



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

May 7, 2021

Colleagues: Please see below for important information and updates.

Budget for FY 22: The Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget containing the recommended 16% increase in the state appropriation for UNA has now passed both the Alabama Senate and the Alabama House of Representatives. As approved by the individual chambers, the two versions of the budget were similar enough to avoid the need to convene a conference committee this year. That means that the budget became law upon being signed by Governor Ivey yesterday afternoon. Therefore, I have asked VP Evan Thornton to proceed with preparing a budgetary recommendation for the Board of Trustees for FY 22 that: (1) implements a cost-of-living salary adjustment for faculty and staff; (2) initiates the strategic refilling of some of the positions that were left open this year to help balance the budget; and (3) holds tuition level for the second year in a row. UNA will remain an affordable and high value option for college-bound students in our state and region.

Governmental Relations: There is only one day left in the 2021 legislative session in Montgomery. The comprehensive gaming bill that includes a provision for a state lottery remains in limbo, having been approved by the Alabama Senate but not by the Alabama House of Representatives as of this writing. It seems likely this issue will be revisited by the House on its last official day of business on May 17. We are tracking the progress of that bill closely as the formula for dividing any lottery proceeds would be very important for UNA and the rest of the higher education community. Jay Cochran and our governmental relations team have been active in advocating for plans that would treat the regional campuses equitably and increase scholarship support for our students. Also, different bills that proposed to strengthen or weaken the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act (AMPA) failed to advance this year. This means that AMPA continues as state law without modification. Finally, both House and Senate have passed a bill that would slightly reduce the gap in retirement benefits between Tier I (employment began prior to January 1, 2013) and Tier II (employment began 2013 or after) state employees. That bill now awaits action by Governor Ivey.

Enrollment: Registrations for the upcoming summer terms are currently running well ahead of the record we set in Summer 2020. Similarly, both applications and acceptances of new students for Fall 2021 are up significantly over last year. Even with these robust indicators, however, we are continuing to press hard on recruitment and retention in recognition of the fact that the pandemic has likely altered the landscape of college admissions for the foreseeable future. Like college officials everywhere, we are assessing enrollment patterns to see which of the new student trends will have staying power. We should be encouraged that our smart growth strategy has been very successful and leaves us well-positioned to adapt as necessary. Provost Ross Alexander recently addressed UNA trustees on our prospects for continued enrollment growth in the post-pandemic era. He concluded his assessment by telling the Board, "I like our chances." So do I.

Fountain: The Light the Fountain tradition resumed this year with the celebration held on April 28. My thanks to the staff of Student Affairs and to the LTF Committee for planning festivities that balanced the need to provide students with a great end-of-year event while simultaneously operating within campus health and safety guidelines. I know you join me in thanking VP Thornton and his staff for their efforts to get the fountain ready. Evan continues to work with the contractor to resolve drainage issues in the pedestrian area around the new fountain. We'll get those addressed and will ensure that any additional construction or repair work is completed over the summer months. I also wish to thank VP Kevin Haslam and his team in Advancement for organizing the Legacy Initiative to raise funds for the fountain. To date that project has yielded \$600,000 in gifts and commitments, and there are still naming opportunities available for bricks, marble and bronze plaques, benches, and trees. Visit <https://www.una.edu/legacy/> for details.

COVID Response and Vaccinations: UNA continues to take a leading role in ensuring access to vaccinations for our campus and surrounding community. All faculty and staff that wished to be vaccinated have now had that opportunity, and in recent weeks we have extended the invitation to include our students in keeping with CDC and ADPH guidelines. In addition to the clinics already completed, we have 11 more scheduled over the next few months. Our weekly count of confirmed cases this spring has declined from a January high of 78 to much smaller numbers of late. Last week we had 12 total cases on campus, and this week the number is down to 4. These are very manageable numbers that bode well for our plan to move "closer to normal" with operations for the upcoming academic year.

Commencement: Spring commencement will be held today and tomorrow with six total ceremonies planned in accordance with continuing campus guidance on social distancing. Our guest speakers include: Helen Keller Hospital President Kyle Buchanan (Friday evening); UNA alumna, trustee, and pharmaceutical executive Anne Whitaker (Saturday morning); and Bank Independent President Macke Mauldin (Saturday afternoon). Our graduating class will be in excess of 900 students, a new record for UNA. The size of that class creates an enrollment challenge as we have that many more seats to fill for the upcoming academic year, but at the same time this is an unqualified good for our region and state as these students leave our campus to begin careers and contribute to their communities.

While this will be my last communique of the spring, as the summer progresses I promise to provide an update on indicators for fall enrollment, health conditions in our state and region, and any other important developments for UNA. Until then, please know that Dena and I thank you for helping us navigate the 2020-2021 academic year. And what a year it's been! Working together, we met the many challenges posed by the pandemic and kept this University moving ahead. That's an accomplishment of which we can all be very proud. Best wishes to each of you for a healthy and enjoyable summer, and Roar Lions!