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# WKU's enrollment dips again this fall amid pandemic

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**WKU Fall 2021 Enrollment Report**  
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Western Kentucky University’s enrollment for full-time equivalent students is down again this year, signaling that – despite the university’s best efforts to recruit students – it isn’t exempt from a national decline in college enrollment that’s been turbocharged by the pandemic.

WKU’s new fall 2021 enrollment figures, recently finalized and confirmed by the Kentucky Council for Postsecondary Education, show that the university fell from 14,225 full-time equivalent students in 2020 to 13,660 this fall.

As for the university’s total enrollment – a figure that includes hundreds of high school students taking courses for college credit – WKU is sitting at 16,750 total

students, down from 17,518 last fall. That's a drop of 768 students – almost 4.5%.

The news doesn't necessarily come as a surprise to the university's leadership.

“It has been an exceedingly challenging year to recruit students to WKU because we've been unable to get into the schools,” WKU President Timothy Caboni told the Daily News in August.

He forecasted that the university's population of first-generation college freshmen and students from low-income households would be particularly hard hit this fall.

“What's unfortunate is the students who most needed to be in person and weren't are the ones that we're missing out on. So we know our numbers, this number of entering freshmen this fall from first-generation students and low-income students will be off significantly. And the reason is because they have not had an adviser helping them see college in their future,” Caboni said,

adding that high schools did everything they could just to get students across the graduation line, let alone think about college, amid the pandemic.

The latest enrollment figures for the university do show a decline in underrepresented minority students, defined as students who are Black, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander or of two or more races.

That figure fell from 3,008 last fall to 2,923 this fall, a drop of nearly 3%.



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Ethan Logan, WKU's vice president of enrollment and student experience, also said this fall's enrollment results aren't unexpected given the pandemic.

“Our fall enrollment is not unexpected coming out of the impact of the pandemic and challenges of enrollment for institutions across the country. Already we are seeing more engagement with our forthcoming class of prospective students than we saw during last year’s recruitment process. I believe that our challenge of being accessible to students (i.e., being in their high schools, hosting college fairs, etc.), even with our virtual resources, impacted our enrollment participation during the last recruitment cycle,” Logan said.

“WKU is forging ahead with a strong reinvestment in our future students in terms of our scholarship modeling and Hilltopper Guarantee. Access and opportunity are a part of our mission and we chose to reinvest in our students’ success towards graduation,” he said.

“The recruitment practice in higher education is ongoing and overlapping for each cycle of recruitment. We are already recruiting the Fall 2022 class and Fall 2023 class. Our Fall 2021 class may have had fewer students,

but they are among the most academically qualified students we've admitted to the institution. We hope to see their aptitude demonstrated in our retention of students through this year," Logan said.

The university saw a significant decline in its freshman class, falling from 3,436 to 3,281 this fall, a drop of 4.5%. That drop is even steeper for first-time, first-year students, which includes summer session students. That figure fell from 3,120 the previous year to 2,832 this year – a decline of just more than 9%.

Like colleges in general, WKU also has a guy problem. The number of male students attending the university fell from 6,725 last fall to 6,250 this fall – a decline of 7%.

WKU's enrollment figures mirror a national decline. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, fall 2021 enrollment numbers "show no signs of recovery from last year's declines.

Undergraduate enrollment is down

3.2% from a year ago. Undergraduate student numbers have now fallen by 6.5% as a total from two years ago.”

Freshman enrollment nationwide continued to slip this fall, the center said. First-year student numbers declined by 3.1% overall and 3.9% among traditional-age students (18-20).

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