



President's Communique

Dr. Ken Kitts

May 8, 2024

Colleagues: Please see below for important updates from the University of North Alabama.

Legislative Session: The Alabama House and Senate have now completed work on the education budget for FY 25, inclusive of the annual appropriations for UNA and all other public universities in the state. We entered those deliberations in good shape with a recommended funding increase of 8.87% courtesy of the Governor's budget that was released at the start of the session. I am pleased to report that both chambers concurred in that recommendation. Our percentage increase is the second highest of any university in Alabama and continues the progress we have been making in closing the funding gap that separates us from our peers. The only step that remains in this process is for the Governor to sign the budget into law this week. We are grateful to the Governor and her staff, our local legislative delegation, and the leadership of the Education Trust Fund committees for this successful outcome.

Federal Government: We received very good news last month when President Biden approved the portion of the federal spending bill for FY 24 that contains an appropriation of \$13 million for UNA to assist with construction of a new STEM/Engineering building. That request was placed into the spending bill by Congressman Robert Aderholt and comes on top of a \$3 million appropriation he was able to secure for us last year for the same purpose. UNA is the only four-year university in the Congressman's district (AL-04), and we remain very appreciative of his strong advocacy for this project. *Significantly, this represents the largest single appropriation of federal dollars for UNA in our history.* It also underscores our determination to find new sources of funding to limit University borrowing, to avoid unnecessary increases in student tuition and fees, and to compliment the success of our Progress 208 efforts at the state level.

Construction Projects: Work on the new Computing and Mathematics Building is on schedule and should allow for move-in to begin in June with a formal opening to follow in August. By early fall, we should be able to begin work on a new residential facility to replace LaGrange Hall (and on that same tract of land). That project, along with the initial phase of construction of Bank Independent Stadium, will keep work crews busy during the coming academic year while we finalize funding for the STEM/Engineering Building that will represent our next major undertaking. Beyond that, we are building a reserve account to address pressing facility needs for our programs in Music and Art. We plan to approach both state and federal officials in the coming months with an ambitious request for matching dollars to complete the funding necessary to assist in this work.

HB129/SB129: Minnette Ellis and Jay Cochran are taking the lead for the Executive Council in ensuring compliance with the new Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI) legislation that was signed into law in March. They have analyzed the text of the legislation, consulted with state officials and their counterparts at other institutions, and hosted several meetings with stakeholder groups at UNA to discuss these recent developments. A recurring theme from these discussions is that the decision to decentralize our diversity efforts -- a move which began in 2022 -- has served our campus well and has already moved us into substantial alignment with the new law. As we work to make any additional changes that might be necessary, we can and will remain committed to ensuring a welcoming environment for all members of the UNA family. We will also continue to implement our new "Pride in the Gold Standard" strategic plan for the University, key portions of which focus on recruiting and assisting students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Provost: Dr. Brien Smith will arrive on campus next week to begin work as our new Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. Brien will use the summer months to meet people, understand our campus culture, and learn about our programs. I have already been in touch with him about transitional matters, and his introduction to UNA is being further facilitated by Dr. Katie Kinney (interim Provost for AY 2023-24), Ms. Minnette Ellis (chair of the Provost Search Advisory Committee), the Provost's direct reports on the Council of Academic Deans (COAD), and staff in the Office of Academic Affairs. While Provost Smith will be able to meet many faculty and staff over the next few months, we will still make good on our commitment to provide time for all of campus to welcome Brien and his wife, Sherri, to UNA at the beginning of the fall semester.

Enrollment: The outlook for our upcoming summer terms is encouraging with increases projected in both headcount (+3%) and credit hour production (+5%) over the previous year. The projection for the upcoming fall semester is also encouraging. Preregistration of upper division students continues even as we get ready to welcome new students to campus through our summer SOAR orientation program. If current indicators hold, we are on track to reach new enrollment milestones. At the same time, I will reiterate our commitment to ensure that this growth is sustainable and does not overshadow the equally impressive gains we are making with new markers of excellence and in promoting the quality and value of our academic programs.

Bank Independent Stadium: At its March meeting, the UNA Board of Trustees voted to authorize preliminary steps necessary for the construction of Bank Independent Stadium next to Flowers Hall. Our current focus is on developing a new turf practice field on Cox Creek Parkway adjacent to the Hilda B. Anderson Softball Facility. This new field will become the permanent practice field for the Marching Pride. It will also provide additional space for student intramurals and will help meet the practice needs of our athletic programs in soccer and football. A four-lane track will surround the site for campus use. This, in turn, will allow us to begin work at the stadium site. Please check the website at <https://una.edu/bistadium> for additional details on this project. We remain grateful for the generous private gifts that are funding this project and allowing us to move forward with this long-overdue addition to campus life at UNA.

Leo III: It's been a sad week with the passing of our beloved lion, Leo III. Dena and I have felt this loss acutely as we live next door to the George H. Carroll Habitat. When we arrived at UNA in 2015, the Habitat was a busy place with two very active lions in addition to constant work going on by long-time caregivers Dan and Anne Howard. Now it's quiet there for the first time in over two decades. As for the future, we will have additional information to share on this topic in the late fall – and with that timeline in mind, it is worth remembering that almost three years passed between the death of Leo II in 2000 and the arrival of Leo III and Una in late 2002. We are planning a public event for November to celebrate and commemorate Anne, Dan, Leo III, and Una. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the veterinarians and caregivers who helped provide an outstanding level of care for our lions.

Important Dates:

- May 10-11 Spring Commencement Ceremonies
- May 13 May Intersession Classes Begin
- May 27 University Closed for Memorial Day
- June 4 Summer I and Full Summer Session Classes Begin
- June 19 University Closed for Juneteenth Holiday
- July 3 Summer II Session Classes Begin
- July 4 University Closed for Independence Day
- August 3 Summer Commencement Ceremonies

Dena and I hope you have a very enjoyable summer and send our heartfelt thanks for all you do for UNA.