



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

December 1, 2022

Colleagues: I hope this note finds you well. Please see below for important campus updates and information.

Enrollment: With the record-breaking news from fall census still fresh on our minds, I am pleased to report that the enrollment indicators for Spring 2023 are very promising. Currently, we are up by double digit percentages in both headcount and credit hour production for the spring term. Indicators for next fall are even more preliminary; however, the early signs for enrollment in the next academic year are encouraging as well. Our weekly tracking comparisons and year-over-year data show us up in both new student applications and acceptances for Fall 2023. Provost Ross Alexander, his COAD team, and the many other faculty and staff who oversee our enrollment efforts on a daily basis continue to do an amazing job. At the same time, maintaining robust enrollment remains everyone's responsibility. From Facilities to Financial Aid, and from Academic Affairs to Student Engagement, we are succeeding when others are not because of the great teamwork going on at UNA. Thank you!

Pine Street: Pedestrian safety on Pine Street is a priority concern for this administration. As the University continues to grow, the need for action on this busy thoroughfare will only become more important. The challenge for UNA leaders is that, although Pine Street bisects our campus, the road itself belongs to the City of Florence and is thus under the jurisdiction of municipal officials. We have met with City officials on several occasions to discuss this topic. The jointly appointed Florence-UNA Town-Gown Committee has also identified Pine Street safety as a priority concern. Steps currently under consideration include traffic calming measures for the portion of Pine Street between Irvine Avenue (adjacent to Norton Auditorium) and West Lelia Street (over the hill to the north of Olive Hall), the installation of sidewalk safety rails and/or fencing on the bridge over Circular Drive, and the creation of a better pedestrian underpass in the area between LaGrange Hall and Flowers Hall. City leaders have told us they understand the urgency of this matter for our campus, and we hope to see movement on these safety enhancements in the near future.

State Budget: The Educational Trust Fund (ETF) budget remains very healthy as we begin to look toward the 2023 legislative session. We believe the available funds give state officials the opportunity to bring UNA to equity without taking money away from other institutions. We have already had three meetings, including one yesterday in Montgomery, to make our case before key state officials and are scheduled to have several more in the next two months. A good outcome in the upcoming budgetary deliberations will be important in allowing us to fund capital needs, finalize plans for a COLA for Fall 2023, and fill open positions on a strategic basis. Please remember that the legislative session begins and ends later in the spring, as this is the first year of the new quadrennium following the 2022 elections.

COLA: I have asked Vice President Evan Thornton to prioritize an across-the-board raise for employees in the budgetary plan he will submit to the Board of Trustees for the next fiscal year. It is important to me and my colleagues on the Executive Council that we continue with these periodic increases to help offset increases in the cost of living and to show our appreciation for the great work going on across our campus.

Please keep in mind that the state of Alabama does not include higher education employees in the blanket COLAs announced for “state employees.” Instead, higher education institutions are required to fund these raises out of institutional funds. With support from the UNA Board, we were able to implement an across-the-board salary increase last fall, which brings our cumulative increase over the last six years to 8.5%. This number compares favorably to other universities in our state. Moreover, the COLA history does not reflect the other types of salary increases (promotion in rank, staff merit pay, move to midpoint adjustments, full professor merit pay, etc.) that we have fully funded each year, even during the worst of the pandemic. While not as broadly based as a COLA, these special increases typically end up benefitting almost half of the individuals in our faculty and staff ranks in any given year.

Governmental Relations: With the midterm elections behind us, we now know the official results in the state and federal races that determine our representation in Montgomery and Washington, DC. The redistricting process undertaken by the state last year resulted in our campus moving into a new State House district, a new State Senate district, and a new U.S. Congressional district as well. Representative Kerry Underwood will represent our campus in the Alabama House as part of District 3. Senator Tim Melson will represent our campus in the Alabama Senate as part of District 1. And in the U.S. House, UNA will now be represented by Representative Robert Aderholt as part of the 4th Congressional District. Significantly, all three of these officials are alumni of UNA. In addition to these district-level changes, we will be working to prioritize UNA issues with all area lawmakers as well as with newly elected U.S. Senator Katie Britt who, together with continuing Senator Tommy Tuberville, will represent Alabama in the upper chamber of Congress.

SACSCOC: Last month, we received a very encouraging preliminary report from our Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee at the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. None of the areas identified for follow-up by the committee fall under the heading of core requirements, and we are already in the process of bringing together additional information to fill in gaps in our report in anticipation of the on-site review which is set for March 13-16, 2023. With that date being less than four months away, it is important that we all help our SACSCOC principals on campus – Dr. Joy Borah, Dr. Lorie Johnson, and Dr. Chris Klein – with any requests for information or assistance as we prepare for this important visit.

Important Dates:

- Friday, December 2: Beginning of Final Exams (End December 7)
- Wednesday, December 7: Annual Santa Party for Children at the President’s Home
- Friday, December 9: Winter Commencement Ceremonies for ACONHP and COEHS
- Saturday, December 10: Winter Commencement Ceremonies for CASE and COBT
- Monday, December 12: Start of Winter Session (Ends December 30)
- Friday, December 16: Christmas Break Begins at Close of Business that Afternoon
- Tuesday, January 3: University Reopens for Spring Semester
- Wednesday, January 11: Classes Begin for Spring 2023

Dena and I extend our very best wishes to you and hope that you and your families have a safe and enjoyable holiday season. Thank you for all you do for the University of North Alabama!