The University of West Alabama has continued its ongoing efforts to recruit black students, faculty, and administrative staff. The following is a synopsis of diversity efforts and achievements during the past year.

In 2012, The University of West Alabama achieved national recognition for its efforts toward creating a campus environment that supports diversity and community outreach. The university was featured at the 2012 National Role Models Award Conference for Diversity sponsored by Minority Access, Inc. in Orlando, Florida. The University was showcased at the conference for its commitment to diversity, effective interaction and the exchange of ideas. This marks the fifth consecutive year the University has been identified as a national diversity role model by Minority Access, Inc. Division of Outreach Services Director Kenneth Walker accepted this award on behalf of the University, as well as presented UWA National Conference Alumni Recipient Judge Ermea Russell, who was recognized for her contributions made to the affirmative action policies in Mississippi. Appointed to the Mississippi Court of Appeals by Gov. Haley Barbour in 2011, Judge Russell became the first African-American woman to sit on a Mississippi appellate court.

Judge Russell served as staff attorney for the Mississippi Senate from December 1986 to May 1990, drafting legislation and advising committees. Following her appointment as Assistant Commissioner for Intercultural Relations for the Institutions of Higher Learning in 1990, she directed development of affirmative action policies to improve minority participation in higher education at Mississippi’s eight public universities. Judge Russell became chief legal counsel to Lt. Gov. Eddie Briggs in 1992 and was unanimously elected by the 52-member body to serve as Secretary of the Mississippi Senate in 1993, a capacity in which she served for three years. She was also selected by the United States Information Agency to serve as a legislative consultant to fledgling governments formed after the breakup of the former Soviet Union. She served as an advisor to the Parliaments of the Republics of Armenia and Kazakhstan. A decorated veteran with more than 37 years of military service, Judge Russell served in increasing positions of leadership and retired at the rank of colonel in 2010. She is a veteran of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom and has received numerous awards and citations for outstanding performance and service, including the Global War on Terrorism Service and Expeditionary Medals, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, and the Bronze Star.

UWA continues to partner with other Alabama based institutions of higher education to advance program activity and membership of the Alabama Association of
Higher Education Diversity Officers (ALAHEDO). ALAHEDO’s mission is to advise its members on issues, policies, and practices that affect diversity at higher education institutions in Alabama. The Association proposes initiatives to ensure that institutions fairly meet the needs of minority faculty, staff and students. The association held its Inaugural Annual Meeting on November 5-6, 2011, in Auburn, Alabama. UWA personnel served on the conference’s Planning Committee. The goal of the conference was to build and improve vibrant diversity best practices and research community by bringing together interested practitioners and researchers who have responsibility or interest in the broad field of diversity. The conference featured Representative John Knight has its keynote presenter.

University personnel also took part in the conference’s Pre-Conference Diversity Training Workshop conducted by Mrs. Patricia Pope. The workshop showcased innovative tools that objectively measures inclusion, which have been used with over 100 teams, including executive teams, project teams, universities and even a professional sports team.

The University of West Alabama’s Department of Athletics became one of just eighteen Division II schools selected for an NCAA Coaching Enhancement Grant, which provides funding for Division II institutions to enhance diversity and inclusion through the hiring of full-time coaching positions. The grant, which funds UWA’s Assistant Cross Country Coach position, addresses the issues of access, recruitment, selection and long-term success of women, racial/ethnic minorities and other individuals in Division II who seek to overcome hiring barriers.

