



President's Communiqué
Dr. Ken Kitts
November 9, 2015

This has been a great fall semester for the University of North Alabama. As we enter the final period of the term, I would like to provide you with an update on key campus developments and projects.

Enrollment: The final tally on headcount enrollment for Fall 2015 was 7,078, an improvement of 237 students over last year. The freshman class of 1,159 was the largest in our history. The news was also good with returning students, where our freshman-to-sophomore retention rate improved from 72.3% in 2014 to 76.9% this fall. While these numbers are very encouraging, we are already focusing on the steps necessary to maintain this good momentum for 2016 and beyond. At my direction, the staff in key enrollment offices have conducted a review of our fall performance to see what areas need the most attention going forward.

The recent announcement of Dr. Thomas Calhoun's selection as president of Chicago State University means more changes coming in Enrollment Management. I intend to fill that vacancy this spring by national search and to hire at the level of Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management.

Fall Preview Day is set for this Saturday, November 14, with over 1,460 prospective students expected to attend. This year, we're going to follow up with a (new) spring Preview Day on March 19 – details to follow. Please do your best to respond if you or your office is called upon to assist. These events are crucial for our future enrollment success – as with life, you only get one chance to make a first impression - - so let's *Tell the UNA Story* with energy and passion!

Budget: There is significant overlap between enrollment and our budget. Our three largest sources of revenue are student tuition and fees, state appropriated dollars, and auxiliary income. The first and third items on that list are both directly tied to enrollment, so we are becoming more sensitive to enrollment trends as they have a direct impact on our budget.

We have already started meeting with our local legislative delegation to emphasize our needs in the upcoming session in Montgomery. One of our key themes is funding equity. UNA is currently next to last (#13 out of 14) in per-student funding among Alabama's public universities. We've occupied that unenviable position for many years now, and it's time for it to change. Our local lawmakers are supportive of UNA, and we are going to continue to push hard to secure our fair share of the state dollars that are going to higher education.

A topic likely to come up in the 2016 legislative session is performance based funding. This proposal has been explored in other states, and the idea is to systematize funding for higher education so that individual institutions are funded based on specified metrics. We are confident in our performance at UNA and welcome accountability. But, having been through this exercise elsewhere, I can tell you that the devil will be in the details with regard to the selection of metrics. We are thus working diligently to ensure that UNA will have a seat at the table if a state working group is formed to discuss performance based funding.

Facility Development: Plans for a new building for our College of Nursing continue to take shape, but we have had to rethink our timeline due to the many moving pieces involved in this project. Currently our focus is on finding a suitable home for the components of the Department of Human Environmental Sciences (HES) that continue to occupy Floyd Hall. Once that decision is made and plans for the move of HES are set in motion, we will have a better idea of when we might be able to begin work on the new Nursing Building. For now, please know that this project remains a very high priority for the administration and Board of Trustees.

We are using this extra time to pursue a grant opportunity for Nursing that would provide additional funding to supplement the private gifts and state support already in place. Finally, and in response to questions that have been asked, I wish to confirm that the design work on this project continues to incorporate a significant expansion of parking in the area around the new building.

Work on Olive Hall, the new student residence facility, is almost complete. We are on schedule to open that building in January 2016, which will bring an additional 429 beds into the mix for student housing on campus.

Open Forum: To enhance communication and increase transparency, I have collaborated with members of the Shared Governance Executive Committee to plan an open forum for faculty and staff on the afternoon of February 2, 2016. All members of the University's Executive Council will be present to help field questions you might have about campus issues and/or plans for the future. The SGEC has agreed to sponsor this event and will be in touch as the date draws nearer to provide details. My hope is that we will be able to establish this forum as an annual tradition at UNA.

Fall Commencement: Commencement for this fall semester will be held at 10:00am and 2:00pm on Saturday, December 12, 2015. It is my pleasure to announce that acclaimed musician and band leader Patterson Hood has agreed to deliver the commencement address at both ceremonies. As many of you know, Patterson has deep personal and family ties to UNA and the region we serve. His participation in our fall commencement will mean a great deal to our graduates and will underscore our commitment to *Celebrate the Shoals*.

Athletics: UNA Athletics is off to an auspicious start in 2015-16. Every team or squad in action this fall has received recognition for individual and team success in intercollegiate competition. Most teams that can be ranked nationally are, in fact, ranked nationally. One team has already locked up a conference championship and is preparing to move into post-season play; others are likely to follow. Of 28 home contests this fall in volleyball, soccer, and football, our Lions have won 27 of those for an outstanding home field/court winning percentage of 96%. It is worth noting that this success in athletics is paralleled by success in the classroom. The average GPA of our student-athletes now exceeds 3.0 and is higher than that of the general student population. Athletics is an important way that we enhance our name recognition beyond our region and state, so I ask that you join me in finding time to congratulate our players and coaches on their success this fall.

November is the month of Thanksgiving, and in the spirit of the season Dena and I wish to thank each of you for all you do to make UNA such a special place. Your dedication and professionalism are showcased each day on this beautiful campus, and our students benefit and learn from the pride we all show as members of the UNA family. Roar Lions!

Ken Kitts