



President's Communiqué

Dr. Ken Kitts

September 3, 2026

Colleagues: I hope the fall semester is off to a great start for you. Please see below for important news and updates regarding UNA.

Annual Meeting: My thanks to those of you who attended the Annual Meeting of Faculty and Staff on August 18. The turnout in Norton Auditorium was outstanding, and I wish to express gratitude to those who had a hand in planning and supporting that event. Some of the topics covered in my address are mentioned below with additional updates and/or information provided. I concluded my remarks at the meeting with the announcement of a cost-of-living adjustment for continuing full-time employees. This 3% COLA follows the same percentage increase in salaries last year. Being able to deliver a COLA in successive years is a difficult feat to pull off as we have to fund those increases ourselves (as opposed to the K-12 sector, where the state budget itself provides for COLAs). At UNA, every 1% adjustment in salaries requires approximately \$1 million in recurring dollars generated either through new revenue or savings within the existing budget. I am grateful to Evan Thornton and his staff for running the numbers and coming up with a plan that allowed for this COLA while simultaneously protecting other budgetary goals (filling vacant positions, fully funding promotions and merit pay, building maintenance, etc.). Our salary schedule and periodic adjustments compare very favorably to our peers and will remain a priority for us as a means of recognizing the excellent work going on across our campus.

Wendell Gunn Documentary: As first noted last spring, a documentary detailing the remarkable life of Dr. Wendell Gunn, our famed alumnus and civil rights icon, has been in the works now for well over a year. I am pleased to report that filmmaker Norton Dill has completed work on *Making History Together*. Mr. Dill is the nephew of President E.B. Norton, who first met Wendell in the fall of 1963 and then went on to lead this campus through the era of desegregation with grace, skill, and wisdom. The documentary is set to air this fall on Alabama Public Television. Some industry insiders who have seen it are even talking about the possibility of a wider distribution beyond that -- the story is just that compelling and well-told. However, and as is fitting, we want *our* campus and *our* local community to be able to see it here first as Wendell's story is integral to the larger UNA story. With that, please stay tuned for a forthcoming invitation to attend the global premier of *Making History Together*.

Mission: Shoals: I spoke at some length on August 18 about the noteworthy economic development activity underway in our area. In March, the Hadrian Corporation and the Department of the Navy announced plans to invest billions to retrofit the old railcar plant in Barton (near Cherokee in western Colbert County) for the manufacture of submarine components. That announcement has spurred other defense-related entities to begin exploring opportunities in the Shoals. The net weight of these developments is significant and could portend a generational transformation for our area in terms of job growth and economic activity. To help our region understand the impact of this growth and to prepare for what's coming, we are launching *Mission: Shoals* as a new, signature community outreach initiative for UNA. We will have more to say about what this entails as the academic year unfolds, so please stay tuned for opportunities to learn more about the new industries moving into our area and related service opportunities.

Board of Trustees: Trustee Will Trapp wrapped up his term as chair (formally, President Pro Tempore) of the UNA Board of Trustees this past June. This is a good opportunity to thank Will for the excellent leadership he provided to our governing body over the last four years. The new Board chair is Trustee Nancy Sanford ('78), who was elected to the top position by her fellow Board members after serving two terms as vice chair. Trustee Gary Smith ('76) is the newly elected vice chair. Under state law, our eleven appointed Board members are each appointed by the Governor to six-year terms with confirmation provided by the Alabama Senate. The Board operates with four standing committees that process most issues in preparation for the quarterly meetings of the full body. Those committees are as follows: Academic Affairs and Enrollment Management Committee; Campus Life and Athletics Committee; Advancement and University Relations Committee; and Finance, Facilities, and Personnel Committee.

Enrollment: In keeping with past practice, census date for this fall term won't occur for another two months due to late-reporting cohorts of off-campus students as well as the start of the second 8-week session of classes in October. But we already know the trends that are shaping our student profile. The number of international students is down, both here and across the country, due to a combination of national policy, delays in visa processing, and a tense global situation that has led to a significant decrease in travel to the U.S. Overall graduate enrollment is also trending downward, though results in that sector are mixed with some individual graduate programs at UNA recording significant increases over last year. On the other hand, the number of new full-time students (inclusive of all sources) at UNA is up over 5% compared to last year, and the number of new, full-time freshmen stands currently at 1,110 – which could end up being the largest freshman cohort we've welcomed in ten years. Moreover, occupancy in our residence halls remains high, and those numbers will only increase once the new LaGrange Hall opens and is brought into the residence life inventory. By the time of census, we believe total enrollment should be around the 10,500 mark where we've been the last few years. That's a good outcome in light of challenges facing higher education. It allows us to balance a robust student population with revenue needs, state resource base, and that all-important collective desire to protect our unique campus identity.

