

UW System plans \$500,000 vaccine incentive program

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Vaccinated UW System students can win one of 70 scholarships valued at \$7,000 each if their university reaches a 70 percent COVID-19 vaccination threshold by Oct. 15.

UW-Madison students are not included in the incentive program.

The one-time \$500,000 incentive program will confirm a campus is at least 70 percent vaccinated using the honors system, but winning students will need to present their vaccination cards in order to receive the scholarship money. Qualifying universities will get a bigger share of the scholarships if others do not meet the program's requirements.

The System will also grant student governments that help their campuses reach the 70 percent goal additional funds up to \$5,000.

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UW System President Tommy Thompson said he hopes federal dollars will fund the program. No such money has been allocated by Gov. Tony Evers. Existing System administration money will fund the program if Evers does not direct federal dollars toward it, Thompson said.

Thompson said UW-Madison has not asked to participate in the program. He added that Chancellor Rebecca Blank is aiming for an 80 percent student vaccination rate, a target Assistant Vice Chancellor of University Communications John Lucas said the campus is on track to meet.

"Madison always likes to go at it alone," Thompson said. "They think they can get a higher thing if they do it alone. And more power to them."

Lucas said UW-Madison won't participate in the System's plan because the university is already closing in on its vaccination target. He added that UW-Madison is considering incentives for student vaccination, but does not currently have a program or details to announce.

Thompson also doubled down on the System's refusal to require vaccinations despite a federal judge upholding Indiana University's vaccine mandate for students, faculty and staff.

"We think there's a much better way. We wanted to get the students buying in," Thompson said, citing students' past successes with mask requirements. "They bought in on the mask thing, even though that was a mandate, but they had a cultural responsibility. They went around and actually did the enforcing."