

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**Academic and Student Affairs**

**AGENDA ITEM: 8 – R**  
**DATE: December 5-7, 2017**

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**SUBJECT**

**Distance Education Report**

**CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY**

[BOR Policy 1:7:10](#) – Extended University Consortium

[BOR Policy 2:12](#) – Distance Education

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION**

The annual Distance Education Report provides a summary of performance data related to the university system’s various distance delivery initiatives. It is important to note that previous 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, Fall Enrollment Report and Dashboard), the current edition focuses on an analysis of fall term data only.

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

**IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION**

A number of relevant trends in the report are important for the Board of Regents to consider, including:

- Distance education headcount has increased by 30% over the past five years growing from 12,158 students to 15,790.
- Forty-five percent of Regental students took at least one distance course in Fall 2017. This is a 9% increase over the past five years.
- Four Regental institutions had more than half of their students enrolled in distance courses in Fall 2017.
- An additional 20,000 credit hours were delivered via distance this fall compared to Fall 2013.
- While the majority of undergraduate students enroll in distance courses to supplement their face-to-face courses, a majority of graduate students complete their programs via distance.

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**INFORMATIONAL ITEM**

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- Despite the increase in the credit hours delivered, the number of distance sections has remained rather consistent over the past five years. Average enrollments in distance sections has increased from 16.8 to 19.6 over the past five years.

Board members should be conscious of the continued growth in this area considering facility expansion on campus.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment I – Distance Education Report

# Distance Education Report

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 15,790 students enrolled in at least one distance course in Fall 2017. Overall, the number of students enrolling in distance courses has risen 29.9 percent over the last five fall terms, compared with a growth rate of only 2.3 percent for system enrollments overall.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1**  
Headcount Trends

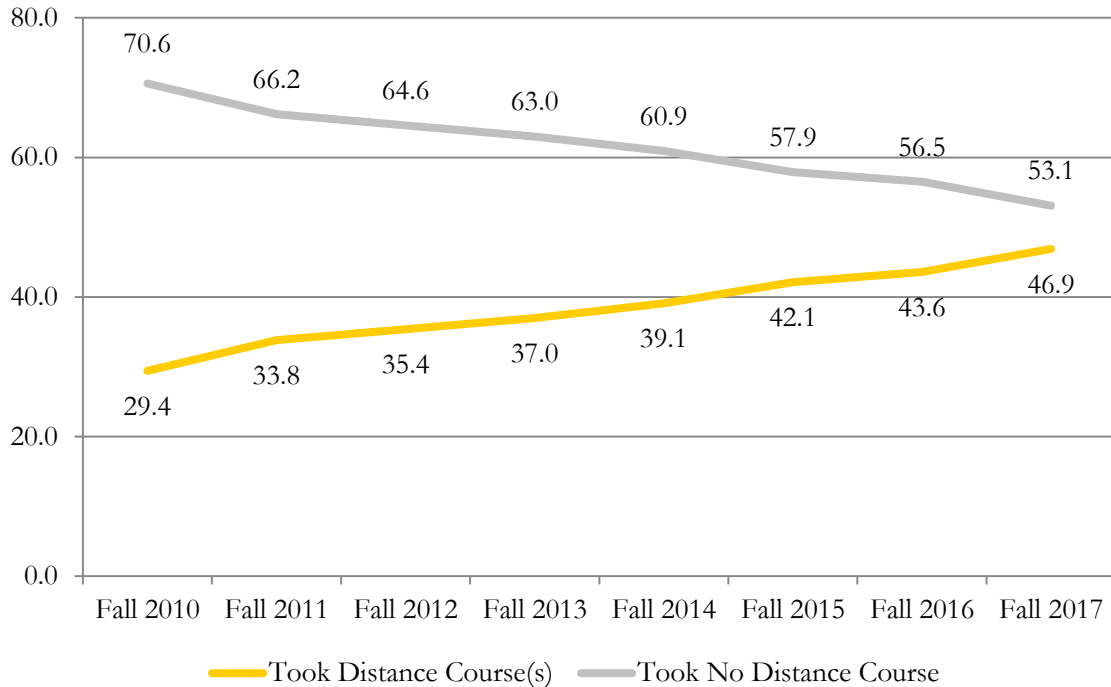
	Distance	Non-Distance	Total
Fall 2013	12,158	20,734	32,892
Fall 2014	13,056	20,307	33,363
Fall 2015	14,050	19,340	33,390
Fall 2016	14,604	18,927	33,531
<b>Fall 2017</b>	<b>15,790</b>	<b>17,847</b>	<b>33,637</b>
Five-year $\Delta$ (Percent)	+29.9%	- 13.9%	+2.3%
Five-year $\Delta$ (Number)	+3,632	- 2,887	+745

