

SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

Academic and Student Affairs

AGENDA ITEM: 5 – M

DATE: December 2-3, 2015

SUBJECT: Distance Education Report

The annual *Distance Education Report* provides a summary of performance data related to the university system’s various distance delivery initiatives.

Readers may note that past editions of this report presented data on a full-year reporting basis. However, because such an approach can complicate comparisons with data shown in other regental enrollment summaries (i.e., the SDBOR Fact Book), the current edition focuses on an analysis of fall term data.

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

RECOMMENDED ACTION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Information only.

Distance Education Report

Background and Data Notes

The university system operates two major off-campus ventures. First, in 2000, the board initiated the Electronic University Consortium (EUC) for the purpose of coordinating a statewide system of distance course offerings. This system offers students the opportunity to pursue coursework through a variety of delivery mechanisms, including the internet, DDN, and personal correspondence. Second, the university system has continued to support its off-campus delivery sites in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Pierre, and Huron. These facilities allow for the delivery of classroom-based instruction in cities not served by a residential campus. In addition, the board also has worked to develop a system-wide common course catalog to assist students seeking coursework from multiple institutions.

With this context in mind, this report provides a summary of distance course delivery in the university system. The goal of the report is to offer a means for evaluating changes – through analyses of enrollment histories, student characteristics, and course offerings – in this rapidly developing delivery network.¹ Altogether, data suggest that the human footprint of the university system's distance education offerings is large, and continues to grow.

Analysis

Headcount Trends

Table 1 shows that 14,050 students enrolled in at least one distance course in Fall 2015.² Overall, the number of students enrolling in distance courses has risen 46.1 percent since Fall 2010, compared with a growth rate of only 2.1 percent for system enrollments overall.

