



## President's Communique

Dr. Ken Kitts

September 19, 2024

---

**Colleagues:** I hope the new academic year is off to a great start for you. Please see below for important information and updates.

**Facilities:** It's a busy time for construction at UNA. The beautiful new Computing and Mathematics Building is open for classes with an official ceremony to be held later this semester to thank all of those who had a hand in bringing this addition to our campus. LaGrange Hall has now been demolished, and we will begin construction later this semester on a new residence facility to replace it with a planned opening in Fall 2026. Elsewhere, we are moving into the planning stage for a new STEM/Engineering Building made possible by two large federal appropriations directed by Congressman Robert Aderholt. In Athletics, the new practice field on Cox Creek is complete. Work on Bank Independent Stadium is well underway next to Flowers Hall. We hope to have the baseball portion of the stadium ready for play by March of 2025 and the soccer/football portion of the complex ready by the start of the Fall 2026 semester and sports season.

**Music and Fine Arts:** With many of the projects noted above already underway or nearing completion, the next long-term capital project we wish to highlight is a much-needed new facility to replace the aging buildings that house our outstanding programs in Music and Art. Over the last five years, we have considered various options for facility design and funding sources – none of which have proven viable or satisfactory. Accordingly, I intend to work with Provost Smith, leaders from CASE and the School of the Arts, and our Shared Governance leadership to empanel a Work Group to Enhance Music and Fine Arts. The goal of this exercise is to come up with a final facility plan acceptable to all and then to focus on a financial strategy to bring this project to fruition. EC member Jay Cochran is already beginning to engage with state and federal officials to see what funding options might exist to support this project in light of its alignment with regional economic development goals and the rich musical and artistic heritage of the Shoals.

**Enrollment:** Final numbers compiled last month confirm that we set another enrollment record for summer sessions during 2024. We are still some weeks away from having the final tally for this fall semester due to late reporting off-campus programs and the start of the second eight-week session of classes. Even so, the indicators are positive for continuing gains at a rate consistent with our desire for smart, sustainable growth that respects our institutional identity. We expect final fall enrollment to come in at around 10,600 students. Of special note, our undergraduate numbers are especially healthy this fall. That bodes well for our FTE count and credit hour production.

**DEI Law:** During the 2024 legislative session, much attention in Montgomery revolved around Senate Bill 129. This bill was passed into law as Act 2024-34 and governs the way that state universities in Alabama handle the organizational infrastructure of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The new law takes effect on October 1. It has already resulted in several of our sister institutions announcing moves to dismantle large DEI divisions on their campuses. We did not have to follow suit, as we had already transitioned away from the divisional model for DEI in 2022 – a move taken then not because of any state directive but rather in response to stakeholder feedback about how best to promote efficiency and good service to our students. This new approach to diversity at UNA has worked well. It has allowed us to continue to serve students from a wide variety of backgrounds and to provide a welcoming campus environment for all members of the UNA family while also bringing us into compliance with the new state law. Please feel free to contact EC member Minnette Ellis if you have questions about Act 2024-34 or would like to schedule an information session on this topic.

**Local Government:** Next summer, voters in Florence and other Shoals-area municipalities will go to the polls to choose city council members and mayors for the next four years. The results of those elections will be important for determining the course of town-gown relations on issues ranging from roads and pedestrian safety to financial support for mutually beneficial projects. UNA has a permanent presence in most of the council districts in Florence. District 1 includes the McKinney Center, SCOBT’s College Street Building, Flowers Hall, Bank Independent Stadium, the intramural field, Greek housing, and some of the residence halls on the northern end of campus. District 2 includes most of the main UNA campus from the Harrison Entrance extending north and east, and it also encompasses the downtown areas that are home to our School of the Arts, Department of Entertainment Industry, and the Mane Room. District 4 includes the East Campus maintenance and shop complex, the Institute for Learning in Retirement, and the COEHS Regional Inservice Center. District 5 includes the Hilda B. Anderson Softball Complex, the new turf practice field, and the beach volleyball courts. Beyond these permanent facilities, UNA faculty, staff, and students live in all parts of the city as well as in the other communities that make up the Shoals. Our total economic impact on the region is approximately \$400 million per year. We feature one of the largest payrolls in the area, and we recruit thousands of students to this area. In addition to studying here, these “unique visitors” live here for nine months out of the year. They also eat here, shop here, and play here. As we look ahead to these local elections, it is vitally important that we pay close attention to candidate positions regarding issues of importance for our campus community

**Lions:** Leo III’s passing in May coincided with the end of the 2023-24 academic year. Working with the Shared Governance Executive Committee, I appointed a Special Committee on Live Lions to look at all facets of this question, inclusive of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) standards which have changed significantly over the last two decades. Appointments to this panel were made by elected leaders of constituent bodies in the shared governance system. My charge to the committee reads: *“The goal of this undertaking is for the SCLL to advise University and Board officials on the advisability of continuing the live lion tradition at UNA. If this review results in consensus for a recommendation to acquire new lions, the committee may suggest conditions and highlight considerations that warrant special attention. If there is consensus for a recommendation against continuing the live lion tradition, the committee may suggest other ways that the University can remain meaningfully connected to the species and continue to promote lion education.”* Please monitor upcoming editions of the Campus Digest for a list of members of the SCLL as well as for opportunities to provide input into the committee’s work.

**Strategic Plan:** Last December, the UNA Board of Trustees approved our new *Pride in the Gold Standard* strategic plan. As we look ahead to the one-year anniversary of the plan’s inception, I want to take this opportunity to remind campus that construction of this plan was a transparent and labor-intensive exercise. The members of the Strategic Plan Steering Committee, led by Dr. Jessica Stovall and Dr. Laura Williams as co-chairs, did an excellent job of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to identify core themes. Consequently, the plan reflects our institutional values and outlines our aspirations in key areas such as student-centric excellence, sustainable growth, and community engagement. To make sure we validate that hard work, and to ensure that the document functions as a roadmap for our development, I have asked Minnette Ellis to coordinate oversight of the plan’s implementation and to work closely with Provost Smith and other key campus leaders in this endeavor. As a continuing member of the Executive Council, Minnette carries the new title of “Executive Director for University Priorities” in recognition of her work in this area.

**Dena and I thank you for all you do for the University of North Alabama. Roar Lions!**

**Important Dates:**

- October 1                      Deadline for Students to Apply for Fall Graduation
- October 9                      Last Day of Classes and Final Exams for First 8-Week Session
- October 10                     Midterm
- October 10-12                Homecoming Events (Parade and Homecoming Game on Saturday, Oct. 12)
- October 11                     Second 8-Week Session Begins
- October 18-20                University Closed for Fall Break
- October 28                     Registration Begins for Spring 2025