<sup>1</sup> Data used in this report come from census date extracts. Records were queried under the following definition of distance delivery: *Delivery method*  $\neq$  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.

<sup>2</sup> Headcount figures are unduplicated.

Students enrolling in at least one distance course represented 46.9 percent of all students enrolled in the public university system in Fall 2017 (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.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1**  
Students Taking a Distance Course  
(Percentages)



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.<sup>4</sup> 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.

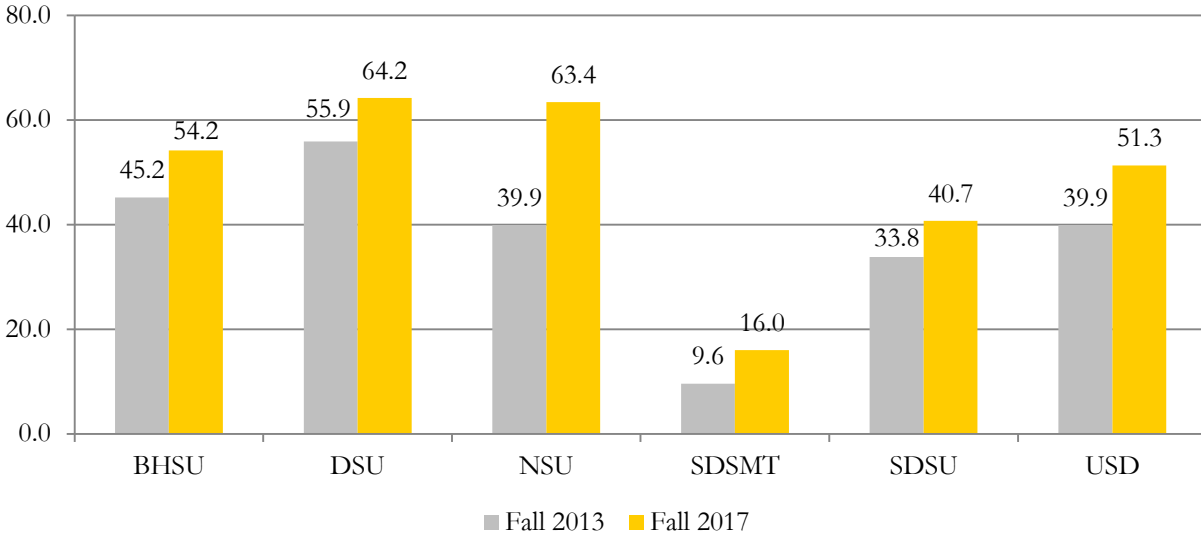
With the above trend in mind, Figure 2 illustrates the marked uptick in distance course-taking seen across all six universities. Grouping students according to their home university classifications, these data show

<sup>3</sup> 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.

