

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**Academic and Student Affairs**

**AGENDA ITEM: 6 – H (1)**

**DATE: October 3-5, 2017**

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**SUBJECT**

**Section Size Report – FY2017**

**PERTINENT HISTORY**

The Board of Regents discussed a number of efficiency strategies during their [August 2017](#) meeting and the structure for the effectiveness of the current section size policy framework were discussed. Each year the Board receives a copy of this report to determine whether institutions have complied with ensuring only 3% or 4% of selected sections are below the established 4/7/10 standard.

For additional information, visit the interactive SDBOR Section Size Dashboard at <https://www.sdbor.edu/dashboards>

**CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY**

[BOR Policy 5:17 – Instructional Funding](#)

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION**

BOR Policy 5:17.4 stipulates the minimum number of students that must be enrolled in course sections offered at the state’s public universities. As stated in this policy, undergraduate and dual-listed sections must enroll at least ten students, entry-level graduate sections (i.e., 500-600 level) must enroll at least seven students, and upper-level graduate sections (i.e., 700-800 level) must enroll at least four students.

This so-called “4-7-10 rule” applies only to state-supported course sections delivered through “selected” instructional methods (e.g., lectures, seminars).<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to the 4-7-10 rule are allowed for up to four percent of selected sections at BHSU, DSU, and NSU and up to three percent of selected sections at SDSMT, SDSU, and USD. These exception limits are based on cumulative data from the fall and spring terms.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for detailed definitions of “selected” and “non-selected” instructional methods.

<sup>2</sup> All data presented in this report refer to state-supported sections only. Data are sourced from census date extracts.

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**INFORMATIONAL ITEM**

This item is for informational purposes only. Any action will be at the Board’s discretion.

### **IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION**

As the public university system advances its efforts to balance instructional effectiveness with organizational efficiency, course section size has emerged as an important accountability measure. The annual *Section Size Report* evaluates the extent to which the state's six public universities continue to meet Regental policy with respect to minimum enrollment per course section.

This year all institution except BHSU (4.5%) feel within the acceptable ranges of selected course sections falling below the required 4/7/10 limits.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment I – Section Size Report

# Section Size Report

## Policy Background and Data Notes

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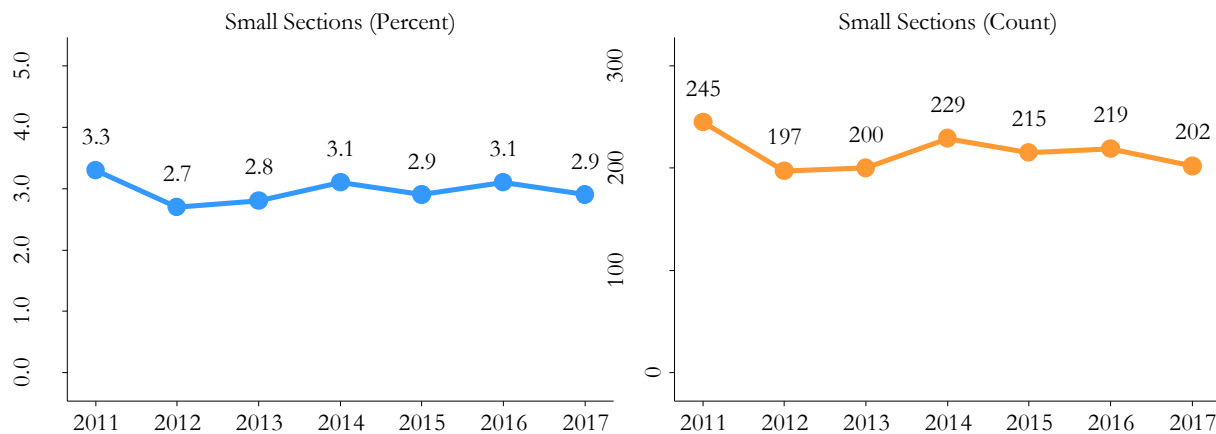
This so-called "4-7-10 rule" applies only to state-supported course sections delivered through "selected" instructional methods (e.g., lectures, seminars).<sup>3</sup> Exceptions to the 4-7-10 rule are allowed for up to four percent of selected sections at BHSU, DSU, and NSU and up to three percent of selected sections at SDSMT, SDSU, and USD. These exception limits are based on cumulative data from the fall and spring terms.<sup>4</sup>

## Analysis

### Small Sections

A total of 11,063 state-supported sections were offered in the university system during FY2017, 6,996 of which (63.2 percent) were selected sections. Overall, 2.9 percent of selected sections ( $n=202$ ) were classified as "small" under the 4-7-10 rule. Figure 1 shows that these figures are consistent with those recorded over the last several years. Of the 202 small sections recorded in FY2017, 168 (83.2 percent) were undergraduate sections, 16 (7.9 percent) were dual-listed sections, and 18 (8.9 percent) were graduate sections.

**Figure 1**  
Small Sections by Year



<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for detailed definitions of "selected" and "non-selected" instructional methods.

