



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts
July 2, 2015

As we cross the midpoint of the summer break, I thought this might be a good time to communicate with you on several developments of interest at UNA.

Enrollment: As you know, we've been following enrollment trends for the upcoming fall term very closely. Currently, most key indicators point to an increase in the number of new students (freshman, transfer, and graduate) for this fall term. The freshman indicators are particularly encouraging, and it's possible that our freshman class will move back into the 1,000 plus territory for the first time since 2012. That would be a significant increase over the 931 freshmen who enrolled last year. Our SOAR registrations are at an all-time high and are running 20% ahead of last year. In short, we have reason to feel good about new student enrollment, and I am grateful to all those who have played a role in getting us to this point.

The outlook for overall enrollment is less clear. For every new student at UNA this fall, we will have three students who are not new. A concern here is what I call the "bulge in the boa" effect – that is, clumping of students at various classifications. Currently, students classified as seniors account for 29% of undergraduate enrollment at UNA. That means we are likely to experience larger-than-usual graduating classes for the next few commencement cycles. Until the senior numbers return to a more proportional level, we will be facing a stiff headwind in our efforts to increase overall enrollment.

I have made adjustments to our organizational structure that will allow me to monitor our progress on enrollment more closely. Dr. Vince Brewton, interim Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, has been given new responsibility in his interim role for oversight of the Offices of Admissions, Student Financial Services, and the Registrar. We are currently searching for directors for the Offices of Admissions and Student Financial Services, and it is important that we make the best possible hires for both of those positions. Conducting those searches and ensuring that the offices run smoothly during this period of transition will require a good deal of Dr. Brewton's time. He will report directly to me so I can monitor the progress of our recruitment efforts and provide the necessary level of support and guidance.

Budget: Governor Bentley signed the education budget bill into law on June 2. Our interest throughout this budget-making cycle has been on achieving greater equity for UNA. Currently we rank next to last in per student funding among the fourteen public universities in Alabama. We used that as a talking point with key lawmakers during the recent session.

I am pleased to report that we came out of the legislative session with a net increase in our state appropriation for Fiscal Year 2016. There are still one or two remaining acts in this drama, but our total increase will likely be in the \$1 million range, and our final "ranking" in terms of institutional success in the annual budgetary process will place us either third or fifth (again, depending on the outcome of the decisions that remain) among the fourteen public universities in Alabama. That's a good step in the right direction, but it is clear that we need a series of strong finishes in order to close the funding gap that exists between UNA and our sister institutions in state.

On that note, I encourage each of you to follow developments in Montgomery closely. It seems likely that Governor Bentley will convene a special session of the legislature in August to resolve issues with the General Fund. Decisions on that front could have an impact on the Education Trust Fund and, by extension, on UNA. We are state employees, but we're also taxpayers and citizens. Don't be afraid to make your voice heard in the political process.

Facility Development: Provost Thornell reports that progress is being made with the move of four academic departments --Biology, Chemistry and Industrial Hygiene, Physics and Earth Science, and Engineering Technology -- into the new Science and Technology Building. The opening of that building, coupled with the completion of the two new residence halls (one to open this fall, the other in the spring), will accelerate the transformation in appearance of the north side of campus.

There is more good news to report. Because of the generosity of several key individuals, we are going to be able to begin work on our next capital project, the construction of a new nursing building, during the upcoming academic year. We consulted with these donors, our own facilities team, and outside experts to determine the best site for the new building. Recently, consensus began to emerge around the option of bringing down Floyd Hall and building on that site. The condition of that facility has driven this decision. The structural issues in Floyd are more serious than previously realized, and for that reason it would be difficult to justify investing large sums of money into the renovation of the existing building. Pending review and approval of this plan by the Board of Trustees, we anticipate beginning the demolition of Floyd Hall after the completion of the fall 2015 semester. Work on the new nursing facility would commence soon thereafter.

As we plan for the new nursing building, we pledge to incorporate parking as a major priority in the design work. Some of the options for the area around Floyd could result in a significant increase in parking capacity on our campus. Stay tuned for details as this planning work continues to unfold.

We understand that this decision has implications for the HES Department that continues to call Floyd home, as well as others that had expressed an interest in office and classroom space there. I will be working closely with faculty and staff leaders, deans, and members of the Executive Council to ensure that we do a good job of listening to concerns and achieving a smooth transition for all. At the same time, let's not forget that the receipt of these large gifts and the advent of a new nursing building are very positive developments for UNA. Construction is a sign of progress, and our students will be the primary beneficiaries of these upgrades to campus.

I hope you find this information useful. Please don't hesitate to contact any member of the Executive Council if you have a question or idea on these items or any others that are of interest to our campus community. That officer might have an answer at the ready. If not, we'll take it up at the EC level and get back to you.

Finally, and on a personal note, Dena and I continue to be grateful for the words of welcome and outpouring of support from the UNA family. We feel honored to be here, and our appreciation for this institution and the people who work here grows deeper with each passing day.

Thank you for all you do.

Ken Kitts