

Annual Address by President Kitts
Norton Auditorium
August 21, 2018

Good afternoon, colleagues. It's good to see you. Whether you have been on campus all summer or are just now returning after a break, I welcome you

Another bright spot for this fall is international student enrollment. In June, I travelled with Dr. Zhang to Mexico to negotiate a new partnership with La Salle University in Mexico City. For Dr. Zhang needed me to help with translation. After all, Spanish was one of my minors in college. I had even studied in Mexico as a student ... in 1984. Surprisingly, it turns out that you lose language ability when you don't use it for 34 years! But with luck, patience from our Mexican hosts, and a fervently assist from Google translate, we were able to lay the groundwork for that new partnership.

But back to the main story line. News reports indicate that international student enrollment in the U.S. is down sharply this year. Meanwhile, here at UNA, Dr. Zhang and his staff continue to perform miracles over in Powers Hall. Intake of international students this fall will double that of previous years, and our overall international enrollment will be up by some 20% when all is said and done. This growing body of international students is an important component when we think about diversity at UNA.

Ladies and gentlemen, make no mistake about it: to prepare our students to function in this very complex world of the 21st century, we have to be proactive about ensuring that both our student population and faculty and staff ranks feature diversity in its broadest sense. We need diversity in national origin, background, lifestyle, gender, race, and ethnicity. Ron Patterson is doing an outstanding job of leading our diversity efforts, and we are now entering year two of an ambitious five-year plan to ensure that diversity at UNA is more than a bumper sticker. We have to model it and live it and champion this commitment in all that we do. I ask that you join me as we follow the lead of Ron Patterson, Joan Williams and others in working to make sure that we value and respect all members of this campus community.

On a related note, one of my proudest moments this past year was the day that we dedicated the Wendell W. Gunn University Commons. I remember the first time I mentioned that idea to my colleagues on the Executive Council. They loved it, and with their help, this became a recommendation to the Board of Trustees. Trustees embraced the idea with an enthusiastic and unanimous vote, and then we turned to many of you for help with planning to make sure the event would celebrate Dr. Gunn and the importance of his story for UNA as a good day, a powerful day, and a healing day.

Moving from the sublime to the not so sublime, let's talk for a second about funding. By now some of you might be getting sick of hearing about Project 208. If I'm sorry, I need to steel you for additional disappointment because I cannot stand down on this topic. Most of you know the basic contours of this issue. UNA has fallen far behind our sister schools in Alabama when it comes to state support on a per-student basis. In fact, we are dead last among the 14 universities

So last year we initiated Project 208 and mounted a full court press in Montgomery to get this issue on the radar of key decision-makers. We had success. State allocation increased by almost \$2 million dollars for FY 2019. The recurring dollars, and they help more than you know. Because of these extra funds, we were able to forego a tuition increase this year. And of interest to everyone in this room, this increase means that we are going to be able to include a COLA in the budget proposal we carry to the Board next month. Stay tuned for details as we monitor enrollment and determine how much revenue we have to work with.

Now for the bad news. Despite our good showing this past year, we remain in a very distant last place in terms of per-student funding in Alabama. In dollar terms, we are \$24 million dollars below the state average-- and that's \$24 million dollars each year, every year that we are not getting. That means that, over the last decade, we have missed out on a quarter of a billion dollars that other schools of comparable size received and we did not. Isn't that staggering? Underfunding of this magnitude must be seen for what it is: a very real threat to the future of this wonderful institution. How can any enterprise survive over the long term if forced to operate on a fraction of the revenue enjoyed by its competitors? This cannot continue.

We are already working very hard behind the scenes to freshen our arguments and implement strategy for the 2019 legislative session. I will be calling on many of you to help through making phone calls, rough opening doors for me with alumni of influence. More generally, here's something you can all do: stay informed and active on this issue. Get to know your state representative and your state senator on a first name basis. Write to them. Be polite. Remember to thank them for what they did to help us last year, but then remind them that our hole remains very deep and that we need even more help this year and in subsequent years to get out of last place.

Along the way, it's all remember to stress the positive about UN. I don't want my grouching about our low funding to sound like a whine (nobody likes a whiner) or, worse, to suggest that we are not fulfilling our mission because of lack of resources. That's just not true. As faculty and staff, you excel at doing more with less while experiencing unprecedented success. This university is on the move, and I could not be prouder to call you my colleagues and to brag about your successes, which I do early and often.

So, bringing these two threads together, my next talk in Montgomery this year is going to focus first on the many wonderful things going on at UN. Then I will pivot and remind our lawmakers that we are getting these results with the lowest funding of any university and then I will invite those same lawmakers to imagine with me the even greater things we could do for region and state if only we were treated fairly and funded at an average level.

My talking points on success come from you. Our nursing program ranks consistently as one of the very best in the state of Alabama. Kilby Laboratory School an extension of our College of Education and Human Sciences is ranked in the top 2% of all schools in the state of Alabama. Our business programs uplift the region through a focus on entrepreneurialism and economic development. We are a top 25 research university in Alabama.

interact so freely in the building that now carries his name. He told me recently "Ken, I've fallen in love with my mater."

Another great story is that of Mary Alice Young, a native of Lauderdale County who always wanted to be a teacher. Mary Alice graduated from Central High School and enrolled here, only back then we were Florence State Teachers College. She graduated from Florence State in 1948 and immediately returned to her home community where she embarked a 40 year teaching career at Central Elementary School. She is still a legend in that community. Ms. Young worked hard, lived modestly, and changed countless lives through her caring instruction. She passed away last year. Unknown to most of us was the extent to which she carried this diversity in her heart for well over half a century. I didn't know it. But I found out about Mary Alice Young's story in a big way last Tuesday when VP Debbie Shaw and I were summoned to a local law office for the settlement of Ms. Young's estate. When we arrived, one of Ms. Young's former students greeted us, a gentleman now in his 70s.