

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**Academic and Student Affairs**

**AGENDA ITEM: 6 – G**

**DATE: August 10, 2017**

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**SUBJECT: Credit Hours to Degree**

This report examines recent data with respect to credit hour completions by Regental graduates, and tracks changes in this metric following SDBOR's adoption of new credit hour requirements for undergraduate degree programs.

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**INFORMATIONAL ITEM**



\*\*\* Special Data Analysis \*\*\*

## Credit Hours to Degree

In October 2011, the Board of Regents adopted a policy change establishing new credit hour limits for undergraduate degree programs. While the regental system previously had observed – by convention, but not as a matter of policy – unofficial limits of 128 credit hours for bachelor’s degree programs and 64 credit hours for associate’s degree programs, the above policy change established firm limits of 120 hours and 60 hours for these respective program types. This report tracks the effects of this policy change by examining the number of credit hours completed by regental graduates in recent years.

### Data Notes

Degree completion data are provided by Regents Information Systems at the degree major level in order to enable the analysis of individual majors. However, the data presented in this summary have been unduplicated at the institution-term-degree level, meaning that each graduate is counted only once per institution per term per degree earned.

### Analysis

Credit hour limits were adopted by the Board of Regents with the intent of reducing the costs – both time and money – associated with earning a college degree.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, this policy aimed to trigger an observable reduction in the mean number of credit hours completed by regental graduates over time. Because the new credit limits took effect in the summer of 2012, the first consequent downturn in credit completions was expected to occur in FY2013.<sup>2</sup>

The data summaries below display credit completion data for undergraduate degree completers over the last five fiscal years. Credit hour totals (both regental credit and cumulative credit) are segmented by degree level and transfer status.<sup>3</sup> The transfer/non-transfer distinction is an important one to make here, given that many transfer students have spent significant time working toward graduation requirements at institutions outside the SDBOR system. Consequently, students transferring credit from other institutions are likely to accumulate more total credits – but fewer regental credits – prior to earning a degree from a regental university.

<sup>1</sup> BOR Policy 2:29 can be found [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> As noted in [previous materials](#), new credit limits were incorporated into academic catalogs starting with AY2012-13. Consequently, new credit hour limits applied to students admitted in AY2012-13 or later, as well as reentering students, transfer students, and current students electing to follow the new guidelines.

<sup>3</sup> Transfer students represent approximately 46 percent of the roughly 23,000 records analyzed here. See Appendix A for table of graduate counts. In this report, “cumulative” credit represents the sum of Regental, transfer, and other (e.g., credit by examination) credit types.

Figure 1 shows credit completion averages for the 21,440 students earning a bachelor’s degree from the regental system since FY2012. Data indicate that, on average, regental graduates in FY2016 did indeed complete slightly fewer total credit hours than did graduates in FY2012 (the last cohort predating the current policy). The right-most set of bars shows that mean cumulative credits fell from 144.3 in FY2012 to 138.9 in FY2016, while mean regental credits fell from 126.5 to 118.7 over the same period. Comparable declines were recorded for transfer students and non-transfer students alike. Overall, these data indicate that mean credit completions have ticked down consistently since SDBOR’s new credit hour limits were established.

