



# News Release

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## **USD and SDSMT Propose New Admissions Standards**

MADISON, S.D. – Higher admissions standards—aimed at raising student expectations and enhancing institutional reputation—are being proposed by The University of South Dakota and South Dakota School of Mines and Technology.

Presidents from the two universities briefed the South Dakota Board of Regents Thursday on their proposals. No immediate action was taken by the board.

“The regents will carefully consider these recommendations,” said Regents President Harvey C. Jewett. “Before we take action, possibly in March, we’d like to gauge reaction from students, parents, educators, and others interested in the public university system.”

Board policy allows each university to adopt specific admissions regulations that assure acceptable student preparation and enrollment levels. Current policy, in effect for over a decade, applies the same minimum admission standards to all six public universities. The policy requires incoming students to meet certain high school course requirements. In addition, students must have at an ACT composite score of 18 or above, or a high school graduating class rank in the top 60 percent, or a high school grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.6 on a 4.0 scale.

SDSMT officials believe a change in admissions standards would enhance the school’s reputation as a premiere science and engineering university, as well as improve the student academic profile and retention. USD’s proposal points out distinctive admissions standards will open up more options for the state’s best and brightest students, as well as make South Dakota higher education more attractive to non-resident students.

“When considering admissions requirements, it is important to take a state-level ‘system’ look to ensure that we provide access to all students,” said Robert T. Tad Perry, the regents’ executive director. “Not every institution is positioned, nor should they be, to increase admissions standards.”

At SDSMT, the school proposes to classify applicants into three categories based on an ACT composite score, the ACT mathematics sub-score, and high school GPA. Students who score well on the ACT or have a high GPA would gain automatic admission at Tech, while students whose ACT scores and GPA are both low would not be considered. A third group of prospective

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students would be considered on a case-by-case basis, based on the strength of their high school record, test scores, and other relevant data.

Tech President Charles Ruch said his university seeks better prepared incoming freshmen, to retain more students, and to graduate more of them. “Since any increase in admission requirements is likely initially to negatively impact enrollments, we propose to gradually raise requirements for admission,” Ruch said. Enrollment this fall at SDSMT stood at 2,345. If approved, the Tech proposal would not be implemented until fall 2006, with a two-year phase-in for in-state students and one-year phase-in for non-residents.

USD recommends increasing the admission criteria at its Vermillion campus to a minimum ACT score of 21 and a high school graduating class rank in the upper 50 percent. The change, to be implemented in fall 2007, would be phased in over three years, with the ACT score requirement increasing by one point per year.

“We are optimistic that this change would actually serve to attract more students of a higher caliber,” said USD President James W. Abbott. This year’s fall enrollment at USD totaled 8,120. Abbott noted the university already has seen positive results from marketing its academic programs to students with a stronger preparation base. He said a change in admissions standards would further support that trend at USD.

“Over the past decade, the percentage of the entering first-year class with ACT scores of 24 or greater has increased from 30 percent to 47 percent,” Abbott said. “Additionally, the percentage of the entering class with ACT scores at or below 17 has decreased from 14 percent to 6 percent.”