<sup>4</sup> All data presented in this report refer to state-supported sections only. Data are sourced from census date extracts.

Table 1 shows that small section percentages in FY2017 ranged from a high of 4.5 percent at BHSU to a low of 2.5 percent at USD. The exception rate at BHSU (4.5 percent) was slightly higher than the annual exception limit stipulated in BOR policy.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1**  
Small Sections by Institution and Year  
(Percentages)

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
BHSU	3.7	5.7	2.4	3.1	4.5
DSU	3.8	3.8	4.0	4.1	3.8
NSU	3.6	3.6	3.2	4.0	4.0
SDSMT	1.9	2.4	2.3	2.2	2.6
SDSU	2.7	2.6	3.0	2.8	2.6
USD	2.4	3.0	3.1	3.3	2.5
System	2.8	3.1	2.9	3.1	2.9

Table 2 dives further into FY2017 small section offerings by displaying institutional counts of small sections by course level. It can be seen that, for all institutions, undergraduate courses account for the majority of small sections. Note that these data are provided for reference only; no specific exception limitations have been established with respect to particular course levels.

**Table 2**  
Small Sections by Institution and Course Level, FY2017

	BHSU	DSU	NSU	SDSMT	SDSU	USD
Undergraduate	25 (4.4%)	15 (4.1%)	21 (4.0%)	13 (1.8%)	63 (2.5%)	31 (2.5%)
Dual-Listed	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (6.4%)	3 (2.5%)	9 (6.4%)
Graduate	1 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.7%)	5 (5.8%)	10 (3.6%)	1 (0.4%)
Total	26 (4.5%)	15 (3.8%)	22 (4.0%)	22 (2.6%)	76 (2.6%)	41 (2.5%)

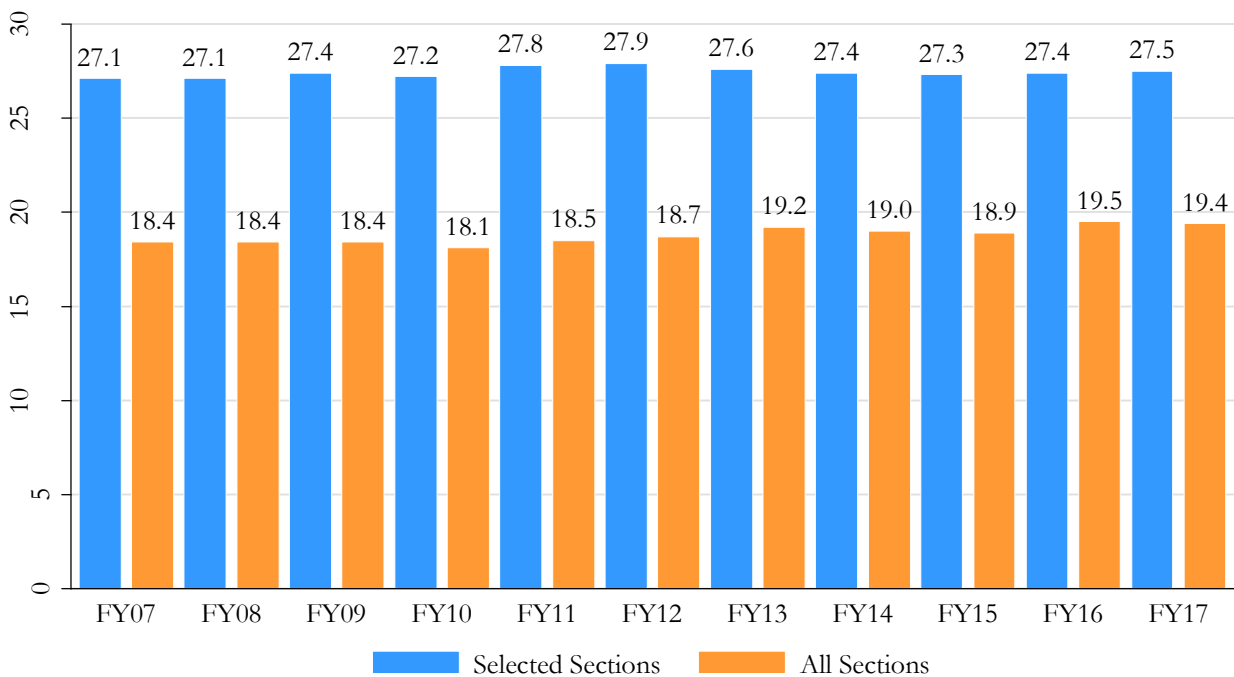
<sup>5</sup> Again, established exception limits are four percent at BHSU, DSU, and NSU, and three percent at SDSMT, SDSU, and USD. Representatives from BHSU were asked to provide explanations for exceeding established thresholds which are outlined below.

- A cross-listed PHYS341/CHEM342 is a required class for majors. In order to graduate students the institution needed to let those cross-listed classes go with a total of 9 students.
- Two sections of EXS350L, two sections of HLTH425, and two sections of PE280 have a space constraint in the lab. There is space for no more than 12 students, so the institution had to add an additional section of each class knowing that there were more than 12 students needing those classes.
- A BADM592 course should have been coded as an independent study and was not part of that faculty member's workload.

