

UW System: Reports final 10th day headcount enrollment

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MADISON, Wis.—University of Wisconsin System enrollment totaled 162,980 students in fall 2021, a drop of 1.1 percent compared to the previous year, according to data released today.

By comparison, national estimates show enrollment dropping by 2.3 percent for fall 2021, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

New freshman enrollment at UW System campuses also outpaced national averages. The number of freshmen enrolled at UW System increased 3.9 percent; the Research Center estimates freshman enrollment nationwide to drop 3.1 percent.

When looking just at the four-year campuses, UW System freshman enrollment jumped 6 percent compared to the national decline of 3 percent at public four-year campuses.

“The pandemic has increased our enrollment challenges, but I’m extraordinarily pleased by the increase in freshmen,” said UW System President Tommy Thompson. “We’ll continue to work hard to convince Wisconsin students that our public universities are the best investment they can make. We are also redoubling our efforts to ensuring returning students progress toward a degree. The UW System is accessible and affordable and is the best investment students and our state can make.”

Thompson has noted that much of the enrollment drop is attributable to undergraduate students who did not continue their enrollment after the COVID-19 pandemic affected campus operations during the 2020-21 academic year.

Overall, the data shows 1,786 fewer students in the UW System in fall 2021 compared to fall 2020. About 41 percent is attributable to the two-year branch campuses. Nationally, community colleges were down 5.6 percent.

Undergraduate enrollment fell by 1.6 percent overall while graduate enrollment increased by 1.8 percent.

The UW System enrollment figures reported today represent the count on the 10th day of classes, the standard reporting figure. UW System earlier this semester released estimates for first-day enrollment. Today's final enrollment is 0.4 percent lower than the estimates. Only two universities, UW-Green Bay and UW Oshkosh, experienced changes to the estimates greater than 1 percent due to the volatility of high school special students, otherwise known as dual enrollment.