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Four Alabama universities ranked among ‘smartest public colleges in America’

BY: CORT GATLIFF

College isn’t supposed to be just about football, but with two dominant teams in the Yellowhammer State, it’s easy to overlook other aspects of college—like the actual learning part.

Alabamians have another reason to be proud of their state universities: Auburn University, University of Alabama, University of Alabama-Birmingham and the University of Alabama-Huntsville made the list of the 104 smartest public colleges in America.

To compile the list, Business Insider worked with Jonathan Wai, a Duke University Talent Identification Program researcher, and looked at standardized test scores from each university.

“ACT scores were translated into SAT scores (math + verbal)…so that all schools could be compared using one metric,” writes Wai and Jenna Goudreau for Business Insider. “Then, an average of the 25th and 75th percentile was computed.”

With college tuition increasing and a national student debt crisis looming, most people can’t afford private schools. But with these four universities ranked among the top public colleges in the nation, Alabamians have a chance to get more bang for their buck when it comes to education.

The average cost of attending a private school is $30,500.

Using these statistics, the biggest cost-to-ranking leap is from UAB to UAH. A student can attend UAB, which is 27 places higher in the ranking than UAH, for only pay about $122 more.
How starting salaries stack up for Alabama graduate schools

By: Alan Alexander

In a competitive job market, many college graduates choose to continue their education by entering graduate school, thereby increasing their chances of landing a job.

But is that extra investment worth it? A lot of factors contribute to the answer like the field of study and institution, but based on average earning potential, a graduate degree can result in significantly higher starting and mid-career salaries than a bachelor's degree.

According to data from the 2014-2015 College Salary Report from PayScale, students who earn a graduate degree from the University of Alabama at Huntsville, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Auburn and the University of Alabama will start their careers earning about $14,000 more on average than graduates with just a bachelor's degree.

That number becomes lower for mid-career salaries, with graduate students averaging $6,000 more than those who earned a bachelor's degree.

The numbers are based on a survey of recent alumni that provided information about their jobs, compensation, employer, demographics and educational background.

See how these Alabama schools compare for average salaries based on graduate and bachelor's degrees:

University of Alabama at Huntsville

Bachelor's degree: $52,000 starting, $87,500 mid-career

Graduate degree: $67,100 starting, $99,300 mid-career

University of Alabama at Birmingham

Bachelor's degree: $41,000 starting, $72,000 mid-career

See next page
Graduate degree: $66,700 starting, $87,900 mid-career

University of Alabama

Bachelor's degree: $43,600 starting, $76,600 mid-career
Graduate degree: $46,900 starting, $72,900 mid-career

Auburn University

Bachelor's degree: $47,100 starting, $91,600 mid-career
Graduate degree: $57,400 starting, $91,100
Airbus opts to produce larger A321 jet at Mobile facility
By: Ryan Phillips

Airbus recently confirmed that its final assembly line, which is under construction in Mobile, would produce the A321 jetliner, instead of the smaller and previously announced A320. Airbus Americas President Barry Eccleston was cited in a Reuters report saying the company elected to change directions to give the Mobile-based facility the opportunity to grow. The first jet assembled in Mobile is expected for delivery in 2016, according to a report from AL.com, and will be the current engine option. The report also said this type of jet typically can seat around 185 passengers, but expansive measures are in place that could possibly seat 220 passengers in a two-class system. The new facility is expected to open in 2015 and employ around 1,000 workers, according to the report. The facilities yield is predicted to be around 40-50 jets by 2018.
UA has fewer in-state students

For the fall, fewer than half of students on Tuscaloosa campus are from Alabama.

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Alabamians represent 49 percent of the fall enrollment at the University of Alabama, with roughly 51 percent of students on campus coming from outside the borders of the state, according to official demographic data released Monday.

This fall, 49 percent of total student enrollment of 36,155 on campus is Alabamians. Of the out-of-state students, 46 percent come from elsewhere in the U.S., and 5 percent are international students from 77 different countries.

UA has 30,754 undergraduates, 4,870 graduate students and 531 professional students. Enrollment increased by 3.7 percent over the enrollment in the fall of 2013 of 34,852.

Since 2012, non-residents have been the majority of the incoming freshman classes, though, until this fall, Alabamians had still been the majority.

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Students on the University of Alabama campus walk to classes on Hackberry Road on Monday in Tuscaloosa.

UA

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overall majority on campus. In fall 2013, 53 percent of UA students were from Alabama and roughly 47 percent were nonresidents, according to last year’s data.

UA President Judy Bonner said the influx of nonresident students would not “take spaces away from qualified Alabamians” in comments in September when the fall enrollment was first announced. Enrollment growth has been part of a strategic plan for the university during the past decade.

Alabama residents remain the largest subgroup among students based on place of origin.

There are 17,830 students from Alabama on campus, 16,655 nonresidents from the U.S. and 1,670 students from foreign countries, according to the fall 2014 enrollment data.

In state, students from Jefferson County represent the largest group of Alabamians with 3,597. Tuscaloosa is second with 3,189 students, followed in a distant third and fourth by Madison and Shelby counties, which each have about 1,500.

Among non-resident U.S. students, Georgians represented the largest group with 2,362, according to enrollment data.

The 2014 data shows no change in campus demographics in regard to race and sex.

The enrollment remains 55 percent women, according to the data. The campus is still roughly 81 percent white, 12 percent black, 3 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent Asian.

The data indicates 32 percent of undergraduates are part of a sorority or fraternity this fall, compared to 29 percent in 2013.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
In-state students now minority at UA

Is the University of Alabama becoming the University of no-so-Alabama? That's what some fear, as in-state students have become a minority on the UA campus. A combination of out-of-state students and international students now outnumber in-state students slightly in Tuscaloosa.

That's not surprising, since out-of-state students have made up a majority of the incoming freshman classes for the past three years. Out-of-state enrollment has largely been responsible for the explosive growth experienced at the Capstone. Since 2003, the campus has grown from fewer than 20,000 students to almost 35,000.

Fueling growth with out-of-state students at the University of Alabama is nothing new. President George Denny might be best known as the first president at UA who took football seriously. But football was just part of Denny's overall strategy for growth. It gave the university national visibility that helped attract students from all over the country.

Denny believed that students from outside Alabama would not only help the campus grow, but would broaden the university's culture. They would expose in-state students to regional differences they might encounter when they went out into the world to pursue careers in business or academia.

The mass communication media, like television and the Internet, have homogenized the United States to a much greater extent than it was during the 1920s. Perhaps that makes exposing in-state students to regional differences less important than it once was. But getting to know people from outside the state and region is still a good experience for students.

The University of Alabama is a public university and that means part of the state's tax dollars support it. That's why out-of-state students are expected to pay higher tuition than in-state students. Their fees and tuition are expected to pay their way while in-state students' tuition is subsidized by the legislative appropriation.

President Judy Bonner has promised that in-state students who meet the university's admission standards have a place on campus. That's the way it should be, with state tax dollars supporting the university.

As long as in-state students aren't being turned away, we don't see a downside to growing out-of-state enrollment.
Free UA health clinic serves West End

By Lydia Seabol Avant
Staff Writer

A new free health clinic operated by University of Alabama students aims to help people with chronic health problems in Tuscaloosa's West End.
The West End Health Project started about a month ago at the McDonald Hughes Center, said Michael Moore, student director of the clinic.
The clinic provides free blood pressure checks, blood glucose checks, height and weight screenings and nutritional information, Moore said.
The clinic, which is open from 1-5 p.m. on Wednesdays, is located at the McDonald Hughes Community Center in Tuscaloosa on Wednesday.
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days, is manned by UA pre-med students who are part of a medicine and community class. The class places the students in medically-underserved communities, like West End and rural communities in the Black Belt.

"We've got the best of the best students here, and they are where they are supposed to be and committed to what they are doing," said Dr. Pam Foster, an associate professor with UA's College of Community Health Sciences, who is also volunteering with the clinic.

The West End Health Project was a student idea started with the help of a $2,500 Daniel Scholars Project grant from UA's Blackburn Institute.

The institute was founded in 1994 with the aim of developing a network of leaders who understand the challenges that face Alabama. Each year, around 25 students are chosen to join the institute during a selection process focused on identifying those most interested in community improvement. The students earn the title of Blackburn Fellow upon graduation.

Students in the Blackburn program came up with the idea for the West End Health Project after they were challenged to create a project that would have an impact on Tuscaloosa or the surrounding counties, said Patrick Crowley, a UA senior and Blackburn fellow who is working with the project.

"We've also had generous support from the Tuscaloosa City Council to use (the McDonald Hughes Center) for free," Crowley said.

The clinic is meant to serve as a basic screening to help identify possible chronic health problems that a person who is medically underserved might not otherwise be treated for. A doctor is always at the clinic to help address possible problems and then the students help connect the patient with low-cost or free health care to continue their medical diagnosis and treatment.

"If there is anything that is a red flag or questionable, we try to get them to a free clinic that can better provide for them," Moore said.

So far, the health project has seen a few patients each week, but the students hope that more people will come as the word gets out. The students are also considering changing up the hours to make it more accessible to people who work, and possibly offering a "mobile clinic" at schools, churches or other locations to help increase the access in the community.

"The screenings are very important," Foster said. "The first day we had a person with blood pressure that was 200 over 170." Normal blood pressure at or below 120 over 80.

"If it weren't for us, that person might not have caught that," Foster said. "Connecting them to a provider is important as well."

The West End Health Project will continue through the semester each Wednesday afternoon, take a hiatus during December and start back up again in January. It's a project that should easily continue each semester as part of UA's medicine and community class.

"This is hopefully going to be permanent, with consistent staffing with our class," Moore said.

The project has the right start, now they just need people from the community to come get a health screening, said Sara Frese, a UA senior who plans to go to medical school.

"I'm really encouraged at where this is going," Frese said. "We have the enthusiasm, the vision and the supplies. We are on a good footing for success, we just need to get the word out there."

For more information on the West End Health Project, email westendhealthproject@gmail.com.
Learning to serve better together

UA students volunteer to help spruce up elementary schools

By Angel Coker
Staff Writer

Paint covered University of Alabama students as they swiped red, blue, purple, pink and a multitude of other colors over chairs, benches and bookshelves Saturday at Central Elementary School.

University of Alabama students from different religious and secular groups on campus gathered at two Tuscaloosa area elementary schools to help with beautification and enhancement projects as part of the second Serve Better Together service event.

The event is cosponsored by the UA Crossroads' Better Together interfaith initiative and the University of Alabama Center for Sustainable Service and Volunteerism, which is funded by Target Corp. grants.

Courtney Thomas, director of the University of Alabama Center for Sustainable Service and Volunteerism, said the center recruits volunteers from different groups on campus to promote interaction between those of different faiths while helping the community.

"This is a day where we encourage interfaith dialogue through service together," Thomas said. "It's an opportunity to break down barriers and get to know each other better through service, because there's nothing like sweating together that will help you bond."

Two interfaith groups made up of 56 volunteers painted interior walls at Maxwell Elementary School in Duncanville and built an outdoor library at Central Elementary School in Tuscaloosa on Saturday.

Central Elementary received a Lowe's Toolbox for Education grant to build the library. Birdhouse book libraries — bookcases with roofs — were built for each grade, with chairs placed around them.  

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Benches were constructed and painted in different colors with titles of books written across them for amphitheater-style seating with a "Throne of Knowledge" chair to be placed in front so students can read to their peers.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Tigger from "Winnie the Pooh," Thing 1 and Thing 2 from Dr. Seuss' "Cat in the Hat" and other book characters adorned fence posts to fence in the area for safety.

"This is an outdoor library to encourage the kids to read, but also be outside," Thomas said.

She said the university students serve as role models to the elementary students. She said she hopes the work of the university students will encourage the elementary students, not only to read, but to go to college and give back to the community.

"We believe service is transformational," and she hopes to build sustainable relationships between the center and the community to make a lasting impact," Thomas said.

"This type of relationship is truly the type of relationship that the university looks for, where we both can come together and give our unique skills and ability to create something wonderful for our community," she said.
ORANGE BEACH, GULF SHORES

Cities team to support new high school, college campus

Marc D. Anderson  manderson@al.com

City officials are making good on promises to improve education, despite a failed attempt at creating an independent school system through a referendum on Sept. 23.

During last week’s council meeting, Mayor Tony Kennon said he and Councilman Jerry Johnson met with Gulf Shores Mayor Robert Craft and Councilman Jason Dyken to talk about moving forward with a new joint high school and college campus on the Foley Beach Express.

“I felt like we found a lot of common ground and we’re going to be meeting with the (Baldwin County school) board and the new superintendent about the new high school,” Kennon said. “I think we’re all on the same page and moving forward.”

In April, Craft announced a proposal for the Gulf Coast Higher Education Center on 40 acres of city-owned property at the intersection Baldwin County 8 and the Beach Express with room for expansion.