**Figure 1**  
Average Credit Hours by Year and Transfer Status  
Bachelor’s Degree Completers

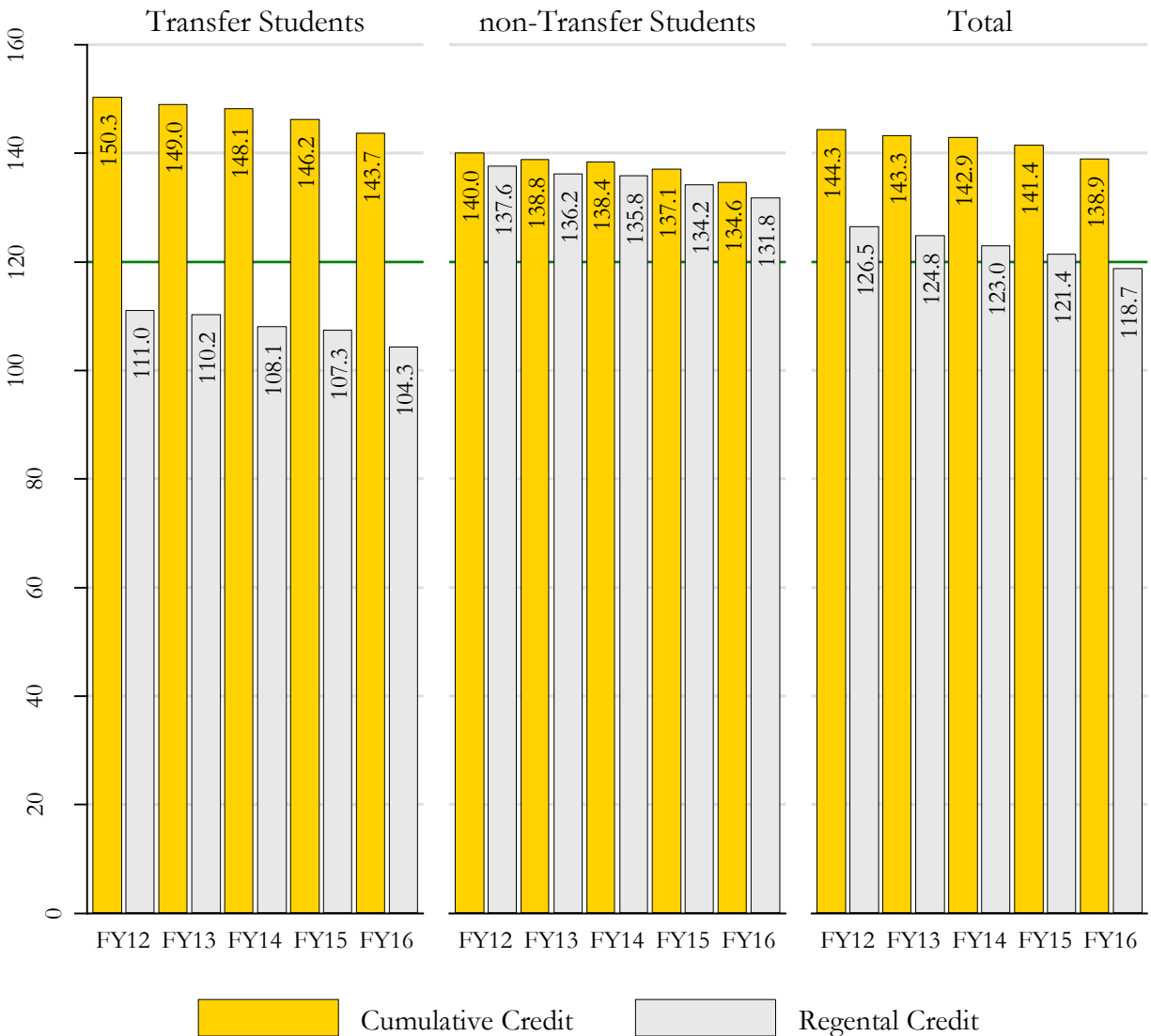
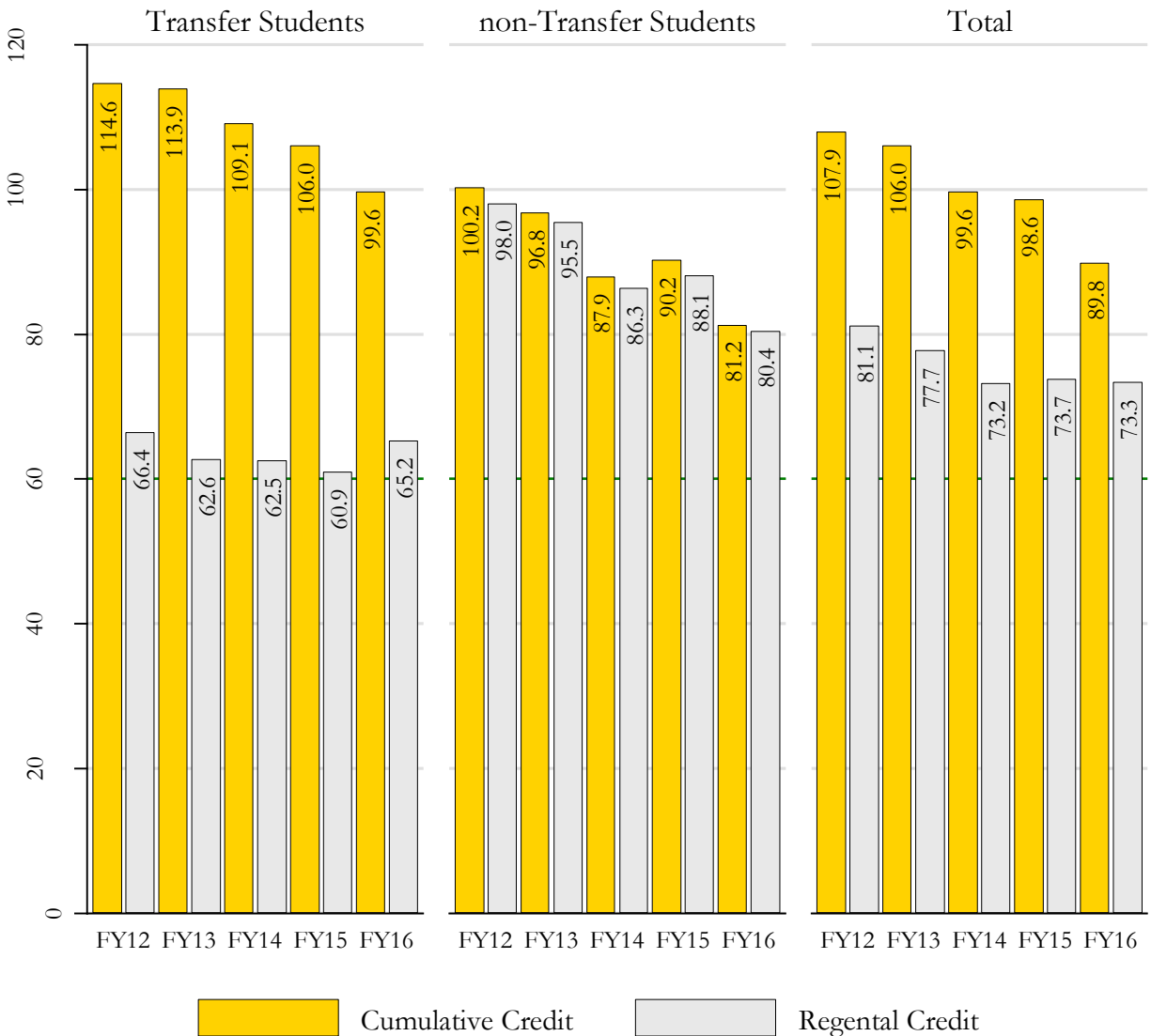


