

Winter 1999

To the Campus Community:

While my purpose in writing my third semiannual letter is to update you on our progress in academics, advancement, and athletics during the past six months, I would be remiss if I did not comment on 1998. It was a magnificent year; in fact, it was so great that surpassing it in 1999 will be a real challenge.

Someone once said that timing is everything. While I'm not sure it is everything, I know Mary Lib and I feel very fortunate to be at the U of A during this exciting period in its history. The seeds that were sown over the past decade are bearing fruit. What a great time to be at the U of A!

**Academics:** The number of new freshmen enrolling in the fall increased by 14 percent over the previous year to make it one of our largest freshman classes; more importantly, it is our best freshman class, as measured by ACT scores and high school grade-point averages. The top 500 in the freshman class ranked in the 98th percentile nationally. What a difference they are making on our campus! Faculty tell me the large influx of Chancellor's Scholars – nearly 20 percent of the freshman class, which is a 12-fold increase over the previous year – is having a real impact. Questions are more frequent and more probing, discussions more lively, the quality of creative work noticeably improved. The bar of academic expectations has been raised considerably. As an example, the response to the Chancellor's Scholars Program and the Bodenhamer Fellows Program resulted in a 42-percent increase in freshman engineering enrollment this fall. The average ACT score of engineering freshmen increased from 26 to 27.

In addition to the progress made in recruiting academically gifted students, exciting things are happening on campus. In the fall, the J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences gave the University a magnificent work of art: the Fulbright Peace Fountain, a 41-foot-tall sculpture designed by E. Fay Jones and Maurice Jennings. Located between Old Main and Vol Walker Hall, the fountain pays tribute to a statesman, scholar, alumnus, and former UA president who shaped American foreign policy in the 20th century and founded the renowned Fulbright Foreign Exchange Program for faculty and students. The fountain is a beautiful addition to the campus.

Additional insight regarding the progress that has occurred in our academic programs is provided in the enclosed publication, *Investing for a New Century: A Report to the People of Arkansas*. As you read it, we hope you will gain new insight on the U of A; our vision, goals, and ambitions; the larger contextual realities and challenges we face; accomplishments and contributions we have made to society; and the enormous potential the University holds for Arkansas and the nation. We welcome your comments.

**Advancement:** Not only was 1998 a remarkable year in academics but it also was a record year in advancement. The level of giving surpassed that of any other year. Of course, the \$50-million gift from the Walton family, alone, would make it a record year. However, setting that aside (which I would not

contemplate!), it was still a record year in number of gifts, and it would have ranked as the second highest in level of giving. From July 1 to December 31, the U of A raised \$69.9 million from alumni, corporations, friends, foundations, and other organizations. That compares to \$12.4 million raised during the same time in 1997.

The Walton gift was the largest ever made to an American business school and the largest in the history of Arkansas higher education. We are deeply grateful to the Walton family and their foundation; their generosity has put us firmly on the national fund-raising map.

Through the generosity of the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation, many more Arkansas towns will be served by the UA Community Design Center (UACDC). The Foundation provided a \$1.5-million endowment for the Steven L. Anderson Chair in Architecture and Urban Studies in the School of Architecture. The holder of the Anderson Chair is Professor David Glasser, UACDC Director.

Prior to establishing the endowed chair, the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation provided a \$7.4-million grant to establish the Donald W. Reynolds Center for Enterprise Development in the Sam M. Walton College of Business Administration.

As you know, our top priority is to raise private support for scholarships and fellowships. To date, the response from alumni and friends has been tremendous. Nearly \$5 million has been raised through cash, pledges, and planned gifts for Chancellor's Scholarships alone. Of that amount, nearly \$2.7 million already has been received.

In the fall, we announced a planned gift valued at more than \$2 million from Julian and Nana Stewart of San Antonio, Texas, for student scholarships, including an endowed Chancellor's Scholarship that was funded immediately. Jim and Joyce Faulkner of Little Rock have given \$100,000 to create an endowed Faulkner Family Chancellor's Scholarship. The Arkansas Alumni Association Board of Directors voted to provide \$60,000 over the next two years and \$40,000 every year thereafter to support Chancellor's Scholars. Although more such gifts are in the works, many more are needed if we are to retain the state's top students and attract outstanding students from outside Arkansas. The state's future depends on our doing so.

In December, the University's National Development Council approved planning for a major comprehensive capital campaign; that activity is under way. Although a goal has not been set, we expect it to be significantly larger than the successful \$175-million campaign completed in 1996. The new Campaign for the 21st Century will engage all parts of the University. In addition to addressing our needs for scholarships and fellowships, we have to do so much more: create endowed faculty chairs and professorships; generate substantial private support for our growing research programs; underwrite our academic programs, centers, and institutes; and generally do everything we can to build a world-class intellectual environment for our students and faculty.

