



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

November 21, 2025

Colleagues: Please see below for updates on topics of interest as we enter the last few weeks of the Fall 2025 semester at UNA.

Enrollment: Since my last communicate, we reached census date in excellent shape, posting another enrollment record with final headcount of 10,732 (+1.05%) and final credit hour production of 105,510 (+1.44%) for Fall 2025. Our sustained enrollment growth over the last decade has moved UNA from the bottom half of Alabama's public universities in size to #6 out of 14 on that list. Looking ahead to next year, interest from prospective students is growing. We are trending upward in applications and acceptances for the incoming class of Fall 2026. Speaking of that class, the students who enter in Fall 2026 and finish in the traditional four years will graduate in Spring 2030 – our bicentennial year! We're making sure that prospective students understand they have an opportunity to become part of UNA's bicentennial story as we approach this historically important milestone.

Fall Commencement: Graduation ceremonies for fall semester will take place on December 12 and 13. On Friday, December 12, there will be two evening ceremonies for graduates of the Anderson College of Nursing and Health Professions and the Sanders College of Business and Technology. Melissa Armstead (UNA '06, '22), Chief Nursing Officer for North Alabama Medical Center, will serve as guest speaker for those ceremonies. On Saturday, December 13, we will host three ceremonies to recognize graduates of the College of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering and the College of Education and Human Sciences. Music industry executive John Briggs (UNA '83) will serve as guest speaker for all three of those ceremonies as we continue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Department of Entertainment Industry.

Progress 208: Our series of meetings with state budget officials has already begun as we look ahead to the 2026 legislative session. The upcoming session will start on January 13 – earlier than usual due to the state election cycle -- and we should find out what the Governor's budget recommends for UNA around that time. In putting together this year's presentation for the lawmakers, we uncovered several impressive data points that deserve a mention:

- Due to the increase in scholarship support provided by the University and our donors, the average loan amount for UNA students has decreased from \$6,351 in 2018 to \$5,291 in 2025. Adjusted for inflation, that's a decrease of 46% in loans over the last seven years. This outcome speaks volumes about UNA's affordability, and it runs directly counter to the national narrative about growing student indebtedness and out-of-control college costs.
- The number of degrees awarded annually at UNA increased from 1,269 in 2015 to 2,227 in 2024. The resulting percentage increase of 75% compares favorably with the state average of 28% across the same time period. Put another way, over the last decade UNA has been responsible for 10% of the increase in college degrees awarded statewide in Alabama.

Suffice it to say that we are highlighting both of these points to underscore that UNA represents an excellent return on the state's investment in our educational mission.

New Lion Alert App: If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to download the new Lion Alert 360 app (reference campus emails from Michelle Eubanks on October 28 and November 4). This new application provides greater functionality with which to enhance campus safety. Among the options available on the app are direct warnings from the National Weather Service, a Mobile Blue Light that notifies University Police of your location in case of an emergency, a Call 911 button, and a new Friend Walk feature that allows a designee to monitor your progress when walking alone to a campus destination.

2026 Elections: As noted earlier, next year is important for UNA in determining the slate of lawmakers with whom we will be working for the next quadrennium. All 105 seats for the Alabama House of Representatives and all 35 seats for the Alabama Senate will be on the ballot, as will the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and other statewide constitutional offices including the Attorney General, Secretary of State, and State Auditor. At the federal level, one of Alabama's two seats in the U.S. Senate (the one currently held by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, who has opted to run for Governor instead of seeking reelection to the upper chamber) is in the '26 rotation, and of course all seven seats in Alabama for the U.S. House of Representatives will be on the ballot on a district by district basis. Party primaries for all of these races take place on May 19, with the general election set for November 3.

The Value of a College Degree: Recently there has been a spate of articles in various national media outlets that seek to highlight the "declining value of a college degree." Typically, these stories suggest that the unemployment rate for college graduates is skyrocketing and that high school graduates who forego college and head straight into the workforce have better financial outcomes. The same voices also argue that the time-tested baccalaureate degree is becoming an anachronism due to the advent of artificial intelligence. I find these narratives troubling. Some are nothing more than polemics masquerading as objective analysis. To be sure, our society is changing, and with these changes come dislocations and shifts in employment patterns. But to use this constellation of factors as the basis for an attack on higher education is, at best, disingenuous, and at worst, manipulative and misleading. I will have more to say on this topic in forthcoming communiques. For now, permit me to borrow the famous quote from Mark Twain: "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." So it is with American higher education. A college education is more important now than at any point in our history. We need future leaders who can use technology and understand data – but who also understand the human condition, embrace core values, and have the ability to think critically. At UNA we have responded well to these new order challenges by being responsive and adaptive. Moreover, if our growth is any indication, our students appreciate what we do and how we're doing it. They are coming to our University in record numbers, and they are persisting and graduating in record numbers. We are proving our relevance every single day. Stay tuned for additional thoughts on this important topic.

Santa Party: The annual Santa Party will be held from 3:30-5:00pm on Wednesday, December 3, at the President's Home. While this event revolves around the children of UNA faculty and staff, as well as the students at our Kilby Laboratory School, Dena and I want to extend a special invitation for any young-at-heart members of the UNA family to stop by for a cup of hot chocolate and some holiday cheer. It's always a fun event! If you are planning to attend and haven't already done so, please RSVP to SANTAPARTY@UNA.EDU so we can prepare accordingly.

Important Dates:

- November 26-28 University Closed for Thanksgiving Break
- December 3 Last Day of Classes for Fall Semester
- **December 3** **Santa Party at the President's Home**
- December 5 Final Exams Begin
- December 12-13 Winter Commencement Ceremonies
- December 19 Last Day Offices Are Open
- January 5 University Offices Reopen
- January 7 Spring Semester Classes Begin

Dena and I extend our very best wishes to you and hope that you and your families have a safe and enjoyable holiday season. Thank you for all you do for the University of North Alabama!