

## Projection of U.S. and Wisconsin High School Graduates to 2031-32

The Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE) recently released its 9<sup>th</sup> edition of *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*<sup>1</sup>. The number of high school graduates by state are projected annually to 2031-32. This summary focuses on the projections for Wisconsin and the anticipated effect of reductions in the number of high school graduates on enrollment planning at UW-Madison.

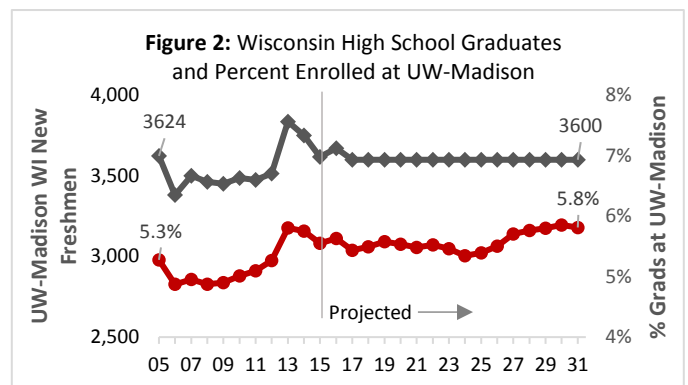
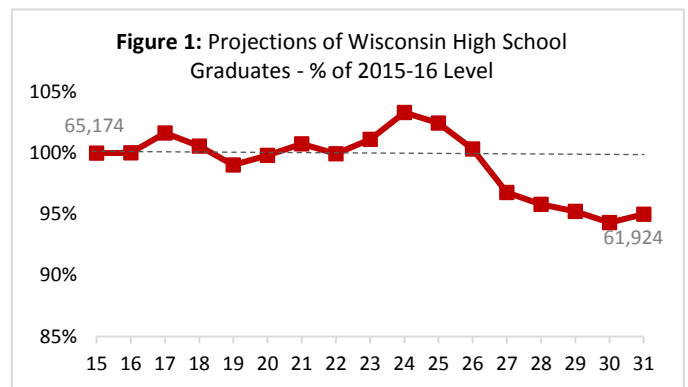
### Key Points

1. The number of high school graduates in Wisconsin, in the Midwest, and nationally is projected to decrease over the long term. Any plans for enrollment growth will have to consider new markets and have the policy flexibility to pursue them.
2. Because the number of high school graduates in Wisconsin is the source of more than half of UW-Madison's new freshmen annually, the number of high school graduates in Wisconsin drives enrollment planning.
3. UW-Madison's current commitment to the Board of Regents is to enroll at least 3,600 Wisconsin new freshmen annually. Unless this is reduced to reflect decreasing number of high school graduates, UW-Madison will enroll a larger share of Wisconsin high school graduates. This in turn will impact enrollment planning and the ability of other UW institutions to meet enrollment targets.
4. UW-Madison will be in increased competition with other colleges and universities inside and outside of Wisconsin in order to meet enrollment goals. Decreases in the number of high school graduates will be most pronounced in the Midwest, the source of almost all of UW-Madison's domestic non-resident and resident new freshmen. The number of high school graduates in California and New York, states outside of the Midwest that send relatively large numbers of non-residents to UW-Madison, are also projected to decrease or remain flat.
5. Recruitment of non-resident students will need to shift to states with projected graduation growth or to other countries. States with relatively large numbers of high school graduates that have projected growth include Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Colorado. Other states with lower numbers of high school graduates that have projected growth include North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah, and Washington.

### The Wisconsin Picture

Compared to the number of high school graduates from Wisconsin in 2015-16 (estimated at 65,174), the number of Wisconsin high school graduates is projected to remain relatively flat until 2018-19 and then decrease annually until 2022-23 (Figure 1). Starting in 2023-24 the number of high school graduates will increase briefly, returning to current levels for a single year in 2024-25. After that, the number of Wisconsin high school graduates will decrease annually until 2031-32. Between 2015-16 and 2031-32, the number of Wisconsin high school graduates is expected to decrease by 3,250 graduates (-5%). This will increase competition among Wisconsin institutions for a decreasing number of potential resident applicants.

In October 2015, the UW Board of Regents approved UW-Madison's request to enroll a guaranteed 3,600 Wisconsin resident new freshmen annually in lieu of the then-existing policy requirement of limiting non-resident enrollment to 25% or less of total undergraduate enrollment (Figure 2).