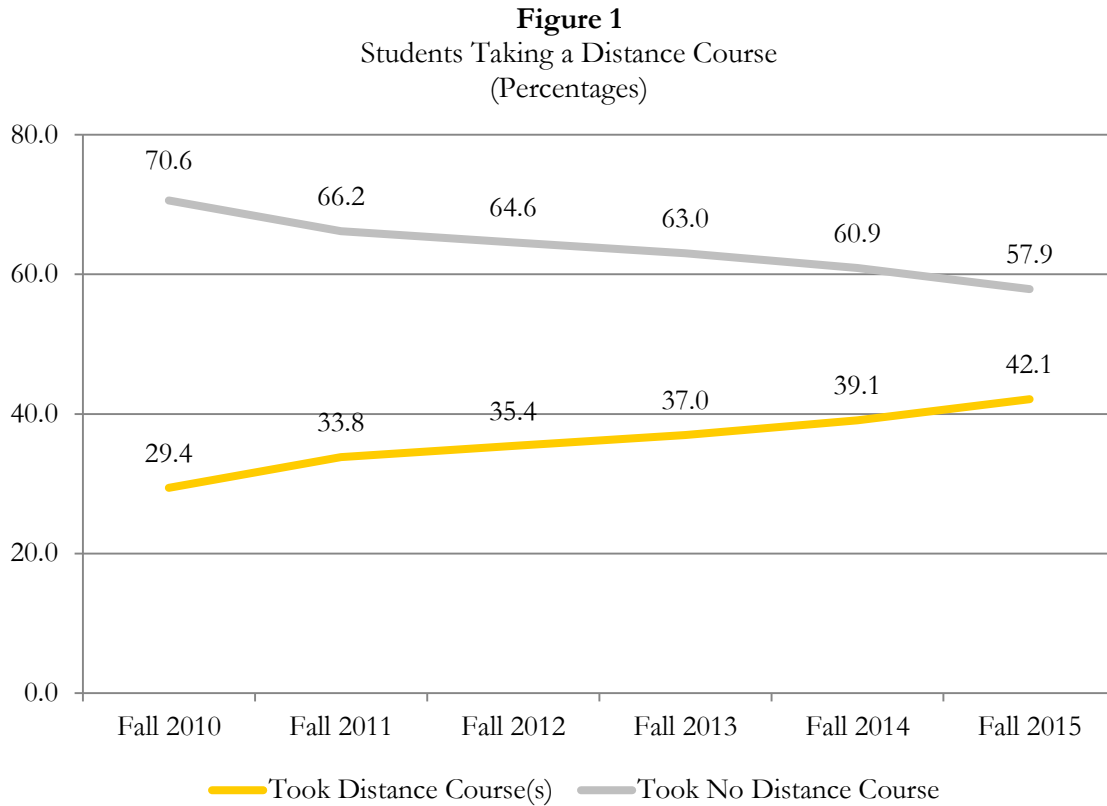
Table 1
Headcount Trends

	Distance	Other	Total
Fall 2010	9,615	23,102	32,717
Fall 2011	11,004	21,556	32,560
Fall 2012	11,581	21,100	32,681
Fall 2013	12,158	20,734	32,892
Fall 2014	13,056	20,307	33,363
Fall 2015	14,050	19,340	33,390
Δ Since 2010 (Percent)	+46.1%	- 16.3%	+2.1%
Δ Since 2010 (Number)	+4,435	- 3,762	+673

¹ Data used in this report come from census date extracts. Records were queried under the following definition of distance delivery: *Delivery method ≠ 001 (or) 028 (or) 050*. While this report focuses mainly on courses delivered by distance, it also makes occasional reference to courses offered at main campuses and at university centers. However, while distance, on-campus, and university center data are depicted in this report as representing separate delivery options, some data unavoidably overlap these categories. For example, a DDN course transmitted from the USD main campus can be defined as both a main campus course and a distance course.

² Headcount figures are unduplicated.

Students enrolling in at least one distance course represented 42.1 percent of all students enrolled in the public university system in Fall 2015 (see Figure 1); as recently as Fall 2010, this figure stood at only 29.4 percent. If this trend persists, the university system may soon see the day when a majority of its students participate in distance coursework offered by regental institutions.³



The university system's proportion of students enrolling in distance courses appears somewhat higher than national rates reported in other publications. A recent report from WICHE indicates that, as of Fall 2013, approximately one quarter of all public university students in the United States enrolled in at least one distance education course.⁴ It seems plausible that the comparatively high participation rates seen in South Dakota may owe in part to the geographic distribution of the state's population, whereby many place-bound residents – living far from any classroom facility – may find distance education the only workable option for postsecondary study. The state's high participation rates in distance offerings also could be taken as positive evidence for the effectiveness of the university system's common course catalog.

³ It may already be the case that a majority of university system students enroll in at least one distance course in a given term when other (i.e., non-regental) course providers are considered.

⁴ WICHE (2015). *Higher Ed Sectors Vary Greatly in Distance Ed Enrollments*. See <https://wctblog.wordpress.com/2015/03/05/ipedssectors/>

With the above trend in mind, Figure 2 illustrates the marked uptick in distance course-taking seen across all six universities. Grouping students according to their “home” university classifications, these data show that nearly seventy percent (act. 69.4) of DSU students took at least one distance course in Fall 2015, up from only 44.7 percent in Fall 2010. With the exception of SDSMT – which historically has accounted for a low proportion of the distance student body – all other universities have seen comparable increases over this time period. Figure 3 further demonstrates the widespread nature of this expansion, showing that growth has occurred across a broad range of student groups.

Figure 2
Percent Taking a Distance Course, by Home Institution
(Percentages)

