

UW System: President Thompson announces student vaccination incentive

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MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin System President Tommy Thompson today announced a new incentive program that provides an opportunity for UW students vaccinated against COVID-19 to win a \$7,000 scholarship.

Under the “70 for 70” campaign, vaccinated students who attend universities that achieve at least 70 percent vaccination rates will be eligible for one of 70 scholarships valued at \$7,000 each. Students at all UW System universities except UW-Madison are eligible for the drawing.

“As we welcome students back to campus this fall, we want their experience to be as normal and safe as we can make it,” Thompson said. “That means students should get vaccinated, and we will incentivize it knowing that high vaccination rates are critical to our success. The ‘70 for 70’ campaign is key to helping our universities achieve higher vaccination rates, especially in the face of the looming threat the Delta variant poses.”

Thompson and university leaders began encouraging students to get vaccinated as soon as they were eligible last spring. The new campaign is designed to reach students prior to the fall semester. Students will be notified of the campaign by their universities and through social media platforms.

UW System is also working closely with student government officials and other student organizations to promote the campaign and facilitate peer-to-peer engagement. Student governments that help their campuses reach the 70 percent threshold will receive up to \$5,000.

““We built a culture of responsibility last year among our students that helped us ‘Smash COVID!’” Thompson said, referencing the popular series of social media videos that showed him smashing things like pumpkins, plates, and cream puffs. “Wait til they see me ring our ‘70 for 70’ high striker.”

The “70 for 70” campaign will work like this: Students who have been vaccinated will notify their universities. When a university’s student body reaches a threshold of 70 percent vaccination, the vaccinated students on that campus will become eligible for a drawing to award a proportionate number of the 70 scholarships based upon enrollment. To receive the scholarship, students must receive their full series of vaccinations by Oct. 15. If some universities don’t meet the 70 percent threshold, the share of scholarships awarded in the drawing will increase at those universities that meet the threshold. The cost of the campaign is expected to be about \$500,000 funded by the UW System.

“Getting students vaccinated now is why the UW System is making this commitment,” said Thompson. “We are investing for success and vaccinated students will not only keep our campuses safe and healthy, but also help us to avoid the human and capital costs associated with outbreaks we want to prevent.”

Numerous UW universities have announced or are planning their own incentive programs.

UW System will not require students to be vaccinated. The 70 percent threshold was chosen based on estimates about the percentage of the population needed to reach herd immunity, which represents those who are vaccinated or who already had the virus and indicates a base level of community-wide protection.