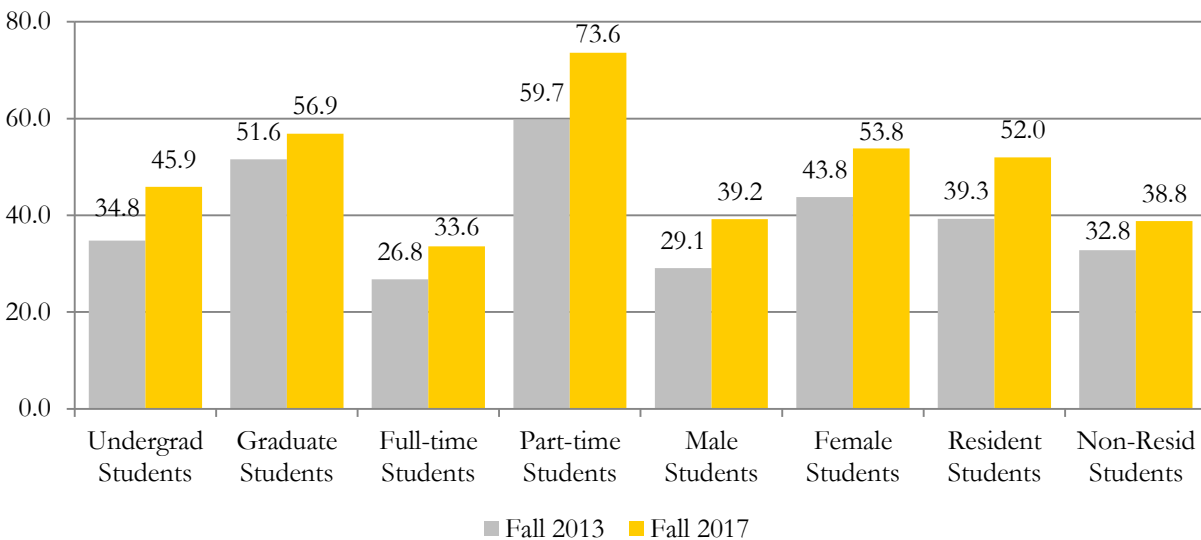
<sup>4</sup> WICHE (2015). *Higher Ed Sectors Vary Greatly in Distance Ed Enrollments*. See <https://wctblog.wordpress.com/2015/03/05/ipedssectors/>

that nearly two thirds of students at both DSU and NSU enrolled in at least one distance course in Fall 2017. With the exception of SDSMT – which historically has accounted for a low proportion of the distance student body – regental universities have seen large increases in distance enrollment 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 2017 distance-taking student body. Students enrolling in distance courses tended to be undergraduates (81.7 percent), part-time (52.2 percent), female (61.0

percent), and South Dakota residents (68.7 percent). Table 2 also provides comparable data for the population of students not enrolling in distance courses.

**Table 2**  
Student Profiles, Fall 2017

	Distance	Non-Distance
Student Count	15,790	17,847
Undergraduate Students	81.7%	85.3%
Graduate Students	18.3%	12.3%
Full-Time Students	47.8%	83.4%
Part-Time Students	52.2%	16.6%
Male Students	39.0%	53.6%
Female Students	61.0%	46.4%
Resident (SD) Students	68.7%	56.2%
Non-Resident Students	31.3%	43.8%
Average Age	24.5	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 11.3 percent from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017 alone, and have climbed 32.6 percent over the last five years. Consequently, tallies of credit hours delivered by distance have jumped noticeably over this timeframe (35.1 percent over the last five years).