The complex would include a high school and an additional Faulkner State Community College campus, along with the ability to partner with four-year universities within the state to offer dual enrollment degree programs.

At a Baldwin County Board of Education meeting in September, Craft discussed the project and presented letters of interest from officials at Faulkner State, the University of South Alabama and the University of Alabama. The joint campus would come together as a collaborative effort from the city, the Baldwin County school board, Faulkner State and the four-year universities.

The new high school is a key part of a comprehensive long-term plan for the Gulf Shores dubbed “Small Town, Big Beach Vision 2025 for Sustainability,” which was approved by the council earlier this year.

The proposed project would relieve congestion at the three-school campus off East 20th Avenue, and the existing middle school would move into the current high school building.
Bonner, Saban among honorees

Ala. Academy of Honor ceremony slated Monday

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama’s president and head football coach are among eight prominent Alabamians scheduled to join the Alabama Academy of Honor on Monday in Montgomery.

UA President Judy Bonner and Alabama head football coach Nick Saban are joined in the 2014 class of new academy members by Apple CEO Tim Cook, Big Oak Ranch founder and former Tide football player John Croyle, HudsonAlpha co-founder Jim Hudson, former Mountain Brook Mayor Margaret Porter, U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions and Wetumpka native and business executive Edgar Welden.

Membership in the academy is limited to 100. The academy honors living Alabamians for accomplishments that benefit or reflect well upon the state.

The eight will be welcomed into the academy during a public ceremony at 11 a.m. in the old House Chambers of the state Capitol. Gov. Robert Bentley and academy chairwoman Catherine Randall of Tuscaloosa will speak during the welcoming.

Cook, a native of Robertsdale, will speak on behalf of the incoming class, and Jim Stephens will address the audience on behalf of current academy members.

Bonner is being recognized for her career at UA, according to an announcement. Bonner is the first woman to lead the Capstone. Saban is being recognized for his success on the football field and

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his philanthropy through his family’s nonprofit organization, Nick’s Kids Fund.

The academy accepts nominations for the honor roll and may elect new members each year to maintain its membership at 100.

All living governors are automatically added to the academy’s roll.

Recent academy inductees include baseball great Hank Aaron, author Harper Lee and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, according to the academy website.

The academy was created by the Alabama Legislature in 1965, and its first members were selected in 1968.
What an HONOR

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

MONTGOMERY — It was a who's-who gathering of Alabamians inside the Old House Chamber at the state capitol Monday afternoon. And one West Virginian.

University of Alabama football coach Nick Saban, from Fairmont, W.V., joined seven others for the 43rd class to be inducted into the Alabama Academy of Honor. The Academy of Honor, comprised and limited to 100 living members, chooses its inductees based on "accomplishment or service greatly benefiting the state or for accomplishment or service reflecting great credit on the state."

Other members of the 2014 class includes Judy Bonner, Tim Cook, John Croyle, Jim Hudson, Margaret Porter, Jeff Sessions and Edgar Weidén.

Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley cited the work Nick and Terry Saban did in the aftermath of the April 2011 tornadoes and the family's charitable works through Nick's Kids.

"I just want coach Saban to know how much I appreciate what he has done for our state," Bentley said. "Not only is he a great football coach... but he's an even greater Alabamian."

"He and his wife Terry really bought into our communities, our community of Tuscaloosa, the state of Alabama."

Nick's Kids has distributed more than $5 million to more than 150 charities throughout the state and teamed with Habitat for Humanity to build 15 homes in the years after April 27, 2011.

"It's certainly a very special class of people," Saban said. "It's certainly an honor, but I think that a lot of people contributed to any success that we had, to put us in a position being able to have influence, leadership, help other people, starting with my wife Terry, who has done a marvelous job supporting me and my No. 1 goal is to help our players be more successful in life for having been involved in the program. And hopefully the lessons learned in competition can help them be more successful in life in terms of character they develop as competitors."

Butkus Award

Junior linebacker Reggie Ragland was chosen as one of 15 finalists for the Butkus Award, given annually to the nation's top linebacker.

Ragland leads the team with 56 tackles, including 6.5 tackles for loss, three pass breakups and four passes defended.

He's one of five SEC players chosen. The others are Jordan Jenkins (Georgia), A.J. Johnson (Tennessee), Benardrick McKinney (Mississippi State), and Ramik Wilson (Georgia).

POTW

The Alabama coaching staff named six players of the week for individual performances against Tennessee.

Offensive selections were Amari Cooper, who set the program's single-game receiving yardage record with 224 yards, Ryan Kelly and Blake Sims. It was Kelly's first game back since being injured in the third quarter against Ole Miss.

Jonathan Allen represented the defense and Landon Collins and punter JK Scott were chosen for special teams.

Game time

The Alabama-LSU game Nov. 8 was chosen for a CBS primetime 7 p.m. (CST) game time, the network announced Monday.

It is the fourth straight year CBS has selected the game for its primetime slot. The network gets to select only one game each season for a primetime broadcast.

Statistics

A quick review of the statistics reveals Alabama players are at the top or near the top in several categories both nationally and in the conference.

Quarterback Blake Sims is fourth nationally and first in the SEC with a 72.68 rating.

Junior wide receiver Amari Cooper is second nationally with 1,132 yards and tied for third nationally with 72 receptions.

The Crimson Tide defense ranks third nationally in scoring defense allowing 14 points a game, second nationally in rushing defense (78.13 rushing yards per game) and fifth nationally in total defense (277.3 yards per game).

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0220.
Private foundation owns Saban’s home, pays taxes

Kent Faulk  kfaulk@al.com

Ten weeks after the University of Alabama won the BCS National Championship game against Notre Dame in January 2013, a private foundation set up to help fund athletics at UA bought the Tuscaloosa home of Crimson Tide football coach Nick Saban for nearly $3.1 million.

The home, which Saban and his wife, Terry, bought in 2007 when they came to the university, was purchased by the Crimson Tide Foundation in March 2013. The Sabans continue to live in the 8,759-square-foot home, and the foundation has paid the property taxes on the home since the purchase.

"It's not all that unusual in the world for universities to provide the housing," said Scott Phelps, assistant secretary of the foundation. "We want to keep him happy. We think he is the best coach in America."

The University of Alabama owned both of the homes that coach Paul "Bear" Bryant lived in with his family, Phelps said.

Saban lives in that house and will continue to live in it as long as he wants to, even after he retires, "in the same fashion coach Bryant did," Phelps said.

The foundation, a nonprofit group founded in 2003, provides money for scholarships, endows coaching positions and has provided money for the renovation or construction of athletic facilities.

The University of Texas reportedly talked to Saban's agent days after the championship game against Notre Dame in January 2013. Texas' attempts to lure Saban away, however, were not made public until later.

Texas was ready to pay Saban more than $100 million over the life of a contract to lure him away. ESPN sports talk show host Paul Finebaum wrote in his book "My Conference Can Beat Your Conference: Why the SEC Still Rules College Football." Phelps, however, said buying the house was something the foundation could do for the coach and wasn't tied to any specific win or attempt by another school to attract him away from the university.

Efforts to reach Saban's attorney for comment were unsuccessful.

Sale specifics

Saban, who made $5.5 million in 2013, inked a new contract earlier this year with UA for $6.9 million a year, before performance bonuses. The new contract, which extends to Jan. 31, 2022, does not include the foundation's purchase of the home.

Phelps said he didn't know how the conversation started that led to the home sale, but it did not originate from within the foundation. But when the idea came to it, the foundation said "sure," he said.

Phelps said he doesn't know whether Saban had a mortgage on the house. It wasn't "a big deal," and the foundation wanted to "keep him as happy as we can," he said.

The money for the purchase came from the foundation's general fund, not a specific donor designated for the purchase, Phelps said.

"It's the only piece of (residential) property the foundation owns," he said.

A warranty deed was executed in Tuscaloosa County on March 25, 2013, on the sale of the house. The contract date is listed as March 22, 2013, the sale price is listed as $3,077,000.

The Foundation paid the $10,035 property tax on the home Dec. 21, 2013, according to records. Before that time, the taxes had been paid by the Sabans.

Saban was not required to note the sale on his annual statement of economic interests with the state of Alabama.

NCAA: It's allowed

The four-bedroom, four-and-a-half-bathroom home has 8,759 square feet and sits on 1.26 acres.

According to Zillow, a real estate tracking website, the home was built in 1997, sold in 2004 for $2.33 million and again in 2007, when the Sabans bought it, for $2.875 million.

A spokeswoman for the NCAA said a coach's compensation package is determined by the university, and a university foundation is allowed to be a source for coach compensation.

At least one other coach, former Auburn University coach Pat Dye, had his house purchased by a private foundation. According to an Associated Press story from 1983, the Auburn Alumni Association bought Dye's $412,000 house and would give him title to it if he remained as football coach for 14 years.

Cassie Athen, Auburn University assistant athletic director for public relations, said Auburn does not pay for head football coach Gus Malzahn's housing.

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KEEPING NICK HAPPY: NONPROFIT GROUP BOUGHT HOUSE SOON AFTER 2013 CHAMPIONSHIP, RECORDS SHOW.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

According to its website, the Crimson Tide Foundation is a nonprofit 501(c)(3), serving as the charitable arm of the University of Alabama Department of Athletics. It is administered by a volunteer board of directors.

All gifts to the foundation are applied to the support of athletic excellence at the University of Alabama. Gifts may be used to establish scholarships or add to an existing one, build or renovate athletic facilities, endow coaching positions and for other special projects. All gifts are used as directed by the donor.

As the Athletic Department at the University of Alabama is 100 percent self-supporting, UA Athletics receives no funding from the state of Alabama, according to the foundation’s website.

Alabama football coach Nick Saban isn’t putting any of his $6.9 million-a-year salary toward a mortgage on his Tuscaloosa home, because the Crimson Tide Foundation bought it last year, records show. (File)
Apple CEO Tim Cook criticizes home state Alabama on gay rights
By Jay Reeves

Alabama was too slow to guarantee the rights of minorities during the civil rights era, and now it’s too slow to ensure the rights of people based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Apple CEO Tim Cook said Monday in challenging his home state to change course.

Cook’s comments came as he, University of Alabama football coach Nick Saban and UA President Judy Bonner and five others were inducted into the Alabama Academy of Honor, which recognizes living state natives for their contributions.

Speaking at the Capitol in the chamber where the state voted to secede from the Union in 1861, Cook said Alabama and the nation “have a long way to go” before realizing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of equality. Cook visited a Baptist church once pastored by King before the ceremony.

Alabama was “too slow” to guarantee rights in the 1960s, Cook said, and it removed a ban on interracial marriage from its constitution only

14 years ago.

“And (Alabama is) still too slow on equality for the LGBT community. Under the law, citizens of Alabama can still be fired based on their sexual orientation,” said Cook, a native of coastal Baldwin County. “We can’t change the past, but we can learn from it, and we can create a different future.”

Alabama is among the states that do not recognize same-sex marriage, and it also doesn’t offer legal protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Cook also called educational equality “one of the greatest civil rights issues of our times.”

Earlier this year, Apple said it would give $100 million for school technology, and Cook announced the money would go for equipment and training at 114 schools in more than 29 states, including five in Alabama.

“We at Apple view it our responsibility to step up and act,” Cook said.

The company is partnering with the White House on the project.

Cook is a native of Robertsdale and attended Auburn University. He succeeded Apple founder Steve Jobs as chief executive officer in 2011. The Apple executive spoke on behalf of the 2014 inductees.
Bonner was recognized for her career at UA, Saban, though not an Alabama native, was recognized for his success on the football field with the Crimson Tide and his philanthropy through his family's nonprofit organization, Nick's Kids Fund.

Other honorees were Big Oak Ranch founder John Croyle, biotech leader Jim Hudson Jr. of Huntsville, U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions, former Mountain Brook mayor Margaret Porter and Birmingham businessman Edgar Welden.

Membership in the academy is limited to 100. The academy accepts nominations for the honor roll and may elect new members each year to maintain its membership at 100. All living governors are automatically added to the academy's roll.

The academy was created by the Alabama Legislature in 1965, and its first members were selected in 1968.
UA business school gets $1.5M gift

Prominent Culverhouse family says it will match monetary donations from alumni

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama Culverhouse College of Commerce and Business Administration has received a $1.5 million gift from alumni and a pledge for matching funds from the family of the college's namesake.

"We are excited about the Fayards' gift, as well as the Culverhouse match," said Michael Hardin, dean of the business school.

Alumni Gary Fayard and his wife, Nancy Fayard, gave $1.5 million to the business college, money that will be used to create the Fayard Endowed Chair in Accounting, according to Hardin. The gift is the largest endowment in the history of the Culverhouse School of Accountancy.

Hardin said he believes the gift will help increase the prominence of the accountancy school. The gifts and fundraising help the school and college stay competitive, allowing it to attract premier faculty and students, he said.

"It's something for the university and the state to be proud of," Hardin said.

