released her executive budget on February 4 which proposed an increase of \$2.7 million in net new funding for UNA for FY26. The executive budget also included the roll-in of an existing earmark of \$2.25 million into our "permanent" O&M budget, which protects those dollars for the future and gives us greater latitude to decide how those dollars are spent. These are both positive developments. The Alabama Senate recently completed its work on the budget for higher education. The Senate affirmed the amounts recommended for our recurring budget and increased our one-time funding by \$2.8 million. With only three weeks left in the 2025 legislative session, we will work with the House Ways and Means Education Committee, chaired by Rep. Danny Garrett with local Rep. Jamie Kiel as vice chair, to see if we can enhance our position further before the budgetary deliberations draw to a close. In planning our institutional budget for FY26, key priorities will include: 1) the filling of vacant positions; 2) a cost-of-living-adjustment for full-time faculty and staff; and 3) funding to continue full support for faculty promotions, merit pay, and move-to-midpoint increases.

Campus Construction: Progress on the new residence hall off of Pine Street is on schedule with an opening planned for Fall 2026. That's also the target date for the grand opening of Bank Independent Stadium. The baseball portion of the stadium now has a playable surface and is being used for games although, for now, fan seating is limited to the adjacent parking lot of College View Church of Christ -- the leadership of which has been very understanding and cooperative throughout this endeavor. Work to complete the baseball field will continue into the summer months. Also this summer, work will begin on the renovation of the Memorial Amphitheater as the last phase of the larger project that included construction of the new Computing and Mathematics Building as well as the widening of sidewalks on Founders Hill. In the fall, we hope to finalize plans for a new engineering building to support our growing array of programs in that field.

Federal Initiatives: This has been an unusually active period for all of higher education in terms of federal relations. The new administration and new Congress have given rise to new executive orders, new grants guidance, new administrative rules, and new bills making their way through the political process. When changes are proposed in Washington that could affect our campus, we contact appropriate stakeholders at UNA to make them aware of the possible impact and discuss compliance as well as options for minimizing disruptions to campus operations and student services. Elsewhere in the federal arena, we recently met with Representative Aderholt, Senator Britt, and Senator Tuberville to request special assistance with projects ranging from construction support for Music and Fine Arts to ensuring the continuation of our ROTC program in a time of consolidation and budget cuts for the Army's Cadet Command.

WICHE Report Comments Part II: I would like to give additional commentary to the national report on enrollment trends that I mentioned in my last communique. *Knocking at the College Door 2024* noted that growth in the number of high school graduates in the South is expected to slow significantly with only a very modest 2% increase over the next two decades. Other regions of the country are expected to see declines in the number of graduates. This sobering projection for our region is compounded by the fact that the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) has simultaneously reported on a decline in the number of state high school students who are college bound. These trends are real. We cannot afford to ignore them. At the same time, I feel good about UNA's long-term enrollment prospects and will have more to say about the reasons for this optimism in a forthcoming final installment on this topic.

Parking: We recently added almost 100 new parking spaces to the campus inventory through the expansion of faculty/staff Lot C next to Willingham Hall and the Appleby lot across Wood Avenue, coupled with the extension of several lots on the west side of Pine Street. Leaders in our Facilities Department are also exploring the possibility of developing a new tiered surface lot at the intersection of Cedar Street and Waterloo Road (just behind the Burford Science and Technology Building and Flowers Hall) which could create up to 200 additional parking spaces.

Service Awards Luncheon: The annual Faculty-Staff Luncheon is set for Thursday, May 1, in the GUC Banquet Halls. As per usual, we will use this opportunity to recognize recent retirees and to honor those in our ranks who have reached milestones in their service history with UNA. I encourage you to attend this luncheon to enjoy good food and good company as we celebrate friends who have made significant contributions to our University.

Spring Commencement: Commencement ceremonies for the College of Education and Human Sciences and the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions will take place on Friday, May 9. The speaker for the Friday ceremonies will be Dr. Ed Nichols, superintendent of Madison City Schools. Ceremonies for the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering and the Sanders College of Business and Technology will take place on Saturday, May 10. The speaker for the Saturday ceremonies will be Hon. Sybil Cleveland-Pennywell (UNA '84), Municipal Judge for the City of Huntsville.

Important Dates:

- April 28 University Awards Gala
- May 1 Annual Faculty-Staff Luncheon and Service Awards
- May 9-10 Spring Commencement Ceremonies
- May 12 May Intersession Classes Begin
- May 26 University Closed for Memorial Day
- June 2 Summer I and Full Summer Session Classes Begin
- June 19 University Closed for Juneteenth Holiday
- July 2 Summer II Session Classes Begin
- July 4 University Closed for Independence Day
- August 1 Summer Commencement Ceremonies

Dena and I wish you the best as we begin to bring closure to this academic year and make plans for the summer. We appreciate all you do for the University of North Alabama!