

UW System: Promotes “15 to Finish” campaign

Posted on Tuesday, Jun 25, 2019

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, Wis.—Across the University of Wisconsin System, incoming freshman students are hearing a new phrase: “15 to Finish.”

It's the idea that taking 15 credits each semester or 30 credits per year makes a student more likely to stay on track and graduate on time.

“We want to make sure that students graduate, and graduate on time,” said UW System President Ray Cross. “Our ‘15 to Finish’ campaign is providing students the information they need to help them accomplish those goals.”

It's just one of several student success strategies being employed by the System, Cross said.

Most university bachelor's programs require 120 credits to graduate. That's an average of 30 credits per year, or 15 credits per semester. Yet, students are considered full-time when taking 12 or more credits for tuition and financial aid purposes.

With the “15 to Finish” campaign, UW System officials are reinforcing the idea to students that being a full-time student doesn't mean they'll graduate on time.

The campaign is rolling out on System campuses this summer during orientation sessions for incoming freshmen. In the fall, digital ads, posters, and other media will target students already enrolled.

A 15-credit course load each semester is not for everyone. Either part-time status or taking fewer than 15 credits still makes sense for many students. But the campaign is designed to allow students to make informed decisions after consulting with their

academic advisors and to develop a plan for success that works for them.

Hundreds of other institutions across the country have demonstrated success in using a “15 to Finish” model. The University of Hawai’i System, a pioneer in the movement, found that since their campaign started in 2012 the percentage of first-time freshmen who took 15 or more credits in their first semester doubled and four-year graduation rates increased eight percentage points.

“We’re eager to share with students how a 15-credit semester can help them maintain momentum toward graduation and boost their academic success,” said Angie Kellogg, senior academic planner in the UW System Office of Student Success, who is leading the initiative.

UW System data show that about 58 percent of students took 15 or more credits in their first semester, and 54 percent took 30 or more credits in their first year. Often, taking 15 credits means enrolling in just one additional course per semester.

The data also show that students who took 30 credits or more in their first year are more likely to return – 90 percent compared to 85 percent for those taking fewer than 30 credits. They are also considerably more likely to graduate – 73 percent in six years compared to 64 percent of those taking fewer than 30 credits.

Underrepresented minorities, Pell grant recipients, first-generation students, and students scoring 25 or lower on the ACT especially benefit from taking 30 credits in their first two semesters, the data show.

Students and families can learn more: uwhelp.wisconsin.edu/15-to-finish/.