

The Wisconsin State Journal

\Record enrollment at UW Colleges

Deborah Ziff | 608-252-6234 | dziff@madison.com | Posted: Friday, September 25, 2009 7:45 pm

A record number of students enrolled this fall at UW Colleges -- again.

For the fifth consecutive year, more students than ever before poured into the classrooms of the state's 13 two-year campuses.

UW Colleges and Extension Chancellor David Wilson attributes the nearly 5 percent increase in enrollment this fall to the relatively low tuition offered at the colleges, which may have looked especially attractive this year due to the recession.

But it's still unclear what impact the economic downturn is having on attendance at the University of Wisconsin's 13 four-year campuses.

Tuition at the UW Colleges remained frozen this year -- for the third year in a row -- while it increased by 5.5 percent at the four-year universities.

"What that has done is it has created some distance between the cost of attending UW-Richland or UW-Rock County or UW-Baraboo versus coming to a UW-Madison or a UW-Whitewater," Wilson said.

Tuition at the UW colleges is \$4,268 for the 2009-2010 academic year, while it will be about \$1,500 more at the UW four-year institutions.

Enrollment in degree programs at Madison Area Technical College also has increased, by about 12 percent from last fall.

While the economic downturn may be driving students to the state's two-year campuses, it's may not be doing the same thing at the more costly four-year institutions.

"All summer we've been wondering where this would go," said David Giroux, spokesman for the UW System. "Whether the economic downturn would have a positive effect, with more students trying to stay in school ... or whether it would have a negative effect because of people's money problems."

Preliminary numbers show that enrollment is holding steady across the University of Wisconsin System, Giroux said. For example, the 42,096 students enrolled in classes at UW-Madison is nearly the same as it was a year ago based on the early numbers.

Universities typically wait a few weeks into the semester to gather final enrollment numbers to account for students who may drop out or transfer.

Wilson said UW Colleges' "no-frills" approach to higher education -- no marching band or football, just courses -- is a big part of the reason why enrollment has been increasing at the colleges. Students can save money during their freshman and sophomore years and then transfer to a four-year campus to finish school, he said.

"Because we're not offering some of the things students would normally get, we're able to keep the cost of higher education reasonable," Wilson said. "Students have to make a decision about whether they want to give that up."

There are 13,807 students enrolled in the UW Colleges this fall.