**Table 3**  
Enrollment Indicators Trends

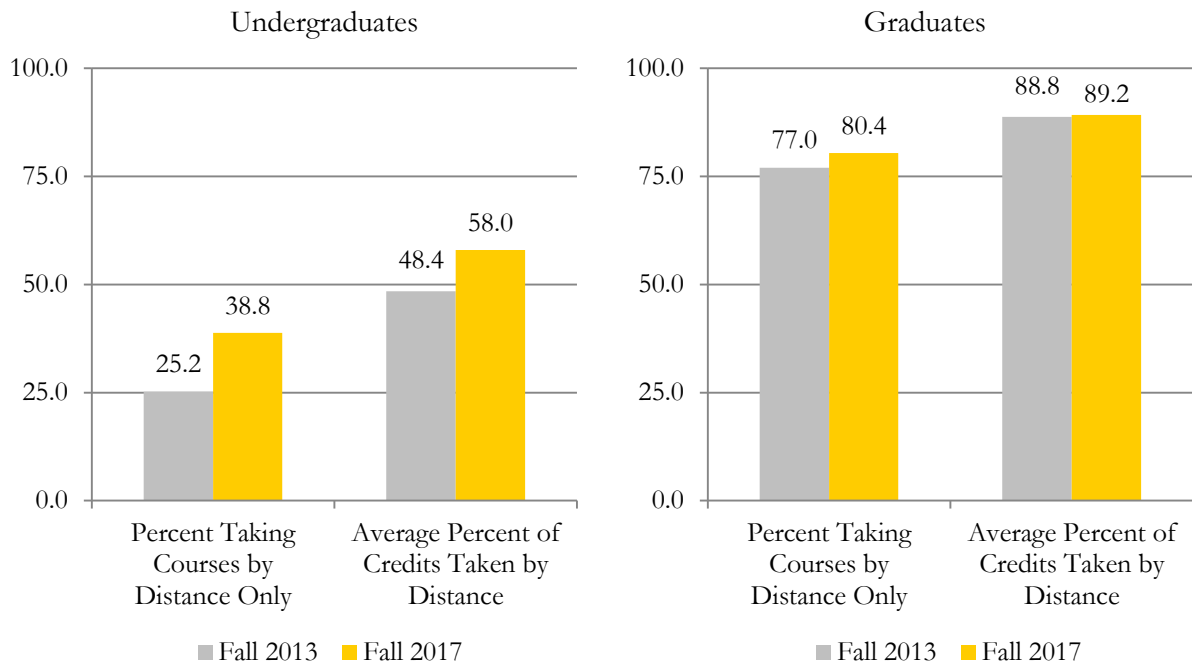
	Total Enrollment	Average Enrollment	Total Credit Hours
Fall 2013	21,463	16.8	58,025
Fall 2014	22,891	16.7	62,411
Fall 2015	24,634	17.7	67,288
Fall 2016	25,566	18.4	70,487
Fall 2017	28,461	19.6	78,406
Five-year $\Delta$ (Percent)	+32.6%	+16.7%	+35.1%
Five-year $\Delta$ (Number)	+6,998	-	+20,381

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 2013 or Fall 2017.

In general, both student groups tend to rely more heavily on distance courses now than in the past. For instance, 25.2 percent of university system undergraduates enrolling in at least one distance course in Fall 2013 took no regental courses by any other means. By Fall 2017, this number had risen to 38.8 percent. Distance-enrolled undergraduates also now take a larger share of their credits by distance. From Fall 2013 to Fall 2017, the percentage of credits taken by distance for this population increased from 48.4 percent to 58.0 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 63.7 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, previous analyses conducted by the system office have affirmed that – with respect to course completion rates – distance-based students hold their own when compared to students in face-to-face classes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For example, see <https://www.sdbor.edu/the-board/agendaitems/Documents/2013/May/18.pdf>

### Course Sections Offered

Table 4 indicates that 1,451 total sections were offered by the university system through distance delivery in Fall 2017. The number of distance sections rose 4.5 percent from the previous year, and has climbed 13.8 percent over the last five fall terms. 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. A total of 886 unique course names were offered by distance in Fall 2017, up from 767 in Fall 2013. 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 2017, the most frequently offered distance courses were SPCM 101: Fundamentals of Speech (35 sections), ENGL 101: Composition I (29 sections), MATH 102: College Algebra (20 sections), PSYC 101: General Psychology (16 sections), ENGL-201: Composition II (13 sections), and MATH-095: Pre-College Algebra (13 sections).

**Table 4**  
Distance Sections Offered

	Sections <sup>6</sup>	Courses <sup>7</sup>	Course Names <sup>8</sup>
Fall 2013	1,275	1,112	767
Fall 2014	1,375	1,239	826
Fall 2015	1,394	1,246	838
Fall 2016	1,388	1,283	860
<b>Fall 2017</b>	<b>1,451</b>	<b>1,347</b>	<b>886</b>
Five-year Δ (Percent)	+13.8%	+21.1%	+15.5%
Five-year Δ (Number)	+176	+235	+119

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 2017, USD offered 27.5 percent of all distance sections, followed by SDSU (26.4 percent), DSU (17.4 percent), BHSU (13.3 percent), NSU (11.7 percent) and SDSMT (3.7 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 84.6 percent of all distance sections offered in Fall 2017 were delivered by internet. No other delivery method category (i.e., 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. Not surprisingly, it is the scaling capacity of internet courses that has enabled the rapid enrollment growth seen over this time period.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

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

<sup>8</sup> In this column, each course name is counted only once.