Fayard, a retired Coca-Cola Co. executive, is a 1975 graduate of the business college, and his wife is a 1975 graduate of the college of education, Hardin said.

The plans for the gift developed during the past month, Hardin said.

Hugh Culverhouse Jr., the son of the alumnus for which the business college is named, issued a challenge last year meant to spur giving for the college. Culverhouse and his wife, Eliza Culverhouse, promised to match others' gifts.

Hardin said he contacted Fayard about the possibility of participating.

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in the Culverhouse challenge, and, after considering the proposition, Fayard agreed to make a gift a few weeks ago.

The college has received the gift from the Fayards, and $1 million of the match from Culverhouse, Hardin said. The college anticipates receiving the remaining $500,000 of the match later, Hardin said.

The Culverhouse match will benefit the Eliza and Hugh F. Culverhouse Student Assistance Scholarship, said Hill Rowan, director of Development for the Culverhouse College of Commerce. Culverhouse has given more than $3 million so far to the college for the program that provides scholarships for academically gifted undergraduates who don’t qualify for other scholarship opportunities and otherwise would be faced with taking on student debt to fund their educations.

The school will make a new hire for the Fayard chair as part of a nationwide search, Hardin said, adding existing faculty would also be eligible to apply.

The college is in the process of preparing to advertise the new chairman, Hardin said. The college hopes to have interviews in the spring and possibly someone in place by next fall.

The endowments help fund various aspects of the compensation for the chair holders, including support and salary, Hardin said. Chairmen are reviewed every five years, he said.

“Chaired positions should be someone who has national prominence in that particular area,” Hardin said. “We expect them to be the intellectual leaders, in that way, of the college.”

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0209.
Bonner to help replace Slive
UA president named to SEC search board

Staff report

BIRMINGHAM | University of Alabama President Judy Bonner has been named to the search committee to find a replacement for Mike Slive as Southeastern Conference Commissioner.

Slive announced earlier this month that he will retire next July after 13 years as commissioner.

Bonner was named by Nicholas S. Zeppos, Vanderbilt chancellor and chair of the SEC’s presidents and chancellors, along with David Gearhart, Arkansas chancellor, who will serve as chairman, and Kentucky President Eli Capilouto, Mississippi State President Mark Keenum and R. Bowen Loftin, Missouri chancellor.

"First of all, let me express my deepest appreciation to Mike Slive for the extraordinary leadership he has provided during his tenure as SEC commissioner," Bonner said. "I am honored to be a member of the search committee, and I am fully committed to working with the committee to select the person who will continue to ensure the traditions of athletic and academic success that define the SEC."

Capilouto is a native of Montgomery and served as provost at
"The SEC has enjoyed an era of unprecedented success under Mike Slive and at the same time has been a leader in dramatic change in the landscape of college athletics under his direction," Zeppos said. "It is critical to have an efficient transition of leadership in order to continue our success on the fields of play as well as to identify a staunch advocate for academic achievement, integrity and sportsmanship. Our objective is to seamlessly maintain our conference's participation in shaping the future of intercollegiate athletics."

SEC

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UAB and was dean of the UAB School of Public Health.

Zeppos said the committee will work closely with athletic directors, faculty representatives, senior female administrators and student athletes in the search.

He also said the presidents and chancellors hope to select the new commissioner in a timely manner to allow a transition period before Slive's retirement.
Dalai Lama brings message of peace

The Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibet, visited Birmingham's historic Civil Rights District Saturday afternoon and called for Birmingham Mayor William Bell to lead the effort to increase confidence and hard work among the people.

"The only question is opportunity," the Dalai Lama said. "Because of the economic situation, there is frustration. Frustration brings anger. Then anger brings violence."

DALAI LAMA.
DALAI LAMA

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He said Bell and President Barack Obama could be role models.
"We must develop self-confidence and work hard," the Dalai Lama said. "That’s what I want to share." He also spoke about inequality of wealth. "America, richest country," he said. "But there’s a gap, rich and poor. It’s a very serious matter."

After a morning discussion with UAB neuroscientists, the Dalai Lama visited Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in the afternoon.

He startled news reporters when he walked into the historic church, sat down in a back pew and welcomed the media to sit around him. They had expected him to speak toward the front of the church, but quickly moved their cameras and equipment.

They began asking questions, then Birmingham Mayor William Bell came and sat next to him. The Dalai Lama grasped Bell’s hand and held it through most of the meeting with the media.

The Dalai Lama said he met Bell on a trip to Japan and Bell asked him to come to Birmingham. It’s his first trip to Alabama, he said.

The Dalai Lama, asked if he hoped to return to Tibet someday, said, "Absolutely." He said he and his followers, who were exiled in 1959 after China took over Tibet in 1950, all hold out hope of returning to their Tibetan homeland.

He also talked about whether he’ll be the last Dalai Lama. He’s the 14th Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibet. "Some people think it’s important to Bud-

dhism," he said. "It’s not."

It’s up to the Tibetan people whether they want another Dalai Lama after he’s gone. "I’m critical of Tibetans," he said. "So much importance of Dalai Lama. That’s wrong. Some spiritual leaders eventually want political power."

He even cracked a joke that if he’s the last Dalai Lama, he’d be really popular. "If end of Dalai Lama come, former Dalai Lama quite popular," he said, and laughed.

At one point, talking about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement, the Dalai Lama asked Bell to correct him if he got anything wrong. "It’s not my place to correct you," Bell said.

The Dalai Lama hit on some of the main themes of Buddhism. "You must develop inner peace," he said. "Then you can develop peace in your family. From there, it can spread to the world, he said.

"Everyone wants happiness," he said. "Peace is the basis of happiness."

Outside the church, about 300 protesters gathered in Kelly Ingram Park and chanted loudly with a drumbeat rhythm. "False Dalai Lama, stop lying." They are from the International Shugden Community, which SAYS that the Dalai Lama has banned their worship of Dorje Shugden, a Buddhist deity also known as "demon king," and that practitioners are being discriminated against in India and other communities of Tibetan exiles.

The Dalai Lama said they worshipped an evil spirit. "I myself also worshipped that spirit," the Dalai Lama. "I stopped the worship."

He accused followers of Dorje Shugden of being extremely sectarian. "These people who follow — very sectarian," the Dalai Lama said. He follows in the tradition of nonsectarian Dalai Lamas, he said. "We never banned (Shugden)," but he has discouraged the practice, the Dalai Lama said.

Across the street in front of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, supporters of the Dalai Lama also chanted.

The animated, loud protest in Kelly Ingram Park was reminiscent of the civil rights era.

The Dalai Lama discussed his admiration of King, who led demonstrations outside the church in 1963. "Martin Luther King was ... a follower of Mahatma Gandhi, his nonviolent principles," the Dalai Lama said. "That gives millions of people more self-confidence and courage. That’s wonderful."

He added, "I also consider myself a follower of Mahatma Gandhi — simplicity, full of confidence, inner strength."

The Dalai Lama mentioned his friendship with the Catholic monk Thomas Merton. "I have many spiritual brothers, sisters," he said. The monastic tradition has similarities to meditation, he said. "We have as a common practice these things," he said.

But all believers of any faith should seek peace, he said. "Once we accept, we should be sincere," he said. "Then all religions have the same potential. Then, conflict in the name of religion is impossible. Killing in the name of religion, impossible."

Those who kill in the name of religion are not true practitioners of faith, he said. "Any Muslim who commits bloodshed is actually no longer a Muslim practitioner," he said. "A person who creates a problem for you is God’s creation. You must respect him."

‘ANGER BRINGS VIOLENCE’: DALAI LAMA CALLS ON MAYOR TO LEAD EFFORT FOR HARD WORK AND CONFIDENCE.
Dalai Lama visits Birmingham

Tibetan spiritual leader met with support, protests

The Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM | The Dalai Lama is in Birmingham this weekend, where he is expected to speak to thousands of people during appearances at a university, a baseball stadium and a theater.

The Tibetan spiritual leader greeted supporters Saturday outside a downtown hotel at the start of his visit to the United States.

WBMA-TV aired video of the Dalai Lama greeting supporters, who wore white scarves in hopes that he would bless them. Tibetan monks prepared sacred art in honor of the visit.

The visit also drew about 250 protesters downtown, Al.com reported. They said the Dalai Lama has persecuted people and caused them to be mistreated and ostracized in Tibetan exile communities.

The Dalai Lama on Saturday was participating in an event on brain science and healing hosted by the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Today, the Dalai Lama will participate in an interfaith event at the Alabama Theater, followed by a public talk at Regions Field.
An Ebola primer: Dr. Craig Wilson of the UAB School of Public Health speaks on the facts

By: Ian Hoppe

Dr. Craig Wilson, professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Director of the Sparkman Center for Global Health gave a lecture yesterday afternoon at the Ryals School of Public Health on the broad history of the Ebola virus across the world.

Dr. Wilson is a definite authority on the subject, having worked in the field of virus transmission his entire career and spent time in south Africa studying virus spread and treatment.

The talk included an explanation of the process of Ebola transmission, the origins of the 2014 outbreak, how this outbreak is different from previous Ebola outbreaks, why the spread was so extensive, and what is being done to quell it.

The Fruit Bat is a common carrier of the Ebola virus and is thought to be the main transmitter to humans. Fortunately for the Fruit Bat, Ebola doesn't affect them, they are just a vehicle for the virus to spread.

Here's one way it works:

- An infected Fruit Bat drinks the juice out of a piece of fruit on a tree somewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa
- That piece of fruit, now with infected bat saliva on it, drops to the ground and is eaten by some other animal like a deer or a monkey
- Humans kill the deer or monkey for food and the virus is transmitted during the butchering of the animal.
- Fruit Bat is also a common food in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes the virus is transmitted directly from bat to human.

The process of disease moving between species of animals is called Zoonosis.

Public Health officials have traced the outbreak in this case back to a two-year old child(Patient Zero) whose mother was cooking a bat to eat.

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Somehow, during the butchering of the animal, the child was exposed to the bodily fluids of the bat and became infected.

Soon after, the boy and his mother traveled to his grandmother's house who was soon sick with Ebola. Her caretakers and daughter were infected and the disease spread like wildfire from there.

Previously, most if not all of Ebola outbreaks were in very rural area, which means people were much more spread out. When people live further apart, the virus does not spread as quickly and the outbreak is much easier to quash.

However, in this case, those infected traveled to Monrovia, Liberia, a place with several million people packed into just a few square miles.

"Imagine if you took everyone in the Hoover-Birmingham area and put them in the space between UAB and Birmingham-Shuttlesworth Airport," Wilson said. "That's how dense the population is."

The disease wasn't recognized as Ebola until the virus had spread too far to manage. This is for a variety of reasons.

Ebola presents a lot like the Influenza virus, Cholera, or any host of other much more common viruses in the region. One thing that distinguishes Ebola from these other infections is the presence of hiccups among the other symptoms.

It was this fact, actually, that finally alerted a Doctors without Borders volunteer to the virus.

Dr. Wilson strongly emphasized, however, that the presence of hiccups does not mean you or your loved one is infected with the Ebola virus. For me, it usually means I drank too much cheap beer. A much less serious, but by no means an insignificant diagnosis.

Don't start any rumors. Seriously.

Some other factors that contributed to the huge spread was the recent and ongoing civil unrest in the country, lack of basic infrastructure like water and food supplies, distrust of health workers and government officials, and the lack of education about how diseases are spread.

The average citizen of Sub-Saharan Africa does not have a conception of Germ Theory.
Finally, Dr Wilson talked about how well the disease has been handled in the United States emphasizing, again, that there is really no need to panic about a real outbreak here, given our sophisticated healthcare system.

"If you want to know how well your healthcare systems are operating, look at how many layers (i.e. secondary infections) there are to the spread." He said, "We have at the most one transfer (the nurse in Texas)."

"When people ask me what they can do to help with the Ebola outbreak I tell them to go get their Flu Vaccine." He says.

35,000 people per year in the United States die ever year of Influenza. There are larger viral threats to people in the U.S. than Ebola, but without the fanfare.

1000 people per hour die of HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa.

There are larger viral threats to people world wide than Ebola. Much, much larger.

In a press Q&A after the lecture, he underscored yet again that the State of Alabama is at very low risk for even seeing a case of Ebola, much less an outbreak.

"There will be more infections in the U.S. in the next few months, but if we stay at a high level of alert and protect our second layer of caregivers we will be fine," he said.

You can lean more about Dr. Craig Wilson and the UAB Department of Epidemiology on their website.
Breast cancer survivor Tammy Than underwent a double mastectomy last spring. Two months later, she ran a marathon in Alaska.

"I sent pictures to people and I said, 'First marathon without the girls,'" said Than, a professor at University of Alabama at Birmingham's School of Optometry.

Than, 64, needed to finish the marathon in Alaska as part of her mission to run a marathon in all 50 states — a mission she will complete Sunday when she crosses the finish line at the BG26.2 run in Bowling Green, Ky.