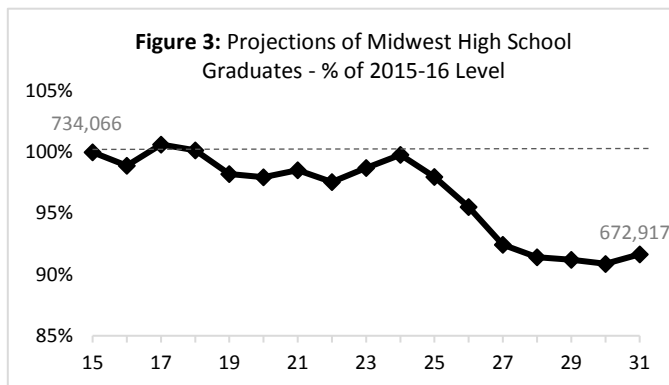
Historically, UW-Madison has enrolled around 5% of the previous year’s high school graduates as fall semester new freshmen. By 2015-16, that percentage had increased to 5.5% due to recent decreases in the size of the high school graduating class.

Further decreases in the number of Wisconsin high school graduates coupled with a requirement for UW-Madison to enroll at least 3,600 graduates annually means that UW-Madison will enroll a larger and larger share of Wisconsin high school graduates in years to come. Based on projections of graduates in 2031-32, the percentage of the graduating class enrolled at UW-Madison would increase to 5.8% of Wisconsin high school graduates. If UW-Madison were to enroll its historic average of 5% of the Wisconsin high school class, the annual number of Wisconsin new freshmen enrolling at UW-Madison would be closer to 3,100 by 2031.

### **The Regional (Midwest) Picture**

Compared to the number of high school graduates from Midwest<sup>2</sup> states in 2015-16 (estimated at 734,066), the number of Midwest high school graduates is projected to decrease until 2024-25 when it returns briefly to the 2015-16 level (Figure 3).

After that, the number of high school graduates in Midwestern states is projected to decrease to 672,917 in 2031-32. This is a decrease of more than 61,000 graduates (-8%), similar to the number of graduates annually in the entire state of Minnesota.

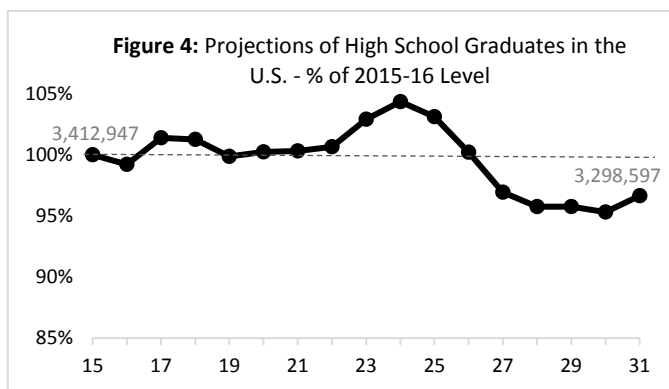


The rate of decrease will be steeper in the Midwest than in the U.S. as a whole. Because non-resident students at UW-Madison are mainly from neighboring states, particularly Minnesota and Illinois, decreases in the number of high school graduates nationally and in the Midwest in particular will decrease the number of recent high school graduates in the college applicant pool. After the Midwest states, non-resident students most often come from New York and California. These states are also projected to see flat or decreasing number of high school graduates, further compounding the challenge of maintaining enrollments of non-resident students.

### **The National Picture**

Compared to the number of high school graduates in 2015-16 (estimated at 3,412,947), the number of high school graduates in the U.S. as a whole is projected to remain relatively flat until 2023-24. After a brief peak in 2024-25 (estimated 3,561,051) the number of national high school graduates will decrease.

By 2031-32, the number of U.S. high school graduates is projected to be 3,298,597, 114,000 fewer graduates than in 2015-16 (-3%). This is roughly equivalent to the number of graduates in the entire state of Ohio. UW-Madison will be competing for non-resident students with other colleges and universities from a smaller pool of potential applicants.



<sup>1</sup> See <http://knocking.wiche.edu/>. Details of the projection methodology used are in Chapter 1 of the full report.

<sup>2</sup> Includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, and Wisconsin.