Figure 2 (below) shows analogous information for the university system’s 1,870 associate degree completers since FY2012. Again, data indicate a clear decline in mean credit hour completions since the board’s implementation of undergraduate credit hour limits. From FY2012 to FY2016, mean cumulative credit completions fell from 107.9 to 89.8 and mean regental credit completions fell from 81.1 to 73.3.

**Figure 2**  
Average Credit Hours by Year and Transfer Status  
Associate Degree Completers



## Appendix A Reference Information

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### Graduate Counts

Table A1 displays the number of graduate records analyzed in this report. The table depicts annual counts of regental degree majors after unduplication at the institution-term-degree level. Each regental graduate is counted only once per institution per term per degree earned.

**Table A1**  
Graduate Counts

| Level and<br>GradFY | Transfer Status   |                      | Total  |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------|
|                     | Transfer Students | non-Transfer Student |        |
| 1.Assoc             |                   |                      |        |
| FY12                | 221               | 192                  | 413    |
| FY13                | 262               | 223                  | 485    |
| FY14                | 254               | 206                  | 460    |
| FY15                | 149               | 133                  | 282    |
| FY16                | 107               | 123                  | 230    |
| Total               | 993               | 877                  | 1,870  |
| 2.Bach              |                   |                      |        |
| FY12                | 1,655             | 2,297                | 3,952  |
| FY13                | 1,877             | 2,394                | 4,271  |
| FY14                | 1,951             | 2,270                | 4,221  |
| FY15                | 2,052             | 2,268                | 4,320  |
| FY16                | 2,226             | 2,450                | 4,676  |
| Total               | 9,761             | 11,679               | 21,440 |