

UW System: New student enrollment at UW System main campuses highest since at least 2018

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MADISON, Wis. – New student enrollment at the main campuses within the University of Wisconsin System is its highest since at least 2018, according to preliminary estimates based on the first day of classes.

The figures suggest that strategies to increase access are working and that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is waning on first-year enrollment, said UW System President Jay Rothman.

“Our UW universities are the state’s biggest and best attractor of talent, and our application process is easier and more affordable,” Rothman said. “We are turning the corner on the COVID-19 pandemic, as our freshman class is the largest in years.”

The estimates show 26,442 first-year students, including freshmen and first-year transfers, enrolled this fall compared to 25,869 in fall 2021 and 25,602 in fall 2018.

Rothman said the Wisconsin Tuition Promise, a new initiative starting in fall 2023 to ensure that students coming from families making less than \$62,000 annually may attend a UW university without paying tuition or fees, will encourage more low-and middle-income students to enroll in the coming years.

“Wisconsin is facing ongoing workforce challenges, and it is critical that the UW relentlessly focus on developing talent and graduates to ensure our state is competitive and economically vibrant,” Rothman said.

Overall enrollment dropped 1 percent to 161,430, according to the preliminary

estimates, or about 1,500 students, including 500 at the branch campuses and the remainder at the main campuses. This result was expected after the pandemic affected two years of enrollment.

UW-Green Bay, UW-Madison, and UW-Superior are showing enrollment increases, UW-La Crosse is even, and the remainder will decrease, the estimates show.

Overall enrollment has dropped in recent years due to fewer high school graduates in the pipeline and uncertainties created by the COVID-19 pandemic. But Rothman said the first-year enrollment figures this fall suggest an improved outlook in enrollment. The strategies to increase access include the optional ACT, easier application to multiple universities, and the waiving of application fees.

“We will continue to demonstrate to students, parents, and the public that there’s no better value than the UW System,” Rothman said. “Wisconsin is counting on us.”

Final enrollment figures based on the 10th day of classes – the standard measure of enrollment and the figure that will be officially reported to the U.S. Department of Education — will differ slightly from the preliminary estimates based on the first day of classes. Some students enroll or discontinue studies after the first day of classes.