One of Than’s biggest support groups is the UAB School of Optometry, including the faculty, staff and students. They surprised her with a rally Monday afternoon for her upcoming final race.

"We're like a family here," Than said. "My heart is in teaching. It's not just a job. I care deeply about all these kids, and I think they know that."

"Physically, mentally, spiritually — she is just such an uplifting person," said student Bonnie-Kim Hang. "All in all, she's just an amazing person."

Chelsey Johnson, another student, helped organize the rally that included signs of encouragement and pink breast cancer T-shirts reading "Keep calm and maraTHAN."

"She’s a very humble person," Johnson said. "She didn’t want any recognition, and a lot of..."

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"When I set my mind to something it's going to happen. I already had my plane ticket, my hotel, I had everything booked for the Alaska marathon, and then I found out I had breast cancer, and I'm like wait a minute. This is not going to interfere. And it didn't."

Tammy Than
Marathon runner, breast cancer survivor

Superior. "Some of these have been so gorgeous. Some of them have not. The one I did in Kansas was 1 mile around the mall that you ran 26 times. That's a little mind numbing."

Than said she prefers marathons with a couple thousand runners as opposed to some of the famous marathons. Instead of running the New York City Marathon, which boasted more than 50,000 finishers in 2013, Than opted to check off that state with a marathon in Rochester.

"I remember the Chicago marathon, my husband and I, we couldn't even find each other afterward. It's almost claustrophobic," she said.

She's also run marathons as small as 50 people. "It was in a town called Hooper, Nebraska. I bet you've never been to Hooper, Nebraska. I would have never been there, either, it wasn't for this marathon. I met some of the nicest people I have ever met. We ran some country roads out by cornfields, but it was delightful."

'I ran pretty fast because I had to catch my plane'

Than's biggest challenge in finishing a marathon in all 50 states has been the logistics of making it work.

"Typically I try to plan my whole year marathoning out. I was going to Iowa and South Dakota, and I thought let's just cross these off in one weekend, and so I did two with one flight and a rental car."

Than also had to coordinate her marathon schedule with her travel requirements as part of her continuing education work.

"I kept thinking surely I will be speaking somewhere where there's a marathon, and then I can kill two birds with one stone," she said. "It never happened, until I spoke at a meeting in Hawaii. Talk about hitting the jackpot."

Her trip to run the Las Vegas Rock 'n' Roll Marathon last November was not as easy.

The race didn't start until 4:30 p.m., which put her in a time crunch. "I ran pretty relatively fast for me because I had to catch my plane," she said. "I got my medal. I ran to my hotel. Caught a shuttle. You'll notice that there's no shower in this story. I caught a shuttle to the airport. Got on a red eye. Came back to UCLA and taught my class that morning."

For her final state, Than planned to keep it closer to home.

"Most people, their last one, they go to Hawaii or Alaska or something, but I really wanted family and people to be able to come. I had already started knocking ones out of the Southeast, so I decided to save Kentucky."

Than isn't sure what her next goal will be after she finishes the 50 States marathon task Sunday, but whatever it is, she will achieve it.

"When I set my mind to something it's going to happen," she said. "I already had my plane ticket, my hotel, I had everything booked for the Alaska marathon, and then I found out I had breast cancer, and I'm like wait a minute. This is not going to interfere. And it didn't."
Prostate cancer targeted in new 'fusion' technology at UAB

By: Mike Oliver

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is now using a new treatment combining two technologies to battle prostate cancer.

Magnetic resonance imaging and ultrasound come together to offer a "targeted biopsy" in this promising new treatment, according to a UAB news release.

The release says UAB is the only place in the Southeast offering what is called MRI-US image fusion technique.

"We are utilizing prostate MRI and fusing it with real-time ultrasound for image-guided prostate biopsies," said Dr. Jeffrey Nix in a statement. "This can detect prostate cancer with high accuracy, and it accurately targets lesions of concern defined by MRI.

"This improves overall detection compared to standard biopsy and, more importantly, has the potential to give clinicians and patients a more accurate picture of their true disease burden by allowing improvements in staging."

Nix, along with colleague Dr. Soroush Rais-Bahrami, both assistant professors in the UAB Department of Urology, are two of a select few urologists in the United States trained to use this technology, the release stated.

"This improves overall detection compared to standard biopsy."

MRI-US fusion-guided biopsy can be performed under local anesthesia in the clinic.

"I have a patient who had five previous biopsy sessions over the past seven years, and he's had persistently elevated PSA, yet each biopsy came back negative," Rais-Bahrami said. "When he came to us and had the MRI-US fusion-guided biopsy, we were able to target areas that we identified with our radiologists as areas of concern, and one in fact came back as cancerous. This is probably what's been there causing his PSA elevation all this time; however, it was hidden to all these biopsy sessions over the past seven years."

The National Cancer center predicts there will be 240,000 new cases and more than 29,000 deaths from prostate cancer in 2014.
European trade mission focuses on Alabama’s bioscience business

Dawn Kent Azok  dazok@al.com

Bioscience, research and business leaders from across Alabama are traveling in Belgium and the Netherlands in a trade mission to strengthen ties with similar companies in Europe.

Alabama Commerce Secretary Greg Canfield is leading the delegation, which is made up of representatives of bioscience firms, research organizations, trade experts and business recruiters.

During the five-day trip, they are making presentations on Alabama’s bioscience sector, networking with colleagues and touring industry facilities.

Participating companies include Atherotech Diagnostics Lab, Evonik Industries and MedSnap LLC, all of Birmingham, and Swift Biotechnology LLC of Mobile.

Other participants hail from the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of South Alabama, Huntsville's CFD Research Corp., the Birmingham Business Alliance, North Alabama International Trade Organization, the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority, the city of Opelika and the Alabama Small Business Development Center.

In Belgium, the group is visiting Flanders Life Sciences Research Institute in Ghent and UCB Pharma in Braine l'Alleud, south of Brussels. In the Netherlands, they are touring the Leiden Bio Science Park.

Alabama is home to more than 550 bioscience companies, and more than 10,000 state residents work in the sector.

"Alabama’s bioscience industry is a vital economic engine for our state," Canfield said in a statement. "We know we have a great story to share."

The Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce and the U.S. Department of Commerce’s Birmingham office are sponsoring the mission, along with the Commerce Department.
Full Moon Bar-B-Que to rise with other eateries at new UAB student center

Jesse Chambers  jchambers@al.com

Popular Birmingham-based eatery Full Moon Bar-B-Que is the latest addition to the restaurant lineup for UAB's under-construction student center.

Full Moon will be one of four restaurants in the 159,000-square-foot, $48 million Hill Student Center, joining Panera Bread, Mein Bowl and Starbucks, according to a news release from the school. It will be Full Moon's first-ever location on a college campus.

The restaurants are part of the efforts by the administration at the University of Alabama at Birmingham to make the campus more attractive to students — both those already attending UAB and ones the school wishes to recruit. The student center is set to open in fall 2015.

UAB Provost Linda Lucas said in the release that UAB students "deserve world-class facilities and services."

In addition to restaurants, the four-story Hill Center on University Boulevard will have a bookstore, other stores and places for students, faculty and staff to meet, mingle and play video games.

"We wanted a place the students can call their own," Harlan Sands, vice provost for administration and quality improvement at UAB, said previously.

While students will have to wait a while on the Hill Center eateries, The Den — a fast-casual version of Denny's recently opened in the former diner location in the Commons on the Green.

UAB also announced improvements to its dormitories, including better Wi-Fi service.
Ensley holds answer to school success

Alabama's education system has long been under fire. We know the struggles and we've read about the shortcomings — but amid the often-publicized failures, there are success stories.

Those successes can be found in places some may consider unlikely, at the address of 2001 19th St., Ensley.

Yes, Ensley.

Birmingham's Ensley neighborhood unquestionably has its problems with violent crime and poverty, but those headlines cloud the innovations happening daily at Holy Family Cristo Rey Catholic High School.

It's a type of education that's producing strong results, thanks to its unwavering commitment to its students and their community.

"Our mission is to be part of a community, to serve the poor," said Anne Thompson, the school's interim chief executive officer. "Instead of running from challenges, we stay and confront those challenges. We have an important role in community stability."

It's working. Holy Family boasts a 100 percent graduation and college acceptance rate since opening its doors in 2007. And the students? They're just as remarkable.

Each student I met during a recent visit looked me in the eyes and greeted me with a firm handshake. They were articulate, punctuating every sentence with "yes, sir."

Sure, they're polite, but those students are so much more than that — they're confident in who they are. You can tell by their poise, their assurance in meeting new people.

Credit a nurturing environment.

Holy Family is one of 28 Catholic high schools affiliated with the national Cristo Rey Network. It offers a college preparatory curriculum and a work-study program that helps students cover tuition.

One day a week, students work with one of the school's 90 corporate partners — including UAB Health System, Regions Financial Corporation — to receive real-world workforce experience.

Holy Family is a private school, but the foundation for its success — its investments in its community and student body — are lessons that can be applied to both public and private institutions.

The students, the teachers, the faculty — everyone is committed to achievement.

"To maintain this 100 percent graduation rate, it takes understanding students and their families," school counselor Pamela Cowan said. "We don't have limits, we open (students) up to what's not familiar so they can see their value. We open the door so they can see their own greatness."

"That means faculty can't run out of the door at 3:20," she added. "It might mean staying until 7 or 8. It might mean opening doors on the weekend. This is what helps the students see their value."

Thanks to Holy Family, RJ sees his value.

Robert "RJ" Jones is an aspiring chef who has been working alongside Frank Stitt of Highlands Bar and Grill.

RJ said the experience was invaluable, learning about health codes and standards along with meal preparation.

When I asked what he enjoyed so much about the culinary arts, he said, without flinching: "Cooking allows others to enter your soul through your plate."

That's passion.

"We set a high bar," said David B. Hodges, the school's vice president for external affairs. "If you raise the bar, students will work up to it."

"Just because (students) are from challenged socio-economic backgrounds doesn't mean they're limited to that," Thompson added. "Our job is to move them beyond their circumstances."

And it's working. There's no easy fix for Alabama's schools, but while we bicker over leadership, funding and other issues, the one fix that can occur right now is increasing our level of commitment.

You don't need a budget or a search committee for that.

All you need is a staff working to help their students see their worth.

The proof is in Ensley.
UAH wants to buy University Park


Steve Doyle | sdoyle@al.com

The University of Alabama in Huntsville wants to buy a 10-acre city park near the campus for use as future sports fields.

The Huntsville City Council was scheduled to vote Oct. 23 on UAH's $900,000 purchase offer for University Park, which backs up to the university's Charger Park baseball and softball complex. The campus and city park are separated by a wide drainage ditch.

Councilman Bill Kling asked to delay the vote, saying people living near UAH need more time to understand what is being proposed. The council scheduled a Monday, Nov. 3, special session to talk about it in more detail.

"I want to make sure the neighborhood has a chance to voice input on this before any action is taken by the council," said Kling, whose district includes the UAH area.

If University Park is sold, City Administrator John Hamilton said the Continental League youth sports program based there would be moved to Brahan Spring Park on Drake Avenue. The $900,000 sale proceeds would be used to "significantly renovate and expand" Brahan Spring Park to accommodate more young athletes, he said.

Continental League board members have been briefed on the possible sale and seem to be supportive, said Hamilton.

Located at 4419 Saundralane Drive in the Rocketview neighborhood, University Park boasts five ballfields, two playgrounds, concession stands, restroom facilities and a picnic pavilion. Hamilton said his understanding is that UAH would turn the park into intramural fields.

Kling said the University of Alabama Board of Trustees is scheduled vote on the park purchase at its Nov. 6 meeting. The proposed contract says the two sides would close on the sale "on or before Dec. 15."
Entrepreneurial students learn vital startup skills from UAH leaders at crash course in Italy

By: Lucy Berry

Two faculty members from the University of Alabama in Huntsville were recently part of a one-week biotechnology entrepreneurship course for European college students at the University of Tuscia in Italy.

The BIOINNO event, which was funded by the European Union, included two of Huntsville's own entrepreneurial leaders: Kannan Grant, UAH's director of technology development, and Krishnan Chittur, professor and interim director of the Chemical and Materials Engineering Department. In addition to his work with UAH, Chittur is the founding chief technical officer of GeneCapture at the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology.

Grant and Chittur were part of a U.S. contingent at the BIOINNO Knowledge Alliance's Crash Course in Technology Entrepreneurship. Grant, who has known BIOINNO Project principal investigator and professor Antoine Harfouche for a while, said the students who attended the conference "left with much more than they thought they would."

"They were given a glimpse of context to enhance the content they have learned at their academic institutions," he told AL.com. "Entrepreneurship has to be learned from experience and practice. Of course, a sound academic background gives you the necessary tools to navigate the world of entrepreneurship successfully. With that in mind, we provided these students with a dose of reality as to what it would take to be an entrepreneur."

