

**From:** [Summers, Greg](#)  
**Subject:** Academic Affairs Update, 02-05-21  
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**Attachments:** [How to Survive the Enrollment Bust.pdf](#)

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Colleagues,

I'm writing today about enrollment. Each year at this time, we know just enough about our recruitment efforts to make meaningful projections of what our incoming class may be next fall. This year, our applications, admits, student confirmations, and housing applications for the 2021 incoming class are all up substantially, which is terrific news. However, when we complete our initial projections of fall enrollment, there will be far more uncertainty than usual.

This is true for several reasons. One significant factor is the recent and welcome decision by the Board of Regents to eliminate the application fee at most UW comprehensive institutions, including UW-Stevens Point. This fee, though modest, had created a financial barrier to student applications. Its elimination allows students to explore more options for pursuing their college degrees. However, the fact that more students are now applying to more than one UW institution will make it difficult to rely on historical yield models to project enrollment. It makes the competition for enrollment more intense. Most important, it means that our success now depends more than ever on our ability to build relationships with students in the critical months following their applications.

The second reason for uncertainty, of course, is the pandemic. We know that many student decisions will depend on the extent to which we're able to enjoy a return to normal teaching and learning next fall. As state and federal authorities coordinate the distribution of vaccines, educators, including those of us working at universities, are [listed on Wisconsin's DHS site](#) among the next groups to be eligible. However, even once we're eligible, our ability to receive this vital protection will depend on how quickly the state can obtain and distribute shipments of vaccine, which remain in short supply. For the time being, our planning will need to grapple with this uncertainty.

The pandemic will have long-range consequences as well. As a final note, I want to share the attached article published recently in the Chronicle of Higher Education. The author, Nathan Grawe, is a professor of economics at Carleton College and a leading scholar on the impact of demographic change on enrollment in higher education. His analysis is worth reading. We know that the pandemic has accelerated numerous changes already underway in higher education, including the demographic pressures on enrollment in the Midwest. He argues that if universities are willing to leverage the lessons learned during the pandemic toward student-centered innovations in how we recruit, advise, support, and teach our students, then there is reason for optimism despite the challenges ahead. We have work to do, for sure; but in many

ways UW-Stevens Point is already doing exactly this, with new approaches to marketing and recruitment, strong first-year and major advising, and outstanding learning experiences. For these reasons, I'm looking forward to welcoming a large incoming class next fall no matter what uncertainties we face.

I hope everyone enjoys a beautiful, wintry weekend. Take care.

Greg

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