### Average Section Size

Average section size remained steady in the university system in FY2017. Figure 2 shows that, across all institutions and course levels, the average section size among selected sections was 27.5 students. Average section size was highest among undergraduate sections (28.9), followed by dual-listed sections (25.0) and graduate sections (16.1).<sup>6</sup> Across all section types (selected and non-selected combined), an average of 19.4 students enrolled in regental course sections offered in FY2017.

**Figure 2**  
Average Section Size by Section Type and Year



### Large Sections

Large sections (those with an enrollment of 100 or more) are used for a variety of purposes in the regental system. For example, introductory courses (e.g., Introduction to Sociology, United States History I) offer students an overview of a discipline. Other large sections (e.g., Biology Survey I, General Chemistry I) require students to enroll in supplemental laboratory experiences that allow for small group interaction in a traditional classroom environment. Participation/orientation courses (e.g., Marching Band, Orientation to Nursing) are experiential requirements for particular degree programs. Nearly all large sections are associated with one of these broad categories.

<sup>6</sup> These figures describe state-supported, selected sections only.

Of the 11,063 state-supported sections offered during FY2017, 134 (1.2 percent) had an enrollment of 100 or more students, up slightly from the prior year.<sup>7</sup> As seen in Figure 3 below, 57.5 percent ( $n=77$ ) of these sections enrolled 100-149 students, with approximately 4.5 percent ( $n=6$ ) enrolling 300 students or more.

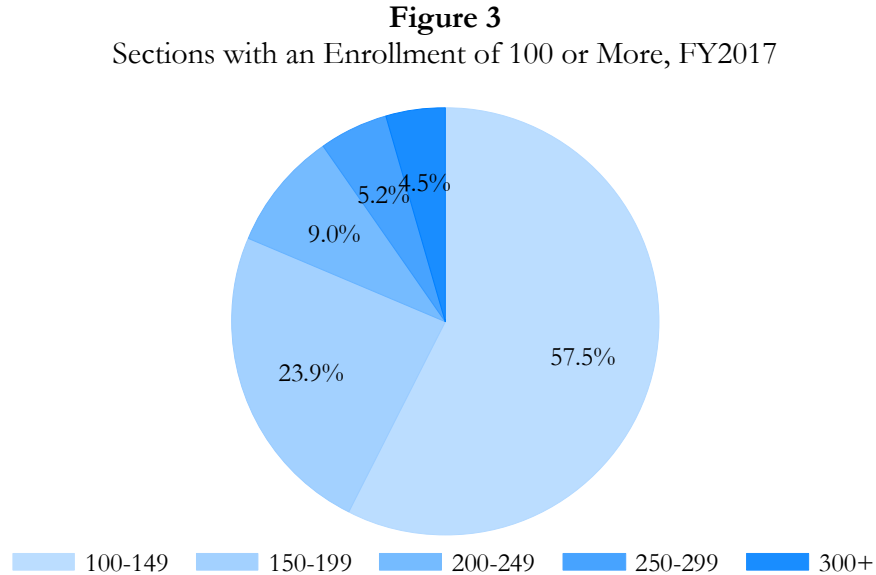


Table 3 shows historical institutional data, and indicates that SDSU has tended to deliver more large sections than any other university. In FY2017 specifically, enrollments in the university system's ten largest sections ranged from 281 to 375 students; all ten of these sections were delivered by SDSU.

**Table 3**  
Large Sections by Institution and Year

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017
BHSU	1	1	0	0	0
DSU	0	0	0	0	1
NSU	4	4	4	3	1
SDSMT	6	6	12	8	6
SDSU	97	95	90	92	102
USD	32	32	25	26	24
Total	140	138	131	129	134

<sup>7</sup> "Large" sections are defined here as those with enrollments greater than or equal to 100; enrollments are reported as aggregations of all cross-listed sections. Unless otherwise noted, the figures presented in this section refer to *all* unduplicated sections, not just *selected* sections.

## Appendix A Background Information

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Every state-supported course section offered in the university system can be classified into one of two categories: *selected* or *non-selected*. The distinction between these categories is based on the instructional method through which the section is delivered. Selected instructional methods are traditional delivery formats whose nature is such that course enrollments are not unusually limited. Non-selected instructional methods, on the other hand, include delivery methods that by definition tend to enroll a limited number of students. As delineated in BOR policy, selected and non-selected instructional types are defined as:

Selected Instructional Methods	Non-Selected Instructional Methods
Discussion/Recitation	Studio / Small Group Instruction / Small Ensemble
Seminar	Competency-Based / Self-Paced Study
Large Ensemble	Clinical Laboratory or Experience
Laboratory and Alternate Laboratory	Independent Study or Private Instruction
Physical Education Activity	Design/Research
Lecture Courses	Tracking
	Internship/Practicum
	Thesis or Thesis/Research Sustaining
	Workshop
	Restricted PE Activity