The event was attended by more than 40 students, ranging from undergraduate to post-doctoral levels, as well as entrepreneurs, patent attorneys and technology transfer experts and academics from across the world.

Chittur said many of the students in attendance had questions about raising capital, pitching new business ideas and taking an idea and making it "real."

View full sizeChemical Engineering professor Dr. Krishnan Chittur with a screen shot of a double-helix DNA strand that will be used to identify pathogens. (Photo by Michael Mercier/UAH)

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"I found myself refining my own thinking about the path from ideas to product/market," he said. "Til very recently, I was comfortable in my small world of classroom teaching ... and my venturing into the 'real world' as it were has really opened my own perspective, for the better."

BIOINNO designed the week-long course to give students the principles and steps needed for intellectual property protection and commercial product expansion.

The two-year BIOINNO project promotes European and U.S. collaborative partnerships and focuses on a number of disciplines, including biotech, engineering, life sciences, medicine and more.

Harfouche, who previously co-wrote a journal article with Grant and is the EU coordinator for the BIOINNO Project, said Grant and Chittur's seasoned expertise in U.S. entrepreneurship and technology commercialization has been an asset for the initiative.

"To be at the forefront of entrepreneurial education, we need to collaborate with the best minds and learn from best practices around the globe," he said in a statement. "The collaboration with our partner institutions, such as UAH, provides our constituents such opportunity and has proven to be very successful."

Other partners involved in the BIOINNO project are the University of Cambridge, UK; Artesis Plantijn University College, Belgium; The SPACE European network, Belgium; The ADAPT Low Carbon Group, UK; Emerald Marketing, Italy; SPYGEN, France; and the Bulgarian Development Agency.

The 2015 Crash Course in Technology Entrepreneurship will be hosted in Belgium. Grant, who expects UAH will be invited, said the conference provides students "a safe venue" to experience what it takes to start up their own company.

"For me it was highly rewarding not only to share how we view, treat, and motivate our entrepreneurs in the U.S., but also to have these students absorb that knowledge and at the end of the conference come up with plan to actually start a business," he said.
Replace a heart valve without open-heart surgery? Huntsville Hospital joins the few

facilities that can

By Lee Roop

Replace a heart valve in an hour without open-heart surgery with the patient awake on the table? It sounds like something from "Star Trek," but a procedure invented by a Huntsville native has allowed surgeons around the world to do just that 150,000 times since 2002. It's so accepted Medicare will pay for it, but it's still rare enough that only two hospitals in Birmingham performed it in Alabama before this summer.

Now, Huntsville Hospital has joined the hospitals able to perform the procedure as a treatment for the disease called aortic stenosis. A team led by cardiologist Dr. Alex Vasquez has done a Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement (TAVR) on seven patients since Aug. 12.

The aortic valve passes blood from the heart back through the body, but in patients suffering from aortic stenosis, the valve is clogged with calcium buildup and able to move only a small fraction of the blood the body needs. The results can range from loss of energy and fainting spells to heart failure and sudden death.

The disease affects people over 65

"It occurs in 12 percent of patients over 80," medical inventor Stan Rowe said in a Thursday interview. Rowe, a graduate of Huntsville High School and the University of Alabama in Huntsville, is now chief scientific officer with Edwards Lifesciences LLC in Irvine, Calif.

"It's an insidious disease." Rowe said. "That's one of the challenges. This loss of energy that's probably the biggest symptom occurs over months because the disease has taken years. It's under-diagnosed."

The traditional treatment is open heart surgery. "The cardiothoracic surgeon, who does amazing work, cuts through your sternum, opens your chest, puts you on cardiopulmonary bypass, cuts open your aorta and removes the diseased valve, then puts in with 30 sutures a new surgical valve.
"We're the world's leading maker of surgical valves, too," Rowe said, "so what these surgeons do is amazing. Their mortality rate is only about 3 percent - phenomenal - but it's a really rough procedure on older patients. A lot of older patients have other medical problems ... that may put you at high risk."

The new procedure is for high-risk surgical patients, Rowe said, "because it's done on a beating heart. You can do this without general anesthesia while the patient's awake on the table."

In the procedure, the surgeon makes an incision in the upper thigh to access the femoral artery, which goes directly to the heart. A guide wire is inserted, then a sheath or conduit. A balloon catheter is inserted to dilate the valve. Then, the valve is pushed through and docked with the balloon. The valve is put in place and the diseased valve is pushed out of the way. The procedure takes about an hour. Patients go home in three-to-five days and recover in a month.

They said: It won't work, we don't need it

"This idea had been around, but no one had ever made one," Rowe said. "No one knew what it should look like. A lot of people said it won't work and we don't need it, mostly the folks already doing the procedures. So I founded the company that developed this procedure in January of 2000 with two cardiologists, myself and one other engineer. We raised money, did the early engineering and by April 2002 did our first case in Europe. It shocked a lot of people that it worked. We did 14 cases before I sold the company to Edwards Lifesciences."

So, what's next? "Great question," Rowe said. "Next is the mitral valve, which is a bigger deal than this one. It's leakage, it's not narrowed, it's leaky. We have the same issue there that there's no great option for replacing a valve in the mitral position. I worked for five years to develop a trans-catheter mitral valve, and we just started doing those clinical trials in January."

A Huntsville Hospital, the procedure involves a number of medical disciplines including cardiologists, cardiothoracic surgeons, imaging cardiologists, cardiac anesthesiologists and perfusionists as well as operating room and cardiac cath lab staff, all in the same room, at the same time.

The cardiologist members of the TAVR team are Vasquez, Joshua Krasnow, Michael Butler, Mihir Kanitkar, Sean Groark and Michael Ridner. Cardiovascular surgeons on the team include Drs. Benton Washburn, Shaf Holden and Aaron Hoffman. Katherine Meier, RN, is coordinator of the Valve Clinic.
Special events put Huntsville in international space spotlight

Lee Roop | lroop@al.com

Leaders of the American and European space programs come together with the latest in space technology next week to put Huntsville at the center of the world conversation about space.

Among those scheduled to be here are NASA Administrator Charles Bolden Jr. and Jean-Jacques Dordain, the director-general of the European Space Agency.

Starting the week's events, Monday, Oct. 27, is a NASA technology exposition and a Marshall Space Flight Center Media Day that will bring journalists from around the country and high-tech innovators to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center.

Later that day, the seventh Werner von Braun Memorial Symposium hosted by the American Astronautical Society opens with a reception at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. A series of panels starting Tuesday, Oct. 28, at UAH will feature Bolden and dozens of leaders in government and private space programs.

First comes the Marshall Technology Exposition, Oct. 27 at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center's Davidson Center for Space Exploration. More than 40 exhibits will feature emerging technologies being developed at Marshall. Registration is still open for the exposition.

"We're excited about it," Jody Singer, manager of Marshall's Flight Programs and Partnerships Office, said. "We are trying to talk to and educate experts in the area about how our work is paving the way for missions today in robotics, human exploration of space and science. We are looking for partners."

Visitors to the expo will be able to see what Marshall is working on and talk to the scientists and engineers doing the work and the decision makers that can help green-light technology projects, Singer said.

Solar engineering, materials sciences, life sciences, welding, composites, small satellites, landing capabilities — Singer said NASA will need work in all of these tech areas to explore deep space. Presenters will discuss many of them at the expo.

"If the discussion catches your attention," she said, "You can go talk to the expert, get more information and get (his or her) contact information."

The von Braun symposium kicks off with a Monday evening reception at the University of Alabama in Huntsville's University Center Exhibit Hall. The program begins Tuesday, Oct. 28, at the Chan Auditorium in the UAH Business Administration Building.

Among those scheduled to speak at symposium events, in addition to Bolden, are:

- Greg Johnson, president and executive director of the Center for the Advancement of Science in Space, the organization that controls science experiments in the American laboratory of the International Space Station.
- John Shannon, Boeing space station program manager.
- William Gerstenmaier, NASA associate administrator for human exploration and operations.

Also taking part in the conference are the leaders whose teams are developing all three major components of NASA's new Space Launch System — ground operations, Orion capsule and the heavy-lift booster — and Mike Griffin, former NASA administrator.

Dordain is the keynote speaker for the Von Braun Memorial Dinner at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center Wednesday, Oct. 29 at 7 p.m.

Online registration to the conference is closed, but persons wishing to attend can register onsite at UAH.
Orion capsule's Dec. 4 test flight is 'a BF deal,' NASA Administrator Charles Bolden says

BY: Lee Roop

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden told a Huntsville space symposium named for Wernher von Braun Tuesday that NASA's coming test flight of the new Orion crew capsule is "a BF deal."

"If you don't understand that, you should not be sitting in this forum," Bolden said to a lunch audience at the 7th Wernher von Braun Memorial Symposium being held at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

The flight scheduled Dec. 4 will take an uncrewed Orion 3,600 miles above Earth to test key systems of the spacecraft NASA will use to fly astronauts back to deep space. Orion will orbit the Earth and re-enter allowing NASA to test its heat shield, communications, guidance and other critical systems. If the test goes well, NASA stays on track to launch in 2021 the first humans on a mission to circle the moon since the Apollo era.

No memory of Apollo

The Apollo era, famous in Huntsville where the Saturn V rocket was built, is something the Millennial Generation entering the space program now does not remember, symposium attendees were told by a morning panel. Young aerospace engineers said they personally remember the Space Shuttle Columbia breaking apart over Texas in 2003 as the most significant moment in America's space program.

Bolden said those young rocket scientists need to be able to put their hands on hardware and launch rockets, something panelists said, but they also need to see America doing big things in space. The Dec. 4 flight is a step toward one of those big things, he said.

"That's a big deal," Bolden said. "Let me stop. That's a big deal. As the vice president would say, and I'm not going to say it, that's a BF deal." The reference was to Vice President Joe Biden being caught at least twice using the "BF deal" expression in its entirety.

Bolden said Orion is the "first time this nation has produced a vehicle intended to carry humans beyond low-Earth orbit into deep space in more than 40 years. More than 40 years."

A rocket built in Decatur

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Orion will ride into space in December atop a Delta IV Heavy rocket built by United Launch Alliance in Decatur, Ala. Later, it will fly as a part of NASA's Space Launch System, and the massive booster rocket for SLS is being developed by the Marshall center in Alabama.

"I don't think we've seen such a flurry of activity at Marshall since Wernher von Braun," Bolden said, adding that "not much goes into space without going through Huntsville."

The NASA administrator is spending most of the week here attending the symposium and getting briefed on Marshall's programs. A former four-time astronaut, he said, "Every time I come to Huntsville I'm thrown into the midst of some pretty giant people. One of my mentors here is Alex McCool. For those of you from Huntsville, particularly those from Marshall, I think everybody knows Alex McCool. He took me under his wing right after Challenger when I came up here to be the Astronaut Office liaison to Marshall. I learned more from Alex in a day than you learn from most people in a lifetime."

McCool was one of the original Marshall Space Flight Center employees who worked on numerous programs and at one time headed the Space Shuttle Projects Office at Marshall.
Huntsville still the 'Rocket City' as NASA aims for Mars: guest opinion

By: Guest Opinion

Huntsville became known as America's "Rocket City" during the 1960s when the pioneering rocket scientist, Wernher von Braun, led Marshall Space Flight Center and the development of the Saturn V rocket that made possible the first steps on the moon by Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

As NASA prepares to take its next giant leap in space exploration with a human journey to Mars in the 2030s, Huntsville is again at the forefront, developing the Space Launch System (SLS), the heavy lift rocket that will carry our astronauts farther into the solar system than anyone has ever gone before.

On Oct. 28, at the annual Wernher von Braun Memorial Symposium taking place on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville, I will share with key members of America's space community, the progress we are making on our Journey to Mars and several other major priorities.

A highlight of NASA's recent efforts was the announcement on Sept. 16 of the selection of Boeing and SpaceX to develop and certify crew transportation systems that will transport U.S. astronaut crews from U.S. soil to and from the International Space Station, ending our sole reliance on the Russians.

From day one, the Obama Administration has made it clear that the greatest nation on Earth should not be dependent on other nations to get into space.

Today we are one step closer to launching our astronauts from U.S. soil on American spacecraft and ending the nation's sole reliance on Russia by 2017. Turning over low-Earth orbit transportation to private industry will allow NASA to focus on an even more ambitious mission - sending humans to Mars.

We have already fulfilled part of the President's vision. For the past two years, two companies, SpaceX and Orbital Sciences, have been making regular cargo deliveries to the International Space Station.

The contracts we recently announced are designed to complete the NASA certification for human space transportation systems capable of carrying people into orbit. Once certification is

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complete, NASA plans to use these systems to ferry astronauts to the International Space Station and return them safely to Earth.

Each day, around the clock, the Marshall Payload Operations Center team helps our on-orbit astronauts conduct groundbreaking science from the Space Station.