In 2011, the College of Education received a two year PBI formula grant entitled Project BLOOM. Project BLOOM (Bringing Learners Opportunities through Outreach and Mentoring) is collaborative effort between the Julia Tutwiler College of Education and the College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics. Project BLOOM promotes the enhancement of STEM Teacher Education for black American students through progressive workshops and outreach activities, imbuing them with the skills to integrate STEM best teaching practices in the teacher education program. The project addresses the critical shortage of minority students enrolling in teacher education programs in the areas of science and mathematics. It also provides support on multiple levels to retain students in the program until they successfully complete the requirement to obtain teacher certification through the Alabama Department of Education. Project BLOOM is designed to recruit first generation black American students as Project BLOOM candidates. Project BLOOM has two different tracks in which students are eligible for candidacy. The first track targets existing UWA students. The second track targets high school students from local partnership schools.
Project Engage is a capacity-building effort on the part of the University of West Alabama to attract and retain students in STEM disciplines. A major focus of the project is to increase the retention rates of STEM majors between their freshman and sophomore years by immersing them in an engaging STEM-related curriculum, guided career counseling, and strategic mentoring activities. A secondary focus of Project Engage is to increase retention rates of sophomore, junior and senior-level STEM students through their continued participation in the project. The project also seeks to address the critical shortage of minorities in professional STEM fields by conducting outreach activities with area K-12 schools to encourage enrollment growth in science, math, and technology degree programs. The project is designed to improve passage, persistence, and retention rates of minority students in STEM courses.

In order to facilitate an increase in minority students’ motivation to pursue STEM-related careers, retention in STEM programs and completion of STEM degrees, Project Engage has implemented the following major components:

1. Strategic Mentoring of Minority STEM students;
2. Intensive STEM Engagement;
3. Guided Career Exploration;
4. Outreach to High-Need Students;
5. Collection and Analysis of Persistence and Completion Data.

High quality and timely data are collected and evaluated to determine the program’s impact on participants.

The University of West Alabama also encourages and supports a diverse student population. Black students accounted for 53% of the overall enrollment for Fall 2012, with the total number of black students equaling 2,623. Undergraduate enrollment of black students decreased only slightly by 22 students from 953 in Fall 2011 to 931 in Fall 2012, and graduate enrollment of black students was 1,694 in 2012. The University continues to monitor its admission policies and retention and transfer policies on a regular basis to ensure that all students receive equal treatment. In addition, all literature and informational brochures used in student recruitment and admissions are reviewed annually to determine if they contain clear statements of the University’s non-discrimination policy.

The University established the Black Faculty and Staff Association (BFSA) on September 18, 2008, to serve as an advocate for the enhancement of educational equality. The Association works as a visible and viable agency dedicated to address the mutual
needs and concerns of the University’s black students, faculty, and staff. The goals of the BFSA reflect with the goals of the University of West Alabama, to establish and maintain a welcoming and inclusive campus environment for all and to eliminate discrimination in all phases of University life.

During the spring of 2012, many of the officers of the Black Faculty and Staff Association completed their term and as a group elected an interim president to ensure the continuation of the BFSA. The BFSA provided support for various events of the traditional black sororities and fraternities and continued to serve in an advisory capacity to the Black Student Union.

In addition to the many activities in which the association participated, one of the most prominent events was the commemoration of Black History Month in February 2012. The BFSA hosted the program in conjunction with various Greek organizations and local churches. It was a unity event featuring the theme “Rock of Freedom” that involved an historical look at the role of the church as an institution during slavery, segregation and modern times. It featured dance, song and poetic performances by students and members of the community. It also included a history lecture by faculty. The culminating event was a legacy celebration that honored black history with performance arts. This event was co-sponsored with the theatre and music departments at UWA.

Currently, the University of West Alabama has fifteen full-time black faculty members. The percentage of full-time black faculty is 12%. Five of these faculty are tenured, seven are tenure-track, three are non-tenure track and one is currently a Minority Faculty Development Fellows and two others are past recipients.

The University employs eighteen full-time administrative staff members, which is 34% of administrative staff. Minority administrative staff hold the following positions: Facilities Manager for the Bell Conference Center, Director and Chief of Campus Security, Director of Auxiliary Services, Program Coordinator of the Regional Center for Community and Economic Development, Director of the Small Business Development Center, Director of the Division of Outreach Services, Grounds/Moving Supervisor, Coordinator of ADA Services, WIA Program Coordinator, Upward Bound Coordinator, Storeroom Manager, Manager of Supply/Bookstore, Interim Director of Admissions and Enrollment Management, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences, Assistant Director of User Services, and Housekeeping Supervisor.

The University also has black professional staff in the following positions: five assistant coaches, PC Technician, Administrative Coordinator in Graduate Studies,
Curriculum Laboratory Librarian (also holds rank of Assistant Professor), and Director of Field Experience.