

UW System: Student demand for UW counseling services high, key to keeping them enrolled

Posted on Monday, Sep 27, 2021

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MADISON, Wis.—More than 80 percent of University of Wisconsin System students who sought mental health counseling at their universities during the last academic year reported improvements in their well-being, and four of five who considered dropping out over the last eight years said counseling helped them stay enrolled.

The latest Counseling Impact Assessment Report for the 2020-21 academic year shows the continued need for mental health services at UW System campuses – and the ongoing benefit to students, communities, and taxpayers. More than 18,000 students reported staying enrolled after counseling over the last eight years.

The report also underscores the challenges, including generally rising demand, providing services remotely, and inequities among universities.

“We have made mental health a priority on our campuses, and we know students are heavily reliant on services our universities provide,” said UW System President Tommy Thompson. “But there remains unmet need, and we are going to seek help from the governor and the legislature to partner with us to expand our capacity. It not only helps us retain students, but more importantly, ensures students get what they need to build a successful future.”

Thompson asked for \$10 million in the latest state budget to hire more counselors, but it was not approved.

The report cites a years-long increase in students seeking mental health services on campus – up more than 50 percent over the last 10 years – but notes that demand

dropped by 7.5 percent during 2020-21, likely due to access issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, more than 13,000 students used campus counseling services during the previous academic year.

“Telehealth has been a useful alternative during the pandemic, but our surveys show students prefer in-person counseling,” Thompson said. “Having more counselors will help us provide more in-person counseling to meet demand.”

The current student-to-staff ratio is above nationally recommended levels at most UW System universities. The report also cites the increasing reliance on segregated fees to fund counseling services, which has increased disparities among universities.

Other findings in the report:

- Students seeking counseling were more likely than in previous years to say they had a hard time focusing on academics.
- Two of every three students said their academic focus improved after counseling.
- More than 90 percent of students seeking counseling said they would return and recommend counseling.
- After some improvement the last few years, the student-counselor ratio worsened to 1,533:1, which is greater than the 1,000:1 recommendation.

Another new report found more than 11,000 UW System students with disabilities received services during the 2020-21 academic year. Demand for these services has increased 31 percent over the last five years.

While the pandemic created new obstacles for some students with disabilities, learning remotely made it easier for others, the report found.

The two reports are available online:

- [Counseling Impact Assessment Report](#)
- [Services for Students with Disabilities Report](#)