As this research takes place in low-Earth orbit, and Boeing and SpaceX refine their new space transportation systems, NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and its Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, are working just as diligently readying our new heavy-lift rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS).

Joined with our multi-purpose crew vehicle, Orion, this new, powerful launch vehicle will carry people far from our local space neighborhood for deep space missions in the next decade.

When SLS and Orion are ready, we'll conduct missions that will each set their own impressive roster of firsts. First crew to visit and take samples of an asteroid, first crew to fly beyond the orbit of the moon, perhaps the first crew to grow its own food in space - all of which will set us up for humanity's next giant leap: the first crew to touch down on and take steps on the surface of Mars.

Beyond SLS, Marshall has a diverse portfolio of technology development and science research underway that will make it possible to explore, live and work in space beyond low-Earth orbit.

None of this would be possible without the more than 6,000 civil service and contractor employees at Marshall who are dedicated to America's spirit of exploration and innovation.

I especially want to commend the President and Congress for providing us support for this new way of doing business. By combining private sector ingenuity with a bipartisan national commitment, and the unmatched expertise of NASA, we are not only better able to stretch the boundaries of the possible, we are strengthening our economy and creating good jobs for our people.

Like that first mission to the moon, our Journey to Mars is an unprecedented undertaking. But, as Marshall's Wernher von Braun reminded us, "Mankind's reach should always exceed his grasp."

Our destiny is set, our course is laid out before us and we are following it. We hope that the people of Huntsville and all Americans will be inspired to join us on this next great, ambitious leg of humanity's journey farther into our solar system than ever before.
Lawsuit: UAH protected athlete in rape case

HOCKEY PLAYER ACCUSED: VICTIM CLAIMS TITLE IX RIGHTS WERE VIOLATED.

Paul Gattis | pgattis@al.com

The University of Alabama in Huntsville sought to protect its revived hockey program by discouraging a female student from making claims that she was sexually assaulted by a hockey player, according to a federal lawsuit.

The lawsuit was filed by the female student. Defendants named were UAH, Associate Provost Brent Wren, former UAH police Sgt. John Beswick and Dean of Students Regina Hyatt. UAH said in an email to The Huntsville Times that it would not be commenting on the lawsuit.

The suit stems from the incident involving Lasse Uusivirta, the UAH hockey player from Finland who ultimately left the country after being arrested in April 2013 and charged with first-degree rape.

The Huntsville Times reported May 16, 2013, that Uusivirta confessed to UAH police that he engaged in nonconsensual sex with the accuser, according to campus police records.

The lawsuit — filed in Alabama’s Northern District and assigned to U.S. District Judge Harwell Davis — repeats that allegation.

The woman’s attorney, Mary- Ellen Bates, claims federal Title IX rights were violated in wake of the incident. The accuser’s rights to education were compromised by the incident, according to the lawsuit.

The suit states the accuser saw Uusivirta on campus about two weeks after she was under the impression he had been expelled from school. The sighting led her to flee campus in fear of Uusivirta and caused her to miss classes and for her grades to suffer, according to the lawsuit.

The suit states that Beswick discouraged the accuser from pursuing charges against Uusivirta, telling her that she had “no case at all” in a court of law. That response led the accuser to instead take her case to the UAH Student Conduct Board.

The conduct board, according to the suit, determined that Uusivirta’s hockey scholarship should be revoked and he should be expelled from school. That ruling, the lawsuit said, led the accuser to believe Uusivirta would be leaving campus immediately.

The accuser saw Uusivirta on campus about two weeks later, though, and she soon learned that he had appealed the student conduct board’s decision to Wren, the associate provost, the suit said.

While awaiting Wren’s decision on Uusivirta’s appeal, the accuser “suffered severe anxiety and distress, and was fearful to be on campus. Her education suffered.”

Wren overruled the student conduct board decision soon after the 2012-13 hockey season ended on March 2, 2013, the suit said. The accuser received an email on March 21, 2013, describing the new punishment for Uusivirta, which included a two-semester suspension. That punishment, the lawsuit said, allowed Uusivirta to return to campus as soon as August 2013 to prepare for the 2013-14 hockey season.

“Upon information and belief, Wren delayed making his decision for approximately a month, to ensure that the ruling came after the mid-point in the semester, so that the punishment could be deferred,” the lawsuit said. “Further, it cannot be a coincidence that Wren took no action on the matter until after the final hockey game of the season.”

The accuser met with Wren the day she received the email, and she was told UAH “only expelled students for academic misconduct,” according to the lawsuit.

“Having been failed utterly by the university, (the accuser) contacted off-campus law enforcement, who treated the matter with the appropriate gravity,” the lawsuit said.

Uusivirta was arrested April 1, 2013, by Huntsville police and charged with first-degree rape.

The lawsuit also cited a post on Twitter the day after Uusivirta’s arrest by former UAH hockey coach Kurt Kleinendorst and said the coach “took to Twitter to defend” his player.

“Things are not always as they seem. Be careful to judge,” the tweet said.

Hyatt is named as a defendant because at the time of the incident, she was responsible for compliance with Title IX, according to the lawsuit. The UAH website states, “In cases involving Sexual Misconduct or Sexual Violence, the Initial Review will be replaced by a Title IX investigation conducted by the Dean of Students.”

AL.com reporter Brian Lawson contributed to this report.
OTHER VIEWS
Time for Athens State to move past concerns

Members of the Athens State University Board of Trustees' Executive Committee met to hear concerns from the Faculty and Staff senates last week. Those issues were raised in part through the remarks at the meeting and in more detail through documents emailed to President Bob Glenn. After reviewing the documents, it is clear that a number of issues have been addressed by President Glenn, and it is time that the university community start the process of moving past them.

IN-DEPTH DISCUSSIONS

First, President Glenn has the full support of the Board of Trustees. He has been completely forthcoming with the board and consistently has kept the board informed on all matters of concern. Dr. Glenn has met with each faculty and staff area across campus. A number of us attended those meetings, and we witnessed first hand both the concerns being voiced and Dr. Glenn's response. The president has been open and honest, has accepted responsibility for his own actions, and has shown respect for opposing points of view.

At Dr. Glenn's suggestion, he soon will gather at least two members of the Faculty Senate and the Staff Senate, along with members of his administrative team, to discuss the issues in-depth. Dr. Glenn will develop an appropriate response to each concern and report them to the Board of Trustees during or before our next meeting.

Second, I believe the president and university have acted according to the law and policies that govern our university. While I cannot address this specifically, claims that the university failed to comply with American Disabilities Act claim are unfounded. The response of the university is clearly specified by federal law. The written record clearly indicates a process is in place that requires all requests for accommodation to be heard by a university ADA committee.

The president doesn't participate in this process, nor does he have authority to overrule the decision of the committee, unless there is clear evidence the decision is unlawful. University counsel is always involved in reviewing requests for accommodations and recommendations to further insure compliance with the law.

Third, I say with confidence that the university's finances are sound and sustainable. This is demonstrated by more than 10 years of audits that have had no findings or recommendations. The crux of these concerns about finances relate to university commitments with which some do not agree. This would include commitments to the Alabama Center for the Arts, which were approved by the state Board of Education prior to 2012 and have since been approved by this Board of Trustees. Let's be clear, these are philosophical differences about vision and direction, not financial ruin.

Fourth, there are many governing issues that have been addressed since the university became autonomous in 2012. At our most recent board meeting, we approved a committee structure that includes members of the board, faculty and staff. This "shared governance" also requires "shared responsibility." Sadly, our university has paid a very public price over the last several weeks. I assure you that the board and President Glenn will make every effort to resolve the issues presented in a manner consistent with making our students successful.

PUT EDUCATION FIRST

Finally, the board will continue to move forward and investigate the concerns that have been expressed. Those concerns that have merit will be dealt with in the most open and transparent matter. It is time for all to focus on the matters that should be of the most importance to us — providing quality instruction. Our students have every right to expect that we continue to provide a valuable educational experience. I believe that should be the heart and motivation of all our faculty and staff.

It is now time for all those who believe in the bright future of Athens State University to work with the students, alumni, staff, faculty, administration and board to fulfill this common objective.

Macke Mauldin is chairman pro tem of the Athens State University Board of Trustees.
UAB

Longtime Blazer supporter launches UAB Football Foundation.

The UAB Blazers are in the thick of the race for their first Conference USA championship, siting two games out of the first place with four games remaining on their schedule. At 4-4 overall and 2-2 in the league they are in need of two wins to become bowl eligible, something they haven't done since 2004.

Now, the effect of the new era under first-year coach Bill Clark is being felt in the business community.

UAB backer Jimmy Filler has announced the formation of the UAB Football Foundation, a private organization that will work in concert with the university's administration, local business leaders, University of Alabama board of trustees and the City of Birmingham to deepen the Blazers' economic footprint and, in turn, up the profile of the program.

"Birmingham has long been known as the Football Capital of the South, and our Foundation will ensure a vibrant UAB football program which will preserve this sacred legacy," Filler said in a release. "Further, the Foundation will help to provide the necessary resources to ensure that UAB students have a comprehensive college experience which includes a football program that builds tradition and pride in our University and Community."

Citing cities such as Shreveport (Louisiana Tech), San Antonio (UTEP) and Charlotte (Charlotte), which have used the interest and energy created by their C-USA football programs to broker partnerships and bolster economic activity in the surrounding areas, Filler said his foundation will seek to aid both "student recruitment" and "alumni development" with the Blazers football team as the catalyst.
BIG-GAME ROUTINE

UAB RUNNING BACK JORDAN HOWARD HAVING A BREAKOUT SOPHOMORE SEASON.

Nick Birdsong  nbirdsong@al.com

It's becoming routine for Jordan Howard.
The UAB running back led all runners in
the Blazers' 34-22 loss at Middle Ten-nes-
see last week with 121 yards and a touch-
down on a game-high 32 carries.

It was the Gardendale High product's third
game of 100 yards or more in the Blazers' last
four outings.

He's Conference USA's third-leading rusher
with 752 yards and seven touchdowns, behind
only Marshall's Devon Johnson and UTEP's
Aaron Jones. His 151 carries in seven games
leads the league heading into the Blazers' 11
a.m. meeting with Arkansas (3-4, 0-4 in the
SEC) Saturday in Fayetteville.

"Jordan Howard is a great running back," said MTSU head coach Rick Stockstill. "He ran
hard last year too, and I'm sure we'll see him in
the NFL one day."

Howard's success in 2014 is a continuation
of the potential he showed the previous year.
He was second on the team in rushing as a
freshman with 881 yards and a pair of scores
on 145 carries while rotating with former
standout Darrin Reaves, now with the NFL's
Carolina Panthers.

"For us, he's evolved as a guy who will hit
a hole hard and a guy you want to block for," UAB offensive lineman Hayden Naumann
said. "Because when you get him to the safety
level and he crashes over a safety like he did in
the Middle Tennessee game, you're like, 'Yeah,
I definitely want to block for that guy.' That's
fun."

This season, he's the No. 1 option in first-year Bill Clark's offense which also rotates
Clay-Chalkville product D.J. Vinson in and
out of the Blazers' single-back offense. Vinson
has also proved to be a threat with 440 yards
and seven touchdowns on 112 carries. His five
rushing touchdowns against Alabama A&M is
a school record.

"The (offensive) line, they do a great job and
the coaches, they do a great job of putting us
in the right position," Howard said. "D.J., he
does a great job of keeping me healthy, push-
ing me and keeping me fresh, and my (posi-
tion) coach he does a great job of coaching me
up in practice."

Arkansas' run defense is rated No. 7 among
14 SEC teams, allowing 138.6 yards per game
but only giving up eight touchdowns on the
ground this season. Georgia running back
Nick Chubb went for 202 yards and a pair of
scores in the Bulldogs' 45-32 win against the
Razorbacks at home last week.
JUCO transfer Rolan Milligan finding home at safety for UAB

Nick Birdsong
nbirdsong@al.com

It doesn't matter where UAB's Rolan Milligan lines up before the ball is snapped.

At the end of the play, the junior college transfer is going to be somewhere near the football. Milligan, a Lake City, Fla., native, arrived on the Southside as a cornerback. Due to injuries in the Blazers' secondary he has also seen time at linebacker and started the past two games at safety.

It's not an ideal situation, UAB defensive coordinator Duwan Walker said. The Blazers have to play the matchup game from week-to-week and re-evaluate who might start in the secondary based on the strengths and weaknesses of their available personnel.

But having players such as Milligan, says Walker, makes it doable.

The 5-foot-11, 185-pounder led UAB with two sacks among five tackles in a 34-22 loss at Middle Tennessee and had a career- and game-high 13 tackles in a loss against Arkansas last weekend.

"He's just a player," Walker said. "He's a versatile player. We like to call him a utility guy. He comes in and plays corner. Then, we move him to linebacker. After we did that, he had to make the transition to safety. The game comes easy for him and he picks up what we're doing so good."

