



## President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

May 4, 2022

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**Colleagues:** Please see below for updates on issues of importance to our campus community.

**Budget:** The 2022 state legislative session ended last month, and we recorded another strong finish in Montgomery. Our University will receive an increase of 12.8%, which translates into just over \$5 million, in new recurring funding for the next fiscal year that begins on October 1. Our total state appropriation has grown from \$28.1 million when we launched Project 208 in FY 17 to \$45.1 million for FY 23. In comparative terms, the gap that separates us from the peer institution closest to us in funding has now been cut from \$10 million to roughly half that amount. Even so, it is unconscionable that any deficit of this magnitude continues to exist. Our commitment is that we will continue to exert a full court press on state officials next year and beyond in an effort to achieve funding parity for UNA.

**Enrollment:** We have continued to set enrollment records and celebrated the crossing of the 8,000-student mark for the first time ever in a spring term. With the start of summer sessions just around the corner, we are running 4% ahead of last summer with both projected headcount and credit hour production. For fall semester, we are up significantly in both freshman applications and acceptances. Provost Alexander and I believe we will see increases in all major categories of students this fall – undergraduate and graduate, on-campus and online, domestic and international – with final headcount exceeding 9,000 students for the first time in our history. Our smart growth strategy continues to pay dividends in generating great enrollment outcomes that fit with our campus identity and maturation as an institution.

**VPSA Position:** In January, I shared news of Dr. Kimberly Greenway's intent to retire as Vice President for Student Affairs effective on June 1. Since that time, we have organized a comprehensive national search to identify her successor. The search committee, led by VP Evan Thornton, conducted Zoom interviews last month with ten candidates and from that arrived at recommendations for three highly qualified finalists to visit campus. We are on schedule to complete this search on time and, as always, my final decision on this important position will be informed by the feedback received from key stakeholder groups in this process.

**Commencement:** Spring graduation ceremonies will occur on Friday and Saturday of this week. On Friday, May 6, we will welcome alumna Jacque Rainwater as our guest speaker for the two ceremonies that focus on the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions and the College of Education and Human Sciences. On Saturday, May 7, we will welcome Alabama Supreme Court Justice Sarah Stewart as our guest speaker for the three ceremonies dedicated to the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering and the College of Business and Technology. In total, we expect to graduate over 900 students this weekend, with almost 800 of them participating in one of the five ceremonies.

**Pandemic Response:** The number of COVID cases on campus remains very low. In January, the University was averaging over 200 cases per week. Those numbers declined sharply in February and have been at five or fewer weekly cases for the past two months. Similarly, the state's positivity rate remains very low at 3.6%, and the number of COVID hospitalizations statewide is trending downward with a current number of 65. Dr. Greenway's message to campus of April 22 contains additional information on this topic. We owe Dr. Greenway and her colleagues on our COVID-19 Recovery Task Force a debt of gratitude for helping us navigate the many challenges posed by the pandemic over the last two years. Please join me in thanking that team for a job well done!

**Elections:** Unlike other states, Alabama does not stagger election terms, which means that in 2022 we will elect our Governor, Lieutenant Governor, other constitutional officers, all 35 members of the Alabama Senate, and all 105 members of the Alabama House of Representatives. Each of these offices carries a four-year term. Federal mid-term elections for Congress also occur this year. (Local municipal elections operate on a different schedule.) Primary elections for state races are set for May 24, any primary runoffs necessary will be held on June 21, and then the general election will occur on November 8. It is important to note that these are the state officials who determine funding for UNA and who set the statutory framework that governs public higher education in Alabama. Accordingly, I encourage you to educate yourself on Project 208 (contact Jason Cochran if you need information on this topic) and act accordingly as an informed citizen and member of the UNA campus community.

**Athletics:** This spring marks the end of the four-year transition that is mandated by the NCAA for institutions reclassifying to Division I. For each of the past three years, we have successfully completed a series of prescribed steps necessary to advance to the next stage in this process. We feel confident in a similarly positive outcome at the conclusion of this final year. The NCAA sent a five-member peer review team to visit our campus in March to meet with key stakeholders and evaluate our operations in light of our athletic self-study. This team consisted of a peer Division I president, athletic director, senior woman administrator, and two members from the NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis. I am pleased to report that the peer team visit went very well and resulted in a favorable recommendation back to the NCAA. The final vote on our active membership in Division I should occur later in the summer. Please join me in thanking AD Looney and his staff as well as Dr. Eric Kirkman and the other members of our D1 Transition Committee for helping get us to this point.

In closing, I would like to take a moment of personal privilege and commend EC member Ron Patterson, our Vice President for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, on the recent completion of his doctorate through Creighton University. Congratulations to all those on our campus who have recently completed degrees, added other work-related credentials, or achieved employment milestones or professional recognition.

I will provide updates on campus developments over the summer months, as needed. In the meantime, please know that Dena and I thank you for helping to make this another great year for our students and our University. We hope you are able to find opportunities this summer to relax and enjoy time with family and friends. The new academic year will be here before we know it, and with it we will have the opportunity to build on our proud tradition of educational excellence. Roar Lions!