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NEWS

UW uploads student data

by Jessi Polsky

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University of Wisconsin officials highlighted their comprehensive student information database Wednesday, nine years after the system was first implemented.

Phillip Hull, institutional reporting specialist at the office of the registrar, said the National Student Clearinghouse's database contains a wide variety of information about students.

The NSC, which UW has used since 1998, holds information about where students obtained their high school diplomas, college enrollment and degree information, and loan information.

"Universities, employers and insurance companies [can find out] who is a student and what their enrollment is," Hull said.

According to Clare Huhn, policy and planning analyst at the office of academic planning, the NSC database houses "over 92 percent of enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities," adding that it is "a pretty rich database."

For the past nine years, Huhn said UW has been using the NSC's student tracker feature to follow where students ended up.

"[It's a] method of keeping track of students who used to be enrolled in a college or university who are no longer there or students who applied to a college or university and didn't enroll," Huhn said.

Huhn added she finds the data provided by the NSC helpful when trying to "confirm or refute myths about what is going on with students."

In addition, Huhn said she uses NSC data to try to develop an understanding for why some admitted students choose not to enroll at UW. According to Huhn, the database provides a plethora of information about students including what state they are from and what, if any, institution they decided to enroll in.

"[It tells us] where every student is enrolled, the student's name and ID, their permanent home address, the level of enrollment, in other words whether they're full time or half time," Hull said.

According to Huhn, the database provides evidence, rather than intent, for trying to decipher why certain admitted students decide against enrolling at UW. Huhn said she is then able to compare the school a student chooses to enroll in to UW examining cost, location and distance from the student's home.

"[It can] help get some evidence of either problems that we have recruiting students, or confirms some of the issues we think might be going on," Huhn said. "We spend resources to recruit students to have college fairs and college visits — I think it helps to know where do the students go, where we are losing them to, and who our competition is."

Through the NSC repository, Huhn said she has learned that many black students who are accepted to

UW choose to enroll in Spelman College in Georgia. Therefore, Huhn said she views Spelman as a school competing with UW-Madison for black students.

“Part of the original impetus to investigate the clearinghouse,” Huhn said, “(was) the pervasive myth ... that UW-Madison cannot enroll African-American students because they want to go to historically black colleges and universities.”