To all of you who have helped move our fund-raising program so far so fast, Mary Lib and I are most grateful. Private gift support is key to our vision and to our emerging as one of America's Top 50

public universities. We are confident our alumni and friends will continue to provide the means for that to happen.

**Athletics:** In addition to a record year in academics and advancement, 1998 was remarkable for our athletic programs.

John McDonnell's men's track and cross country teams won their 29th, 30th, and 31st national championships; the Energizer Bunny would not dare challenge John McDonnell's teams. In addition, women's cross country won the SEC championship and the NCAA regional championship, and finished sixth in the nation; the future is very bright for the women's track program. In women's volleyball, we won the SEC western division championship and reached the NCAA Sweet 16. The women's basketball team went to the Final Four. The remaining men's and women's teams are either nationally competitive or soon will be.

Despite the successes of the other teams, the shot heard round the state and the athletic world was fired by the football team. Houston Nutt's arrival produced results faster than any imagined. Coming off a 9-3 season, being ranked 16th by The Associated Press and 17th by USA Today/CNN, and having *The Football News* Coach of the Year have made recruiting much easier and have brought back memories of the 1960s and '70s.

As pleased as I am with the success of our football team, I take special pleasure in Coach Nutt's public-service TV announcements being seen across the state. He urges Arkansas high school students to "do your best and take the (ACT) test" to qualify for \$2,500 college scholarships in the Arkansas Academic Challenge, a program administered by the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. Our athletic program fully supports our academic emphasis; the coach's TV spots send a great message to Arkansans about the value of a college education.

**New Appointees:** Just as teamwork is essential to the success of Arkansas athletics, so too is it key to an effective University administration. Our administrative team has been strengthened considerably by the recent appointments of Dr. Johnetta Cross Brazzell, formerly of Spelman College in Atlanta, as vice chancellor for student affairs; and Arlene Wesley Cash, formerly of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, as dean of enrollment services. Dr. Brazzell and Ms. Cash are infusing new energy and expertise into their areas of responsibility, which so vitally affect the quantity, quality, and diversity of our student body as well as the total collegiate experience our undergraduates enjoy.

**Legislative Session:** In the next few months, our greatest challenge will be communicating effectively with the General Assembly regarding our budget needs. Someone asked recently how my first 18 months had gone. I responded that I had learned that what I thought would be hard to accomplish is turning out to be easy and what I thought would be easy is turning out to be hard.

I believed it would take five years to reverse the pattern of exporting our top students to out-of-state universities; students, parents, teachers, counselors, and others believed in our vision, and the response has been overwhelming. During a one-week period in early January, we received more than 1,700 applications for fall admission; applicants were meeting a January 15 scholarship deadline – which

suggests they are very good students. The quality and number of applications is remarkable; people across the state are hungering for what we promise – a nationally competitive education.

What I mistakenly thought would be easy is convincing Arkansans of the benefit to the state of having a nationally competitive research university. The U of A being the economic and cultural engine for the state, we believe, is both appropriate and essential for Arkansans. Evidence supporting this belief can be found in North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Texas, Virginia, and many other states. Recent actions by the legislatures in Kentucky and Louisiana indicate “they get it,” too. But too many Arkansans seem to believe the U of A’s competition should be defined within the borders of the state, rather than by other state and land-grant universities in the South and Midwest. This mountain has turned out to be much steeper to climb than I had anticipated.

Too few seem to believe, as I do, that the competition among states in the 21st century will be for high-paying jobs, and knowledge will determine who wins the competition. Because greater emphasis will be given to technology-intensive job opportunities, having a strong research university will play a significant role in attracting high-tech employers to the state and retaining those who are already employed in the state.

If you can assist in delivering our message to elected state and federal representatives, please do so. Convince them that an investment in the U of A is an investment that will pay large dividends for future generations of Arkansans. Convince them that it is in the state’s best interests for the U of A to be nationally, not just regionally, competitive with other state and land-grant universities. Convince them that it is time for Arkansas to do in academics what it has done in athletics and business – be nationally competitive. Convince them to accept nothing less. We need your help.

We are working hard to build and retain quality throughout the U of A. With your help and support, we will succeed in building a nationally competitive research university that will deliver tremendous economic and quality-of-life benefits for Arkansas. Thank you for all you are doing to ensure that the U of A is one of the nation’s great universities.

Sincerely,

John A. White  
Chancellor

enclosure