

# BUSINESS ADVOCATE

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 4

*A publication of the  
Business Council  
of Alabama*

A woman with her hair in braids, wearing glasses, a light-colored short-sleeved polo shirt, and dark pants, is looking at a tablet. She has a purple lanyard around her neck with a badge. She is standing in a server room with rows of server racks. The lighting is purple and blue.

## ALABAMA'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT UNIVERSITY

BCA IS THE VOICE FOR ALABAMA BUSINESS. LEARN MORE AT [BCATODAY.ORG](http://BCATODAY.ORG)



For the second year in a row, Alabama has been named number one in Regional Workforce Development for the South-Central Region. Alabama has the lowest unemployment and highest employment in state history, with unemployment at 2.8% and over two million people employed. This is an impressive accomplishment, but there is still opportunity for improvement to strengthen and grow our state's workforce.

The Business Council of Alabama (BCA) has identified workforce development as a major concern for its members and a focus area for the organization this year. Alabama faces a need for more and better trained workers to fill the jobs we have available in our state. Programs and universities in Alabama must not only keep up with, but outperform, our surrounding states in providing opportunity for our workforce.

As Alabama's Workforce

Development University, the University of North Alabama (UNA) is doing that and more by raising

the bar for Alabama. With a proven track record of establishing the programs and opportunities necessary, UNA is helping to meet the training, education, and workforce needs of employers across the

state. UNA is developing cutting edge programs and curricula based on demand and in direct collaboration with large employers

across a wide variety of industries. UNA is the fastest growing university in the state. This Spring 2023 term broke enrollment records with a greater than 20 percent increase compared to Spring 2022, marking the 15th consecutive term of record-breaking

## ***"WE'RE JUST GETTING STARTED."***

***- DR. ROSS ALEXANDER***



enrollment for the University.

In 2017, UNA President Dr. Kitts established "Projects 208" for the university to rediscover its importance in North Alabama's economic development and educational impact. Named after the 208 miles that separate the campus from the seat of government in Montgomery, this program has been recognized as one of Dr. Kitt's most impactful accomplishments as president so far. Since the Project's implementation five years ago, UNA's state appropriation has increased by 60 percent.

The University leadership has expressed tremendous thanks to the lawmakers and state leaders that also championed this mission in the Alabama State House, creating tangible, positive results for students, employers, and economic development in Alabama.

With this funding, there has been an increased focus on student recruitment, especially in the case of Huntsville and Madison County. In addition to increased recurring



funds, UNA has earned support for one-time funding, as well, due to the success of the programs. For example, they received supplemental appropriation of \$3.2 million for a new program in power generation engineering - an incredible degree program that leads directly to jobs in Alabama.

The economic impact to the Shoals from UNA is more than \$340 million annually, based on a 2021 study. But the impact on the region is certainly seen in the intangible, qualitative success, as well. UNA draws talent to the state and region through faculty, staff, and students that otherwise may not work and live there. The culture and positive well-being of students contributes to the great quality of life and energy that makes North Alabama a top destination for businesses and families.

UNA has listened to the needs of local and state legislators in the development and implementation of innovative academic programs to create workforce solutions. Through strategic industry partnerships, UNA prioritizes degrees that lead to jobs in the Shoals, the region, and the state. This emphasis is a critical component of their growth.

As a proven leader in providing high-quality online learning experiences to learners of every type, North Alabama Online has become the institution of choice for adult and executive learners, in particular, who would like to enhance their skills in order to maintain a competitive edge in the marketplace. UNA has developed a reputation for offering high-quality, flexible learning experiences at an affordable price, while seeking to increase access to higher education and provide learners with robust institutional resources in order to support their success to graduation and beyond.

UNA is invested in the business community, and proud to partner with businesses, health systems, school districts, municipalities, professional associations, and other organizations, including the State of Alabama and its agencies, to offer employees unique opportunities for educational enhancement and career advancement. With a





focus on experiential and work-based learning, UNA boasts over 120 corporate partnerships for workforce and education solutions. To empower adult learners, these “learning agreements” allow employees of these partner companies to receive a tuition scholarship to UNA to further their education through online or in-person learning.

In an effort to strongly position students in the job market, UNA has developed 24 micro-credentials and post-master’s certificates. These programs allow students or employers to tailor their learning to specified career goals while acquiring new skills. Students can enroll in one



of these programs to stay competitive and maintain their market value. These online, short-term programs are ideal for working professionals seeking flexibility in their educational pursuits.

UNA has southern roots and charm, yet serves as a global campus, with approximately 10% of the entire student body comprised of international students hailing from 57 nations around the globe. Interestingly, while roughly half of those students pursue degrees on-campus in Florence, approximately half do not. Rather, they complete their

graduate and undergraduate degrees either fully online or on-site at the new partner campus in China.

The University of North Alabama is changing the landscape of the region and state by recruiting top talent and strategically training our state’s workforce. As an education-solutions provider for life-long learning, UNA has proven to be innovative, agile and entrepreneurial in meeting one of our state’s most pressing demands. In a discussion about the university’s success and accomplishments thus far, UNA Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Ross Alexander shared simply, “We’re just getting started.” **BA**

*The Business Advocate is published by the Business Council of Alabama, a non-partisan, statewide business association representing the interests and concerns of nearly 1 million working Alabamians through its member companies and its partnership with the Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama. For more information on the Business Council of Alabama please contact us at (800) 665-9647 or visit us online at [bcatoday.org](http://bcatoday.org).*