

UW SYSTEM | CAMPAIGN FOR VACCINATIONS

70 students win scholarships

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Like most college students, Cortez Clark is not an early riser. So when the UW-Stevens Point junior received an email last week summoning him to campus at 8:15 a.m. Friday, he thought it was a little early but he would try and make it happen.

"It was well worth it," he said about the early start to his day.

Clark, of Janesville, was one of 70 University of Wisconsin System students who won a \$7,000 tuition scholarship as part of a recently concluded COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

Interim System President Tommy Thompson set a goal this summer for campuses to reach a 70% student vaccination rate. Universities that met the threshold by Oct. 31 unlocked a number of \$7,000 scholarships for students based on their enrollment.

Some students and staff have criticized the System's decision to forgo a vaccine mandate. Data show that Wisconsin colleges and universities that required COVID-19 vaccines reported student vaccination rates no lower than 80% while those without a mandate reported rates as low as 55%.

The System, however, is casting the campaign as a success. All but one of the 12 participating campuses, UW-Platteville, reached at least a 70% vaccination rate.

"We took up a challenge to educate and inform students as a part of a vaccination campaign to help keep our universities safe — and it has succeeded," Thompson said in a statement. "I believe in encouraging, rather than mandating, vaccines, and the scholarship incentive was a great motivator."

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UW-STEVENS POINT

UW-Stevens Point Chancellor Thomas Gibson presents a \$7,000 check to junior Cortez Clark, one of six Stevens Point winners in the UW System's vaccination campaign.

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At UW-Stevens Point, 74% of students are fully vaccinated, including Clark, who is majoring in social work and sociology. He said he was one of the first students to sign up for a shot once the campus clinic began offering the vaccine last spring.

Clark heard about the System's vaccination campaign and \$7,000 scholarships on the news over the summer. But as the semester progressed, he said he largely forgot about it. Even after receiving the email informing him he had been selected for a prize because

of his vaccination status, he assumed it was for one of the many small gift cards UW-Stevens Point gave away.

Clark last Friday spun the wheel, which landed on a local restaurant. Chancellor Thomas Gibson offered him one better, revealing a \$7,000 check.

"I never would have thought I would have gotten it," Clark said. "I'm not the person to win anything ... I was just in shock. I didn't know what to say."

Dylan Ruebl, another scholarship winner, said in a video testimonial that he was "spitballing" how to pay for school this semester until he learned his name had been selected.

The UW-Oshkosh student called his grandma with the news because he had spoken with her just a few days before, worried about how to pay his bills.

"This scholarship means a lot," he said.

Thompson celebrated the campaign's conclusion in a way that has become familiar to those following his presidency: by starring in a lighthearted video.

In an 80-second clip posted Tuesday on social media, Thompson convened a "Board of Mascots." Clash the Titan, of UW-Oshkosh, arm wrestled Blaze the Blue Devil from UW-Stout while they waited for the meeting to start. Others conversed in a corner to kill

time. A pair of vintage water skis leaned against a wall, a nod to Thompson's recent water-skiing accident.

Thompson told the mascots that the majority of their campuses reached the 70% vaccination goal. UW-Milwaukee's Pounce the Panther threw his paperwork into the air. Willie Warhawk of UW-Whitewater shook his tail feathers. Even Bucky Badger, whose UW-Madison campus did not participate in the campaign, was on hand to celebrate.

The campaign cost \$490,000, which System spokesperson Mark Pitsch said came from program revenue funding such as interest earnings.