Milligan committed to UAB back in February after racking up 44 tackles, three interceptions and two fumble recoveries in 2013 while playing at Reedley Community (Calif.) College.

He's second on the team in tackles with 33 stops, including four for loss to go along with five pass breakups, five passes defended and two quarterback hurries.

Though he'd never played safety at any point in his career, Milligan said the Blazers' staff has helped make the transition smoother for him by simplifying his reads so he can react and rely on his instincts.

"Coach is always is always preaching effort. I see the ball. I go get it. That's pretty much what it was," Milligan said of his play against the Razorbacks.

The Blazers (4-4, 2-2) face Florida Atlantic on the road Saturday at 6 p.m. in a Conference USA showdown.

The Owls (3-5, 2-2) are rated No. 10 among 13 Conference USA teams, averaging just 23.5 points per game. Their passing attack is ninth in the league. They average 209 yards per game through the air and have scored 13 passing touchdowns.

One player the Blazers will have to watch for is FAU wide receiver Lucky Whitehead. The 5-10, 163-pound senior leads Conference USA with 55 receptions which have gone for 538 yards and four scores.

UAB coach Bill Clark said the Owls run so many different sets it's hard to have one defensive back shadow Whitehead.

"It's so hard to do nowadays with tempo and they mix him in (in a variety of sets)," Clark said. "He's going to be in the backfield. He could be at No. 1. He could be at No. 2. They're going to motion him. I think the best you could do is be aware of that guy."

If Milligan has to line up against Whitehead in man-to-man coverage, help out on any deep balls that go his way or meet him across the middle, he'll be ready.

"Just embrace the moment," he said. "I mean, as long as I'm on the field and I'm playing, I don't like to lose. I'm trying to win. So, I'm going to do the best I can to help the team out."
Rowing team finally in new facility

Above, Chris Stewart, master of ceremonies, talks to Logan O'Neil, 2014-15 rowing team captain at the University of Alabama, at the grand opening of the UA Rowing Facility at Manderson Landing on Thursday. Construction of the 11,463-square-foot boathouse began in the fall of 2013. It is adjacent to a floating dock, left, on the Black Warrior River.

To see more photos of the dedication ceremony and the rowing team's new facilities, visit www.tuscaloosanews.com.
WCWS rematch highlights Alabama’s schedule

By Tommy Deas

A national championship rematch.

A three-game series with another Women’s College World Series opponent, and another against a fierce conference rival. A four-team tournament where every team involved not only played in the NCAA Tournament last year, but all also won at least one game.

That’s what the University of Alabama softball team’s 2015 schedule looks like: and that’s just a few of the home-game highlights.

“I think it’s going to be a lot of fun,” Alabama coach Patrick Murphy said. “If the weather is good, we can challenge our attendance record for sure.”

Alabama, which finished as the national runner-up last summer at the World Series with a 53-13 record, will rematch with national champion Florida in a three-game series March 21-23. UA will also host Louisiana-Lafayette, another World Series participant, in a three-game set running Feb. 27-March 1. In the Easton Bama Bash at Rhoads Stadium Feb. 20-22, the Crimson Tide will host NCAA Tournament participants Michigan, James Madison and Lipscomb.

“You look at James Madison, Lipscomb, Michigan and us, and every one of them won at least a game in the tournament last year,” Murphy said. “It’s good for us because the pitchers are going to be seeing good hitting and the hitters are going to see good pitching.”

Alabama will also have a home series against SEC rival Tennessee, and will host Ole Miss and Texas A&M.

Out of conference, Alabama will also host UAB, Georgia Tech and North Carolina State.

“Obviously, the SEC series are going to be very tough, but with Louisiana-Lafayette playing in the World Series last year, N.C. State is a very good team, there’s not many gimmies in there,” Murphy said. “Every game is going to be good.”

Alabama will open Feb. 5 at South Alabama and open play in the Sand Dollar Classic in Gulf Shores the next day. UA will also play in the Stanford Nike Invitational in California, facing the host Cardinal as well as Cal Poly and Pacific.

Starting Feb. 20, Alabama is scheduled to play 22 of its next 26 games at home in a stretch that includes the games with Michigan, Louisiana-Lafayette, Florida and Texas A&M.

“I think it’s huge because all those teams could play in the NCAA Tournament,” Murphy said. “There are several super regional teams in that stretch. Our crowd needs to come through for us, too. Hopefully playing at home, we’ll come through.”

See next page
In 2016, Murphy said, Alabama will host an SEC vs. Pac-12 event with Stanford and Arizona coming to Rhoads Stadium to play against Alabama and Tennessee. UA will make a return visit to Louisiana-Lafayette.

Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.
2015 Alabama Softball Schedule

Feb. 5 at South Alabama
Feb. 6 vs. Eastern Kentucky, vs. Houston*
Feb. 7 vs. Florida Gulf Coast, vs. Florida International*
Feb. 8 vs. McNeese State*
Feb. 11 at Samford
Feb. 13 vs. Pacific, Vs. Stanford+
Feb. 14 vs. Cal Poly, vs. Stanford+
Feb. 15 vs. Pacific+
Feb. 17 at UAB
Feb. 20 vs. Michigan, vs. James Madison#
Feb. 21 vs. Michigan, vs. James Madison#
Feb. 22 vs. Lipscomb#
Feb. 25 at Jacksonville State
Feb. 27 Louisiana-Lafayette
Feb. 28 Louisiana-Lafayette
March 1 Louisiana-Lafayette
March 6 Ole Miss
March 7 Ole Miss
March 8 Ole Miss
March 10 UAB
March 13 at Georgia
March 14 at Georgia
March 15 at Georgia
March 18 Georgia State
March 21 Florida
March 22 Florida
March 23 Florida
March 25 Georgia Tech
March 27 Texas A&M
March 28 Texas A&M
March 29 Texas A&M
March 31 Mississippi Valley State
April 1 Southern Miss
April 3 at Kentucky (doubleheader)
April 4 at Kentucky
April 8 Middle Tennessee State^
April 15 North Carolina State
April 17 at Auburn
April 18 at Auburn
April 21 Troy
April 24 Tennessee
April 25 Tennessee
April 26 Tennessee
May 1 at Arkansas
May 2 at Arkansas
May 3 at Arkansas
May 6-9 SEC Tournament@

* Sand Dollar Classic in Gulf Shores
+ Stanford Nike Invitational in Stanford, Calif.
# Easton Bama Bash in Tuscaloosa
^ at Decatur
@ at Baton Rouge, La.
Money trouble

UA men’s basketball revenue, attendance down

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

Men’s basketball ticket revenue at the University of Alabama last season was down $330,222 from the previous season, according to data obtained by The Tuscaloosa News under open records laws. Actual attendance dropped nearly 38,000 from the previous season to less than 4,000 per game.

By the end of last season, as UA was playing out the end of a 13-19 campaign, Coleman Coliseum was all but empty. Patrons could hear the echo of the ball bouncing on the hardwood floor.

Scott Huffman, a season ticket holder for the last five years who has gone to games since he was in school in the 1980s, drives from his home in Hoover to the games.

"I think last year was the worst attendance that I can recall, and I started back in the (Wimp) Sanderson years," he said. "Toward the end of the season we were still going but not as much as in years past. Obviously, the crowd you could see was disappointing with not as many people there."

Anthony Grant, who is entering his sixth season as head coach at UA, believes that winning is the only solution.

"At the end of the day it’s wins and losses," Grant said. "That’s what everybody in this business is going to be judged and based on. If you ask me one thing we need to do better, it is probably win."

Hot seat?

Grant enters the 2014-15 season with UA picked to finish 10th in the 14-team SEC in last week’s preseason media poll. In March, the day after last season ended, UA Director of Athletics Bill Battle felt compelled to issue a vote of confidence to let everyone know Grant would be returning.

"The expectations of competing for championships and a high postseason finish remain," Battle said in the statement. "There is much that is right about our men’s basketball program at this time. Coach Grant has earned the chance to continue building this program into the winner that we all know it should be. He’s done it before. He can do it again."

Grant ignited hope when he arrived at Alabama in 2009 after a three-season stint at Virginia Commonwealth that saw his teams make the postseason three times, including two trips to the NCAA Tournament. After a 17-15 record in his first season, he took Alabama to the

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championship game of the NIT the next year, winning the SEC Western Division title along the way, and followed that up in 2011-12 by guiding UA to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in six years.

During that peak, Alabama's ticket revenue rose to above $1.87 million, an increase of more than $800,000 from his first season, but the revenue began to fall as UA was back in the NIT in 2012-13 before posting a losing record last season.

Grant wants to build a program that can win on a continuous basis.

"I feel good about our program," he said. "I feel good about the people in our program. I believe in our players and our staff, just who we are and what we’re doing.

"But at the same time ... we understand walking into this situation at Alabama the need to get the results that we all want. I understand that, but I also understand where we are as a program and what we’ve been able to accomplish in the five years that I’ve been here as well. We’re not a finished product, so I don’t see how I hang my hat on anything. We’re still working to get better."

Slow starts, slow play

The last two seasons, interest in the program waned by the time SEC play started in January because of poor performance in the pre-conference part of the schedule. Alabama was 6-7 last season against a nonconference schedule that was rated as ninth-toughest in the nation, effectively ending any realistic postseason hopes before SEC play started. The year before, Alabama was 7-6 entering league play.

"We’ve got to do a better job of not only what we tried to do last year, which was beef up our nonconference schedule, but you’ve also got to be able to win," Grant said. "We weren’t able to win. We were in position to win, but we weren’t able to win. We struggled."

Alabama basketball supporters perceive Grant’s style of play to have a heavy emphasis on defense and little emphasis on scoring. While UA averaged 68.7 points per game last season and 63 points the year before, the Crimson Tide also had 24 games over the course of those two seasons where it scored less than 60 points.

"I think the pace of play has certainly not helped," Huffman said. "The offense at times was painful to watch. When you’re not winning and even when you are winning it’s not exciting; it’s a little frustrating. I can see why fans would not stick it out."

Marketing and promotion

Ask anyone who has met Grant and they will probably tell you that they like him. The problem is Grant is so guarded that few get that chance to know him.

John Faile, a retired Tuscaloosa police officer who has been attending games since the mid-1960s and a season ticket holder for more than 30 years, attended a booster barbecue recently where Grant spoke.

"He was funny," Faile said. "When people asked questions, his responses were straight and to the point. I don’t think he necessarily needs to find a funny suit to wear like Wimp Sanderson did, but he could probably do more interviews and things with the media.

"He seems to be a good man with good character. I think he cares about this community. He’s a pretty private person, apparently, but I think he needs to do something with the program to let people know that it’s there, to connect with the fans more."

Huffman believes promoting the program is part of the head coach’s job.

"I think you have to promote it more these days because there’s so much competition with television and other events," he said. "The head coach needs to be out there.

Alabama held a Hoops on the Quad event in the hours before UA’s home football game against Texas A&M, with the men’s and women’s basketball teams running drills on an outdoor court, drawing a nice crowd.

The promotion was the kind of thing that UA basketball supporters would like to see. "It wouldn’t be happening if I wasn’t for it," Grant said. "I support it. Our marketing department has done an awesome job with trying to put things together. I think it will hopefully generate some interest from the student body and people on campus."

As for raising his public profile, Grant doesn’t seem inclined to do so.

"I’m probably a guy that is more focused on controlling the things that I can control, and that’s building this program and taking care of people in this program who I need to take care of," he said. "I also have a wife and four children, I have a deep commitment to in terms of making

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sure that they also get some of my attention and time, that’s something I value that’s really important to me.

“I can’t be good at everything, I can’t excel at everything. I think everybody in life has to have priorities in terms of what’s the most important things to them. Would I like to be able to go and speak at a lot more different things to promote our program? Certainly I would, but there’s only so many hours in the day, so much time I have.”

Stiff competition

Fans flock to winning teams and stay away from those that lose. Grant understands this.

“When you say a decrease in attendance, I think that’s probably related to wins and losses,” he said.

While the men’s basketball program has been rising and falling, Alabama has enjoyed unprecedented success in other sports.

“We have a very passionate fan base that wants to see Alabama be successful in everything that we do,” Grant said. “You know, you’ve got a football team that perennially competes for championships, you’ve got a gymnastics program that competes for national championships, softball competes for national championships, golf competes for national championships, golf competes for national championships, so at the end of the day from a wins-and-losses standpoint that affects perspective.”

The trend in UA men’s basketball attendance under Grant mirrors what happened under his predecessor, Mark Gottfried, who took UA to five consecutive NCAA Tournament appearances — including a run to the Elite Eight in 2003-04. Alabama’s total paid attendance topped 200,000 in the year after that deep run to the round of eight, but had fallen to just above 170,000 by Gottfried’s final season in 2008-09.

Total paid attendance under Grant has been above 200,000 in three of his five seasons, falling to below 170,000 last season.

The coach notes that empty seats haven’t translated into home conference losses.