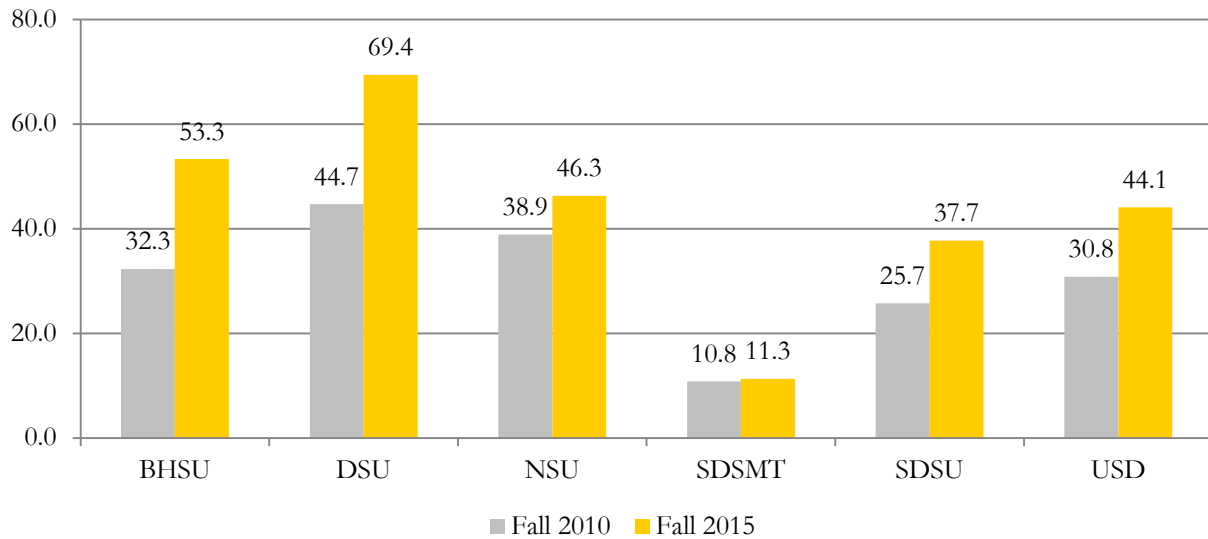
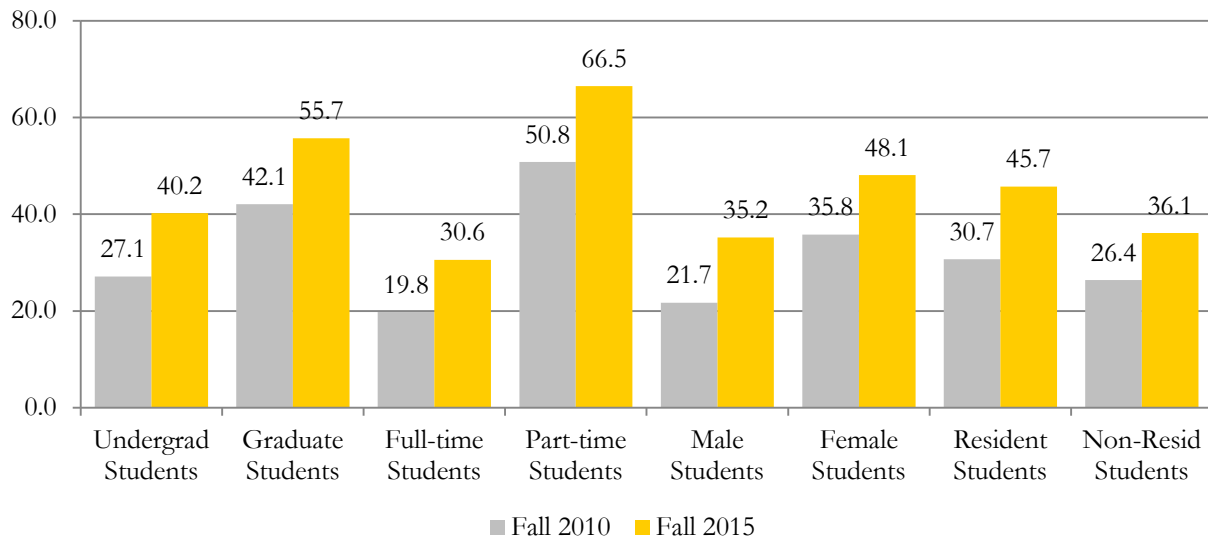


Figure 3
Percent Taking a Distance Course, by Student Category
(Percentages)



Finally, Table 2 offers a profile of the state's Fall 2015 distance-taking student body. Students enrolling in distance courses tended to be undergraduates (79.4 percent), part-time (50.7 percent), female (61.3 percent), and South Dakota residents (68.0 percent). Table 2 also provides comparable data for the population of students not enrolling in distance courses.

