



President's Communique

Dr. Ken Kitts

January 22, 2025

Colleagues: Please see below for important information and updates on developments of interest for our campus community.

Governmental Relations: This will be an unusually active spring for us in terms of governmental relations. At the federal level, there is a new presidential administration and a new Congress in Washington coupled with one party control of the House of Representatives, Senate, and White House for the first time in five years. Accordingly, we are prepared to monitor developments in the nation's capital on issues such as Title IX, federal financial aid for higher education, and new legislation dealing with college athletics. At the state level, the legislative session will soon begin in Montgomery -- see below for more details on that topic. At the local level, we are just over six months away from elections for the positions of mayor and city council in Florence and the other municipalities that make up our immediate service region. Candidates are already beginning to organize campaigns and highlight issues of importance. The outcomes of these local elections are important due to their impact on town-gown relations and on our prospects for being able to make additional progress on projects such as safety enhancements on the municipal roadways that run through campus.

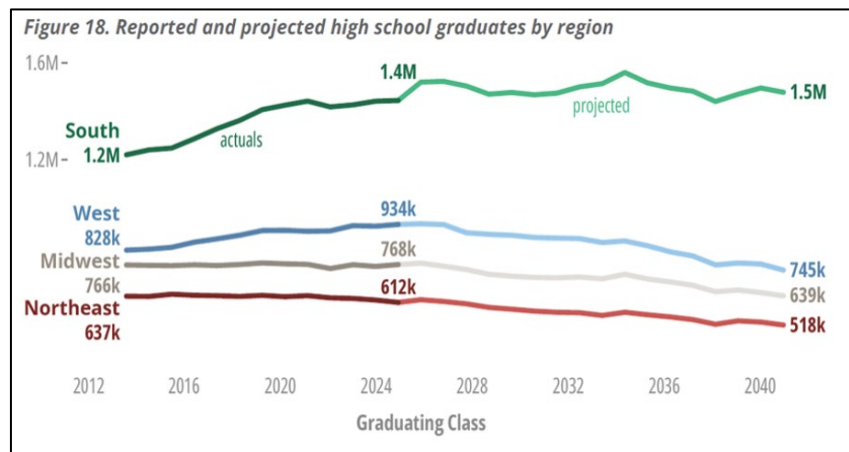
Legislative Session: The 2025 session of the Alabama Legislature will begin on Tuesday, February 4. Jay Cochran, our governmental relations specialist, is monitoring all legislation introduced and is alerting officials on campus when proposals arise that could have a bearing on University operations. As noted in my previous communications, we are already engaged with state officials regarding our budgetary status and needs for FY 26. The House of Representatives remains under the leadership of Speaker Nathaniel Ledbetter of DeKalb County. The Senate will have a new leader this year as Garlan Gudger of Cullman assumes the role of President Pro Tempore of that body. All funding for higher education flows through the Education Trust Fund. There is some concern about declining balances in that fund due to tax cuts enacted last year as well as costs associated with recent policy decisions. My purpose here is not to argue for or against those enactments. It is the prerogative of our elected officials to legislate as they think appropriate. Even so, decisions carry financial implications, and the year-to-year decline in ETF revenues creates additional challenges as we seek to further narrow the funding gap that separates UNA from its peers of similar size, scope, and mission.

Campus Development West of Pine Street: Work crews from UNA Facilities recently cleared the hillside adjacent to Cedar Street and Waterloo Road. The next step at that site will be to create better pathways to make it easier for our students and other pedestrians to walk from areas behind Flowers Hall and the Burford Science and Technology Building up to the Intramural Field, fraternity housing, parking lot W, and parking lot WW (recently completed as an addition to our parking inventory). Given the close proximity of those areas to the center of campus – the two parking lots are less than a quarter of a mile from the GUC – we will continue to look for ways to enhance the appeal of “West Village” at UNA. It makes sense to bring that area more into the mainstream of our campus life and list of parking options. As this topic relates to Greek life at UNA, it is worth noting that Fraternity and Sorority Life (FSL) accounts for 11.2% of our undergraduate population. Last fall, the average GPA for our Greek students was 3.27, a mark that exceeds that of the general student body, with 20% of FSL members earning a 4.0 GPA in the fall term.

Alumni Recognition: Our alumni make us proud every day for their good work and for the positive attention they bring to UNA through their accomplishments. Two recent alumni transitions warrant special mention here as they involve graduates who have worked on the national stage. Earlier this month, Sonceria Ann Berry (BS '78, Education) wrapped up four years of service as Secretary of the U.S. Senate. Mrs. Berry made history in 2021

with her appointment to this role, becoming the first African-American and only the eighth woman to hold the title of Secretary of the U.S. Senate in the 235-year history of that office. Col. Juan R. Santiago Jr. (BA '01, Political Science and Spanish) retired last week from his position as Director of the Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site. Col. Santiago received his commission through UNA's ROTC Program "Lion Battalion" and concludes his service to the Army and RTS with many accolades including the Bronze Star Medal with 2 oak leaf clusters and the Army Commendation Medal.

WICHE Report: Over the recent holiday break, a report released by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) titled "*Knocking on the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates, 2024*" received significant national media coverage. This publication, which is updated every four years, is an important and reliable source of information about long-term enrollment trends in higher education. The tone of this year's report – see chart below – is sobering as demographers predict an overall decline of 13% in the number of high school graduates in the U.S. between now and 2041. However, there is significant variation in regional patterns. The South fares better than the rest of the country with a projected 2% increase during the same period. But even in the South, a 2% rate of increase over almost two decades represents a low rate of growth. The



competition among universities to recruit well-prepared high school graduates promises to become even more pronounced in coming years. I will have more to say on this topic in the months ahead. For now, I'm sharing this as information that everyone in higher education should be tracking. I offer it with my belief that we remain in good shape at UNA. If we continue to work together and follow our plan, we can weather this demographic trough and maintain a robust enrollment profile.

Bicentennial: This January marks our 195th anniversary as an institution of higher education and gives us bragging rights as Alabama's oldest four-year university. Significantly, the passage of this year's anniversary also kicks off the five-year countdown to our University's bicentennial, which will formally occur on January 11, 2030. Only fourteen public universities in the country have reached their own bicentennial ahead of us. So, this will be – and should be – a very significant event in the life of our University. It deserves more than a passing mention in 2030. With that in mind, I intend to work with shared governance leaders to establish a Bicentennial Planning Committee to create a schedule for a multi-year celebration for UNA which will begin this year and culminate in 2030. The committee will have the prerogative to identify themes we want to highlight over the next few years and also recommend special events at key intervals to help build excitement for our bicentennial. The goal is to mark this milestone appropriately and ensure that UNA is acknowledged for its rich history, service to the people of Alabama and surrounding areas, and strong tradition of educational excellence.

Important Dates:

- February 21-23 University Closed for Winter Break
- February 27 Last Day of Class for First Eight Week Session
- March 5 Classes Begin for Second Eight Week Session
- March 13 Light the Fountain Ceremony
- March 24-30 University Closed for Spring Break
- March 31 Registration for Fall 2025 Begins

Dena and I appreciate you and send our best wishes for a great semester. Stay warm, Lions!