AL Act 2026-432: At the end of the 2026 legislative session, lawmakers in Alabama passed HB580, the "Faculty Senate and Post-Tenure Review Bill." Now known formally as Act 432, the law directs the Board of Trustees for each public university in Alabama to take steps to ensure compliance with the legislation. At UNA, our Board passed a resolution in June tasking me with responsibility for establishing a broadly-based task force to review our shared governance system in its totality, and to recommend the changes necessary to bring UNA into alignment with this new state law. I subsequently appointed that task force on August 6 with the following membership: Dr. Sarah Franklin, Chair; Trustee Joel Anderson II, Ms. Bretta Cagle, Dr. Justin Carter, Mr. Jay Cochran, Dr. Minnette Ellis, Ms. Amber Fite-Morgan, Dr. Lauren Killen, Dr. Tom Lukowicz, Ms. Anna Leigh Rossi, Ms. Darlene Townsend, Dr. Laura Williams, and Dr. Ryan Zayac. In the same resolution, the Board also authorized our current Faculty Senate to continue on a temporary and limited basis for AY 2026-27 for the express purpose of supporting the work of the task force. Given the amount of work before us, as well as the close scrutiny from state officials, the Board has directed both the Faculty Senate and the Staff Senate to suspend work on all other business in order to assist the task force in bringing us into compliance with Act 432.

Quick Hits:

- We continue to make progress on additional parking at UNA. Lot WW along Cedar Street has been paved and striped, and is now open for use. The larger, two-tier lot under construction at the corner of Waterloo Road and Cedar Street should be completed later this semester. Finally, Lot C (adjacent to Willingham Hall) will be renovated over the holiday break this year to create additional parking and enhance safety on the access points to Wood Avenue.
- You might notice that the listing of important dates at the bottom of this page does not include a fall break. That's because this year marks the first time we will forego a fall break in exchange for the University being able to close for the full week of Thanksgiving, November 23-27. This schedule brings us into better alignment with our peers.
- We have posted recent successes with program accreditations from groups ranging from CACREP to AACSB to ABET, just to name a few. UNA boasts 85 individually accredited academic programs – a remarkable number for a public regional university and a testament to the dedication and excellence of our faculty and staff. Let's remember to celebrate our colleagues when these accreditation or reaffirmation processes reach a successful conclusion.

Important Dates:

- September 7 University Closed for Labor Day
- September 19 Opening of Bank Independent Stadium / First Home Football Game
- September 30 "Shine On, Gold" Campaign Ends
- October 7 End of First 8-Week Session
- October 8 Start of Second 8-Week Session
- October 8 Fall Semester Midterm
- October 19-24 Homecoming Week (Parade and Homecoming Game on Oct. 24)
- October 26 Registration Opens for Spring and Summer 2027

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

See next page
for the
Bicentennial
Moment



[Note: In keeping with our focus on the long and rich history of the University of North Alabama, please see below for the next installment of our “Bicentennial Moment” as we kickoff the multi-year celebration that will carry us toward 2030. These messages are intended to showcase the people, places, and programs that have contributed to the UNA story over the last two centuries.]

Bicentennial Moment: Beginnings

Most of us are aware that UNA dates its history back to 1830. That’s the year in which LaGrange College, our forebear institution, first opened its doors to students. The college was a creation of the regional conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first discussion among church officials regarding the creation of a college occurred in the fall of 1826 -- 200 years ago! Eventually a site was selected on a beautiful mountaintop near the small village of LaGrange, located about three miles south of present-day Leighton in Colbert County. Church officials were clear that, despite the denominational ties of the college, they wanted a traditional curriculum that would not be “theological” in orientation. The State of Alabama stepped in quickly to add its own endorsement in the form of a state charter for the newly opened LaGrange College. The college operated at its original site from 1830 to 1855, when a combination of financial pressures and the promise of support from Florence led the LaGrange College Board of Trustees to vote to relocate the institution to our current location, complete with the first of numerous name changes to Florence Wesleyan College. The original buildings that had once comprised LaGrange College were burned by Union forces in 1863. Today the site operates under the supervision of the nonprofit LaGrange Living Historical Association.



*LaGrange College c. 1860
America Washington Adkinson*