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South Dakota Reverses ‘Brain Drain; State is a Net Importer of College Students

RAPID CITY, S.D. – It is a common perception that South Dakota suffers from a “brain drain” of students leaving the state to attend college elsewhere. A new study presented to the South Dakota Board of Regents this week refutes that belief.

Board of Regents’ staff and Tom Mortenson, a researcher for Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY, conducted a special data analysis, using existing datasets supplied by the U.S. Department of Education, of high school graduates in 2008 who were first-time college students in the fall of 2008.

The study drew specific comparisons between two groups: first-time freshmen from other states enrolled in postsecondary institutions in South Dakota and first-time freshmen from South Dakota who enrolled in other states.

The data show that South Dakota was a net importer of college freshmen in the fall of 2008. There were 2,134 freshmen imported from other states, while only 1,564 freshmen left to attend college out of state, for a net gain to South Dakota’s benefit of 570 students.

“These data demonstrate that South Dakota does indeed attract more college freshmen than it loses,” said Jack Warner, the regents’ executive director and CEO. “And this is consistent with other data we have seen that shows the import/export ratio started to shift around 2000, when South Dakota began to bring in more college students than those who left,” he said.

“Like many myths that may have been true at one time, circumstances change and it is good to have available to us solid data that challenge these ‘brain drain’ misperceptions,” Warner said.

A link to the full report is available on the Board of Regents’ website at:
<http://www.sdbor.edu/mediapubs/issuebriefs/documents/NetMigration.pdf> .

