

UW System: New fall freshman applications to universities are up by nearly one-third

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MADISON, Wis.—New fall freshman applications for University of Wisconsin System universities are up by about 30 percent over each of the last two years. Moreover, applications by Wisconsin residents, first-generation students, and underrepresented minorities are also up.

The increases are the result of several actions the UW System took over the last 15 months to simplify the application process, including waiving application fees, creating a new EApp (electronic application), allowing students to use a single application for multiple universities, and suspending the requirement that students take the ACT.

“I’m thrilled with these positive application numbers. Our strategies are working, and we are setting the stage for success,” said UW System President Tommy Thompson. “While the pandemic challenged us all, students are primed to get back to campus this fall, and we want them to know that we are ready as ever to help them achieve their education goals.”

In addition to applications being up systemwide, they are also up at each of the 13 universities. Admissions rates are also up slightly – 82 percent in June, for example, compared to 77 percent during the same month in 2020 and 77 percent during the same month in 2019.

Thompson cautioned that not all students who apply and are admitted will enroll. However, he said the increase in applications is a positive signal about first-year enrollments.

Largely due to the pandemic, enrollment was down at UW System universities in fall 2020 by 1.7 percent, according to final figures. That's less than the national decline of 4 percent for public institutions, according to the [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#).

So far, UW System universities have received 133,484 applications from new freshmen for fall 2021, about 29 percent higher than at the same point in 2020 and 33 percent higher than 2019.

Applications from Wisconsin residents stand at 69,435 compared to roughly 50,000 each of the last two years at the same time. The 22,820 applications from underrepresented minorities are up 19 percent compared to June 2020 and 23 percent compared to June 2019. Applications from first-generation students, 40,085, are up 30 percent compared to the same time in 2020 and 25 percent in 2019.

The rate of students completing applications is also higher than previous years, another sign the strategies implemented by the UW System are working, Thompson said.