Table 2
Student Profiles, Fall 2015

	Distance	Other
Student Count	14,050	19,340
Undergraduate Students	79.4%	85.7%
Graduate Students	20.6%	11.9%
Full-Time Students	49.3%	81.4%
Part-Time Students	50.7%	18.6%
Male Students	38.8%	51.9%
Female Students	61.3%	48.1%
Resident (SD) Students	68.0%	58.7%
Non-Resident Students	32.0%	41.3%
Average Age	25.3	21.9

Enrollment and Credit Hour Trends

Table 3 provides several alternative measures of student participation in distance courses, and – like the tables above – indicates another year of strong enrollment growth. Course enrollments in distance courses rose 7.6 percent from Fall 2014 to Fall 2015, and have climbed 58.9 percent since Fall 2010. Consequently, tallies of credit hours delivered by distance have jumped noticeably over this timeframe (67.8 percent since 2010).

Table 3
Enrollment Indicators Trends

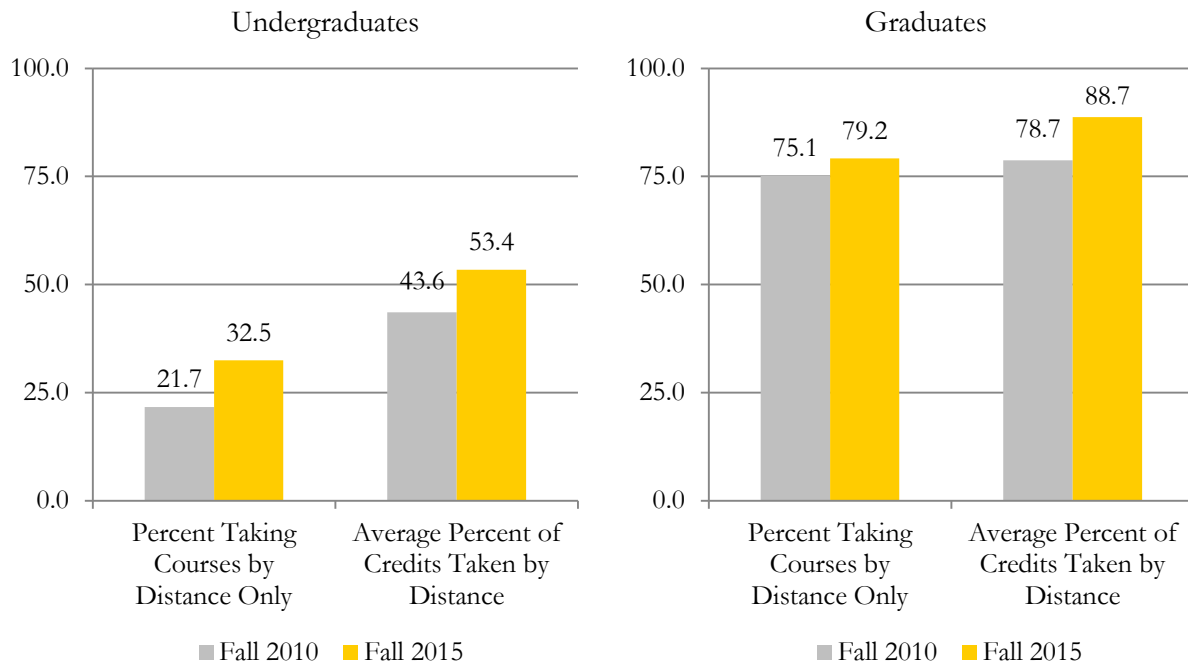
	Total Enrollment	Average Enrollment	Total Credit Hours
Fall 2010	15,504	15.2	40,094
Fall 2011	19,213	16.3	48,276
Fall 2012	20,011	16.7	54,518
Fall 2013	21,463	16.8	58,025
Fall 2014	22,891	16.7	62,411
Fall 2015	24,634	17.7	67,288
Δ Since 2010 (Percent)	+58.9%	+16.3%	+67.8%
Δ Since 2010 (Number)	+9,130	+2.5	+27,194

Importantly, enrollment data suggest that students are moving to distance courses not only in greater numbers, but also with greater intensity. Table 3 shows two indicators of enrollment intensity for students enrolled in at least one distance course in Fall 2010 or Fall 2015.

