



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

January 26, 2022

Colleagues: Please see below for important updates and information.

Enrollment: As we mark the completion of the first three weeks of classes for spring term, enrollment indicators are very encouraging. With census date still many weeks away, we are tracking significant increases over last year in both headcount (up 6.8%) and credit hour production (up 2.3%). We will add to current totals when the second eight-week session begins in March, which places us on track to eclipse the 8,000-student mark for the first time ever in a spring semester. Special thanks to Provost Ross Alexander and the team in Enrollment Management for overseeing this great performance. More good news awaits. Freshman applications for Fall 2022 are currently running 11% ahead of last year. Those numbers, coupled with continued strong growth in the graduate and online sectors, should extend our streak of consecutive semesters with record enrollment into the next academic year.

VPSA Position: Dr. Kimberly Greenway has announced her intent to retire as Vice President for Student Affairs effective June 1, 2022. I wish to take this opportunity to publicly thank Dr. Greenway for her extraordinary service to UNA. As many of you know, Dr. Greenway had initially retired from UNA in 2017 as Director of Student Conduct and Student Affairs Assessment. She subsequently accepted my invitation to return as VPSA the following year in what was expected to be an interim role lasting for a fixed term of two years. However, arrival of the pandemic in 2020 altered those plans, and she agreed to extend her service by an additional two years to coordinate our campus response to the COVID-19 threat. The results of her efforts on that issue and others speak for themselves, and we all owe Dr. Greenway our thanks for a job well done. We are putting final touches on a search to identify her successor as VPSA and will soon have information to share regarding that process.

Pandemic: I encourage everyone to continue paying close attention to the COVID-19 campus updates shared periodically by Dr. Greenway. Her most recent update of January 21 notes the decline in the number of confirmed cases in Alabama. That trend continues with the Alabama Department of Public Health showing total cases in our state being down by half compared to the Omicron peak reached two weeks ago. To be sure, challenges remain as the positivity rate and hospitalization rate (a lag indicator) remain high. However, many health care experts believe we are beginning to turn the corner with the Omicron surge and can look forward to better days ahead. Until we can be sure those better days have arrived, our message remains the same: get vaccinated, exercise common sense in public spaces, and follow campus guidance if you experience symptoms or are diagnosed with COVID.

State Budget: The Alabama Legislature has convened in Montgomery for its 2022 session. The executive budget released on January 12 recommends an increase of \$3.5 million in the state appropriation for UNA in FY 23. While we welcome any increase, the proposed amount does not close the gap that continues to separate us from peer state schools of similar size, scope, and mission. We believe there are enough surplus dollars available (ETF revenue is up 14% over last year) in the education budget to advance UNA closer to our goal of equity without taking funds away from other institutions. It is important to understand the executive budget as a recommendation – albeit an important one – in the budgetary process, and with that in mind we are now fully engaged with lawmakers in the House and Senate in hopes of getting additional funds added to the state portion of our budget before decisions are finalized.

SACSCOC: We received good news yesterday that a key committee from SACSCOC, our regional accrediting body, has supported our request for a degree level change necessary for the University to begin conferring doctoral degrees. The committee’s review of our new PhD program in Exercise Science was very complimentary, which sets the stage for final action by the SACSCOC Board of Trustees at its meeting in June. Our other new doctoral program, the Executive Doctor of Business Administration, was approved by the SACSCOC Board in June 2021 and has now successfully completed a required follow-up review. These are all very positive developments, and we thank the faculty, staff, and administrators from within Academic Affairs, the College of Business and Technology, and the College of Education and Human Sciences who have helped us reach these important milestones in the evolution of our University. Finally, this update serves as a good opportunity to remind everyone that we are scheduled for our decennial SACSCOC reaffirmation review in 2023. The site visit for that University-wide review will take place next spring, and I am pleased to report that we are on schedule with the process of assembling documentation and writing reports to demonstrate our compliance with accreditation standards in anticipation of that visit.

Fundraising Success: VP Kevin Haslam and the leadership of the UNA Foundation recently announced a milestone of their own with notice that the University’s total endowment has eclipsed the \$50 million mark for the first time in our history. To put that number in some perspective, UNA didn’t even have a Foundation until 1980, and ten years ago our total endowment was less than \$25 million. To have doubled that figure in so short a time speaks volumes about the commitment of our alumni and friends – as well as the many faculty and staff who give so generously to support our students and programs. Moreover, giving in the first quarter of FY 22 was so robust that we can already project this as a banner year for giving to the University of North Alabama. These reports come at a very opportune time as we quietly plan for the next Advancement campaign. While Mr. Haslam and his team are not yet ready to talk publicly about goals or an overall target figure, I can tell you that this recent fundraising success has encouraged us to aim high when we think about the contours of that upcoming campaign. We owe our students no less.

Dena and I hope you find this information useful and are encouraged by the successes described herein. It’s a great time to be at the University of North Alabama, and we appreciate all you do to make this a great place to live, work, and study. Roar Lions!