“If I’m not mistaken, I think we were 7-2 at home last year and the year before we were 9-0 in the SEC at home,” he said, “so when you say that, that’s something that you’ve got to form your own opinion about how you want to look at that.

“When you look at the overall record at home, we’ve got to do a better job of having success in the non-conference, and we have to have success when we travel.”

The trend holds in other sports:

UA football added more than 9,500 seats to Bryant-Denny Stadium in 2010 to increase capacity to more than 101,000, with national championship seasons in 2009, 2011 and 2012 driving ticket demand.

When Alabama’s women’s gymnastics team won back-to-back national championships in 2011 and 2012, ticket revenue the following season soared, jumping from just under $300,000 to almost $347,000 the year after the second title season.

Alabama softball’s 2012 national championship season was also followed by a significant increase in ticket revenue, going from just under $175,000 in the championship year to more than $204,000 the next season.

“We have a very passionate fan base that wants to see Alabama be successful in everything that we do,” Grant said. “You know, you’ve got a football team that perennially competes for championships, you’ve got a gymnastics program that competes for national championships, softball competes for national championships, golf competes for national championships, so at the end of the day from a wins-and-losses standpoint that affects perspective.”

Cautious optimism

Crimson Tide basketball supporters are hopeful that Grant can get Alabama back to the NCAA Tournament and fill Coleman Coliseum on a regular basis.

“I really am optimistic this year,” Huffman said. “I think this year is critical for that to happen. I think it can happen. I would not say I’m overly optimistic, but I think it can happen.”

Said Faile, “I think he can. I’m really hopeful.”

Grant said he is committed to his mission.

“My focus is on what we can do to accomplish what I came here to accomplish, which is to build this program,” he said. “Not to have a good team, not to have a winning record one year, but to build a program that can sustain success. The way you do that is by the culture of your program. We’re in the process of that, and that takes time, it doesn’t happen overnight.

“My plan is to build the program: same vision that we had when we walked in, to compete for championships. Nothing has changed in my mind in terms of the direction we’re headed.”

Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.
LIGHT 'EM UP

Receiver Amari Cooper turns in record performance, Crimson Tide earns eighth straight win against Vols

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

KNOXVILLE, TENN. | Lane Kiffin came back to Knoxville — but he didn’t come alone.
He brought Amari Cooper with him. And it was a good thing for Alabama that he did.

Cooper, the Crimson Tide’s junior All-America receiver, sparked a lightning start for No. 4 Alabama as the Crimson Tide roared in, then ebbed, then rose again to take a 34-20 victory over the Tennessee Volunteers, UA’s eighth consecutive win in the series. Along the way, Cooper set a new Alabama single-game record with 224 yards on nine catches.

The game ended with the Alabama band and remaining fans chanting “Kiffin, Kiffin.”

The start of the contest could not have been better for Alabama and Kiffin, the former UT head coach who returned to Knoxville as Alabama’s offensive coordinator. On the first play from scrimmage, Alabama quarterback Blake Sims hit Cooper on a short pass that Cooper turned into an 80-yard game-opening touchdown.

The dynamic Sims-to-Cooper connection teamed up again for a 41-yard score on Alabama’s second touchdown of the first quarter. UA then tacked on touchdown runs by T. J. Yeldon and Sims to push the lead to 27-0, making a blowout seem imminent.

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The Crimson Tide stalled and UT went on two long scoring marches, one on a touchdown pass by Joshua Dobbs, seeing his first playing time of the season, and a field goal as the half expired, cutting the Alabama lead to 27-10.

The Volunteers made it even closer as Dobbs directed another long touchdown drive that reduced the Alabama lead to 27-17 with six minutes remaining in the third quarter. This time, Alabama answered with a 76-yard drive of its own, converting four third-down situations along the way. Derrick Henry capped the drive with a 28-yard touchdown run and Alabama took a 34-17 lead into the third quarter.

A Sims fumble set up a short Tennessee field goal that brought the Vols back to within two touchdowns with 9:42 to play. Alabama consumed most of that time with a lengthy drive, but fumbled again as Jalston Fowler lost the ball going into the end zone with 2:29 remaining.

Tennessee managed to drive the ball off the goal line but lost possession on downs at the 30, allowing Alabama to run out the clock.

Dobbs, who had been slated for a redshirt year, brought a spark to the UT offense in the absence of injured starter Justin Worley, rushing for 88 yards before fading in the final minutes.

Alabama made it through the second half without offensive tackle Cam Robinson, who sprained an ankle, and running back Yeldon, nursing a sore foot.

The win lifted Alabama to 7-1 overall and 4-1 in the SEC headed into an open week. Tennessee remained winless in SEC play at 0-4 and fell to 0-4 in SEC play.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Tide QB's life lessons

Blake Sims, quarterback of the University of Alabama football team, takes a video with seventh-graders Wednesday at Eastwood Middle School in Cottondale. Sims spoke to the students about the importance of focusing on school and listening to their parents and teachers, which he said will prepare them for life. Sims' appearance was part of the school's marking of Red Ribbon Week, a series of activities and programs that emphasize personal responsibility and staying away from drugs and alcohol.
PLAYOFF PRIMER

PROCESS BEGINS: IT'S TIME FOR THE 12-PERSON COMMITTEE TO RELEASE ITS FIRST RANKINGS.

Mike Herndon  mherndon@al.com

The College Football Playoff selection committee will release its first rankings of the 2014 season on Tuesday night, a first step toward the selection of four teams to participate in the Football Bowl Subdivision's first playoff in January.

The committee’s top 25 rankings will be released each Tuesday for the next six weeks, with the top four teams in the playoffs in its final ranking on Dec. 7. Semifinal games will be played Jan. 1 in the Sugar Bowl and Rose Bowl, with the championship game set for Jan. 12 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

The committee's mission, as outlined in its operational protocol, is “to select the best teams.” How it will go about doing that will be watched closely in the coming weeks, as college football has jettisoned the combination of human polls and computer rankings it used under the old BCS format to place its championship in the hands of the committee’s 12 members, who will meet in person weekly to craft their rankings.

As we look toward their first rankings on Tuesday, here are some things to keep in mind:

Who are the committee members?

Thirteen people with a wide variety of backgrounds were selected for the committee, from athletic directors and former coaches to a former U.S. Secretary of State, a retired three-star general and a former NCAA executive who helped develop the NCAA basketball tournament. One of them, former Ole Miss and NFL great Archie Manning, has taken a leave of absence for 2014 as it is difficult for him to travel after knee replacement surgery.
WHO'S ON THE COMMITTEE FOR 2014?
- Jeff Long, Arkansas athletic director (chairman)
- Barry Alvarez, Wisconsin athletic director
- Pat Haden, USC athletic director
- Tom Istrail, former NCAA executive director
- Oliver Luck, West Virginia athletic director
- Tom Osborne, former Nebraska coach and athletic director
- Dan Radakovich, Clemson athletic director
- Condoleezza Rice, Stanford professor and former U.S. Secretary of State
- Mike Tranghese, former Big East Conference commissioner
- Steve Wieberg, former USA Today college football reporter
- Tyrone Willingham, former Stanford, Notre Dame and Washington coach

WHAT CRITERIA WILL THEY USE TO RANK THE TEAMS?
The committee's protocol includes the following criteria to use in selecting and ranking the teams:
- Conference championship
- Strength of schedule
- Head-to-head competition
- Comparative outcomes of common opponents
- Other relevant factors such as key injuries that may have affected a team's performance during the season or likely will affect its postseason performance

HOW WILL THE COMMITTEE WEIGH EACH OF THE CRITERIA?
Bill Hancock, the CFP executive director, has declared that, despite the order listed in the protocol, all criteria should be weighed evenly. But LSU athletic director Joe Alleva, who has served on the basketball selection committee for three years, said it's unreasonable to think that the individual members won't have their own ideas about which of them deserves the most consideration.

WHERE WILL THE COMMITTEE GET ITS INFORMATION?
The selection committee members have been charged with watching as many games as they possibly can, and according to USA Today they've each been issued tablets preloaded with special apps designed to give them access to any game footage or coaches' videos they might want. But there are only so many hours in a week and many of the members have athletic departments to run or other jobs to manage. So they've split the workload by assigning each member a region or conference to monitor throughout the season. While the protocol calls for them to rely on a "wide variety of data," many of the raw statistics they'll use will be generated by SportSource Analytics, a fledgling company founded by three former college baseball pitchers (two from Vanderbilt, one from Georgia Tech), which claims to have more than 50 million statistics at its disposal.

WILL COMMITTEE MEMBERS BE ALLOWED TO LOBBY FOR THEIR OWN SCHOOLS?
No. The committee has a recusal policy for committee members if they or any immediate family members are employed by or provide professional services for a particular school. The policy does not cover alma mater or previous employment relationships. The recusals for 2014 are:
- Air Force – Mike Gould
- Arkansas – Jeff Long
- Clemson – Dan Radakovich
- Nebraska – Tom Osborne
- Southern Cal – Pat Haden
- Stanford – Condoleezza Rice
- West Virginia – Oliver Luck
- Wisconsin – Barry Alvarez
Feeling left out

Alabama tabbed No. 6 in initial College Football Playoff rankings; Mississippi State, Florida State, Auburn, Ole Miss in first Final Four

By Ralph D. Russo
and Stephen Hawkins
The Associated Press

GRAPEVINE, Texas | The College Football Playoff selection committee has spoken — and it likes the SEC.

At least for now.

Mississippi State, Florida State, Auburn and Ole Miss are the top four teams in the initial College Football Playoff rankings.

The first seven Top 25 rankings compiled by a 12-member selection committee were released Tuesday night. The selection committee will ultimately pick the four teams to play in the national semifinals and set the matchups for the other four big New Year's Day bowl games.

"It was an extremely difficult, more difficult than any of us had expected having gone through our mock selections before," Arkansas athletic director and committee chairman Jeff Long said. "There are 18 one-loss teams in FBS at this point in time, and the difference between many of them is very slim.

"Oregon was fifth and Alabama was sixth, giving the Southeastern Conference's West Division four of the top six teams. There are still four games remaining matching those SEC West rivals, starting with Saturday's matchup of Auburn and Ole Miss in Oxford, Mississippi.

The final rankings will be released Dec. 7, the day after the most of the conference championship games are decided.

"Everyone on the selection committee recognized that our rankings will change over the next six weeks," Long said. "I think that's important for us to emphasize. We expect our rankings to change over the next six weeks. One week's rankings won't influence the next week's rankings."

TCU was seventh, Michigan State was eighth, Kansas State ninth and Notre Dame was 10th.

Mississippi State and defending national champion Florida State are the only undefeated teams left among the Big Five conferences.

"It's cool," Mississippi State quarterback Dak Prescott said. "That's something you can never take away from the university or this program. First-ever ranking, first team to be No. 1, so that's pretty cool for the university.

"The Bulldogs and Seminoles also hold the first two spots in the AP Top 25. No. 3 was where the differences started between the playoff rankings and the media poll.

The AP voters had Alabama at No. 3 and Auburn at No. 4. Oregon was fifth, Notre Dame was sixth and Ole Miss was seventh after losing for the first time this season at LSU on Saturday. Ole Miss beat Alabama at home earlier this month.

This is the first year for the playoff format in college football, and the list is the first indication of how the committee is evaluating teams' playoff potential.

"While Ole Miss received a better ranking than Alabama, head-to-head victories weren't always the deciding factor for the committee.

"Arizona, which won at Oregon, is 12th. Baylor, which beat TCU, is 13th.

Long said in both cases the head-to-head loser had the better overall resume. Long said Oregon's victories against Michigan State and UCLA stood out. And Baylor's lack of quality opposition so far held back the Bears.

"They have not had a strong schedule outside of their win against TCU,"

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF RANKINGS

1. Mississippi St. 7-0
2. Florida St. 7-0
3. Auburn 6-1
4. Ole Miss 7-1
5. Oregon 7-1
6. Alabama 7-1
7. TCU 6-1
8. Michigan St. 7-1
9. Kansas St. 6-1
10. Notre Dame 6-1
11. Georgia 6-1
12. Arizona 6-1
13. Baylor 6-1
14. Arizona St. 6-1
15. Nebraska 7-1
16. Ohio St. 6-1
17. Utah 6-1
18. Oklahoma 5-2
19. LSU 7-2
20. West Virginia 6-2
21. Clemson 6-2
22. UCLA 6-2
23. East Carolina 6-1
24. Duke 6-1
25. Louisville 6-2

Long said.

The committee creates small groups of teams, debates their merits and ranks the teams using as many votes as needed to come up with a consensus. Members are given reams of data on each FBS team and each member is allowed to judge those numbers however they determine is best.

The committee members gathered Monday at the Gaylord Texan Hotel in Grapevine, Texas, just outside of Dallas, and did most of their work on Day 1.

Long said the committee worked for about 10 hours total on the rankings. By the time the rankings were released on ESPN at 6:30, most of the committee members were already on their way home.