In general, both student groups tend to rely more heavily on distance courses now than in the past. For instance, 21.7 percent of university system undergraduates enrolling in at least one distance course in Fall 2010 took no regental courses by any other means. By Fall 2015, this number had risen to 32.5 percent. Distance-enrolled undergraduates also now take a larger share of their credits by distance. From Fall 2010 to Fall 2015, the percentage of credits taken by distance for this population increased from 43.6 percent to 53.4 percent. Comparable data for graduate students show similar changes.

Overall, the data shown in Figure 4 suggest that most distance-taking undergraduates continue to use distance courses as a supplement to face-to-face courses. Graduate students taking distance courses, by contrast, typically complete a large majority of their total coursework by distance. Though not shown in the graph below, students at all levels enrolling in distance courses now take 60.7 percent of all credits by distance.

Figure 4
Enrollment Intensity for Students Taking a Distance Course
(Percentages)



Clearly then, students are participating in distance courses more so now than ever before. And looking deeper, evidence suggests that – with respect to course completion rates – distance-based students hold their own when compared to students in face-to-face classes. A previous analysis of AY2012 academic data found that students registering for distance-based course sections earned a creditable grade in those courses at a similar rate (77.5 percent) as students taking face-to-face courses (83.5 percent).⁵

⁵ Analysis presented to the Board in May 2013; see <http://www.sdbor.edu/theboard/agenda/2013/May/18.pdf>

Course Sections Offered

Table 4 indicates that 1,394 total sections were offered by the university system through distance delivery in Fall 2015. The number of distance sections grew by 1.1 percent from the previous year, and has climbed 36.7 percent since Fall 2010. Similar growth can be seen in the number of unduplicated sections (i.e., “courses”) offered over this period.

The table also shows that the variety of distance courses has continued to expand. More than 800 unique course names were offered by distance in Fall 2015, up from less than 600 in Fall 2010. But while the university system’s menu of distance offerings continues to grow, this body of coursework still tends to be oriented toward general education content. In Fall 2015, the most frequently offered distance courses were SPCM 101: Fundamentals of Speech (26 sections), ENGL 101: Composition I (19 sections), MATH 095: Pre-College Algebra (18 sections), ENGL 201: Composition II (12 sections), and MATH 102: College Algebra (12 sections).

Table 4
Distance Sections Offered

	Sections ⁶	Courses ⁷	Course Names ⁸
Fall 2010	1,020	824	599
Fall 2011	1,179	975	676
Fall 2012	1,197	1,038	703
Fall 2013	1,275	1,112	767
Fall 2014	1,375	1,239	826
Fall 2015	1,394	1,246	838
Δ Since 2010 (Percent)	+36.7%	+51.2%	+40.0%
Δ Since 2010 (Number)	+374	+422	+239

Disaggregating the above course sections by university, data show that USD offers – as it has over the history of this analysis – more distance sections than any other university. As of Fall 2015, USD offered 29.8 percent of all distance sections, followed by SDSU (25.6 percent), DSU (17.2 percent), BHSU (14.9 percent), NSU (10.7 percent) and SDSMT (1.9 percent). This distribution has changed little in recent years.

By delivery method, internet delivery continues to account for the largest share of distance course sections. Approximately 78.6 percent of all distance sections offered in Fall 2015 were delivered by internet. No other delivery method category (i.e., correspondence, DDN, hybrid, other) accounted for more than ten percent of all sections. The increasing dominance of internet delivery represents a transformational change from what was the case as recently as the early 2000s, when correspondence courses and internet courses still were offered with comparable frequency. Consequently, it is the scaling capacity of interest courses that has enabled the rapid enrollment growth seen over this time period.

⁶ This column includes all cross-listed sections. Sections may be cross-listed by level (e.g., 404-504), department (e.g., POLS-ECON), site (e.g., UCSF-distance), institution (e.g., NSU-DSU), delivery method (e.g., DDN-internet) or any combination of the above.

⁷ In this column, cross-listed sections are removed, leaving a count of primary sections only.

⁸ In this column, each course name is counted only once.