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UW System: Enrollment drops 1 percent for the fall semester, according to initial estimates

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MADISON, Wis.—The University of Wisconsin System today released an initial fall 2021 enrollment estimate of 163,708 students, an estimated 1 percent decrease compared to fall 2020 based on initial first-day figures.

UW System typically discloses only final fall enrollment figures, and typically later in the semester, but is again announcing initial estimates based on first-day figures because of interest in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

System President Tommy Thompson noted freshman and new transfer registrations have increased by 1,316, or 4 percent, including at eight of 13 university main campuses, according to the estimates, but dropped by 3,305 among other undergraduates, or 4 percent.

“These preliminary estimates reflect a number of factors,” Thompson said. “It’s clear that students continue to view the UW System as a tremendous value and their ticket to a brighter future. New freshman and transfer students are up, thanks to our added recruitment tools coupled with the extraordinary work done by admissions and registrations staff.”

Overall enrollment increased at three universities and dropped at 10, according to the estimates. UW-Madison, UW-Green Bay, and UW-Superior show increases, according to the estimates.

“The last 18 months have been incredibly challenging, not only for our UW schools, but also at colleges of all types throughout the nation,” stated Thompson. “With

plentiful jobs and COVID-19 creating challenges, retaining students has been especially difficult for all of higher education."

The final enrollment figures to be made public later this year may still differ from the first-day enrollment estimates released today.