



# News Release

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## **University Center Ranked Tops in Quality by Undergraduates**

VERMILLION, S.D. – As a history-making academic year for University Center draws to a close, the center’s executive dean says there are three key elements to continued successful growth of the public university presence in South Dakota’s largest city.

Mark Lee told the South Dakota Board of Regents today that University Center must continue to focus on its mission to serve Sioux Falls by providing high-quality courses and programs that students demand, and at a competitive price. Courses and student services also must be delivered in a way that meets the needs and expectations of adult and non-traditional students in the marketplace. And finally, Lee said the center must do more to effectively market its courses and programs and recruit new students.

Lee noted that the Sioux Falls metropolitan area experienced net growth of about 22,500 people in the last three years, and there is a constant and growing need to educate the community about University Center and what it has to offer. Likewise, Sioux Falls continues to become even more economically, ethnically, and racially diverse.

Lee said University Center can build on its already-strong reputation. Undergraduate students surveyed in a recent market study ranked University Center number one among Sioux Falls institutions in perceived quality, Lee told the regents. “This is a clear testament to the quality of the state universities who bring their programs to Sioux Falls,” he said.

Over the past year, The University of South Dakota, South Dakota State University, Dakota State University, Northern State University, and newly-added Black Hills State University all offered programs through University Center. The three founding partners—USD, SDSU, and DSU—have well-established programs and reputations, while NSU and BHSU are just beginning to develop their standing in Sioux Falls.

University Center’s history-making year was highlighted by the January opening of its new classroom building near the intersection of 60<sup>th</sup> Street North and Interstate 29 and the debut in April of the Graduate Education and Applied Research Center. Enrollment at the off-campus center also hit new all-time highs in the fall and spring semesters. In fall 2008, for the first time ever, University Center was the largest higher education activity in Sioux Falls based on headcount, with 2,206 students.

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Lee said University Center must strategically position itself in a changing Sioux Falls higher education market. Since 2004, University Center has grown by 20 percent while the total among all other providers in the city has declined by 7 percent. “Clearly, University Center has outperformed the market during this time period, and even more so if we look back a few more years, but the proportion of the population willing to engage in higher education may have plateaued,” Lee cautioned.

Lee says there are ways University Center can grow faster than the market. He says it is important to identify new strategies to grow the market as a whole by encouraging underserved populations to engage in higher education, as well as to competitively increase University Center’s current share of college students. Adding new academic programs in high-demand areas also will help University Center in its service to Sioux Falls, and the annual report included those programs being considered and planned.

A market study conducted last November surveyed Sioux Falls adults who had recently taken courses from any higher education provider. Lee said University Center is already working to implement some of the programmatic and administrative changes suggested to improve services. “Key to our success is to be true to our mission to serve the Sioux Falls area,” he said.

According to the study, University Center had 19 percent of the actual undergraduate market share for higher education in Sioux Falls, and 15 percent of the graduate market share. When both undergraduate and graduate students were asked where they preferred to take coursework, University Center had 38 percent to 39 percent of the “preference” market share.

Programs in highest demand are business, health care, and education. Students also expressed strong preferences for an accelerated format for their classes, such as eight-, 10-, or 12-week semesters rather than the traditional 15-week semester, and the use of technology to create more hybrid class-delivery models.

“If we stay attuned to the needs of the local market, develop programs and course delivery models in demand, effectively communicate with the market, and meet the unique service needs of non-traditional students, University Center’s future will be filled with as much success as was its recent past,” Lee concluded.