

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**Academic and Student Affairs**

**AGENDA ITEM: 4 – A (1)**

**DATE: May 14, 2019**

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**SUBJECT**

**Section Size Report – FY2019**

**CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY**

[BOR Policy 5:17](#) – Instructional Funding

[AAC Guideline 5:7](#) – Section Size Guidelines

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION**

As the public university system advances its efforts to balance instructional effectiveness with organizational efficiency, course section size has emerged as an important accountability measure. The annual *Section Size Report* evaluates the extent to which the state’s six public universities continue to meet regental policy with respect to minimum enrollment per course section. For additional information, visit the interactive SDBOR Section Size Dashboard at <https://www.sdbor.edu/dashboards>.

**IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION**

During the August 2018 AAC Meeting, the AAC Guidelines were revised to include the following changes:

- Include off-campus courses, per the revisions to Policy 5:17 from the December 2017 Board Meeting;
- Expand the institutional thresholds to 4% and 5%;
- Update selected and non-selected course types per updated instructional method guidelines;
- Reference the exclusion of externally funded tuition rates from the section size policy requirements;
- Expand collaborative course/program options to include shared delivery sites;
- Reference exclusion of courses resulting from campus negotiated reduction in faculty workload or salary.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment I – Section Size Report

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**INFORMATIONAL ITEM**

# Section Size Report

## Policy Background and Data Notes

BOR Policy 5:17.4 stipulates the minimum number of students that must be enrolled in course sections offered at the state's public universities. As stated in this policy, undergraduate and dual-listed sections must enroll at least ten students, entry-level graduate sections (i.e., 500-600 level) must enroll at least seven students, and upper-level graduate sections (i.e., 700-800 level) must enroll at least four students.

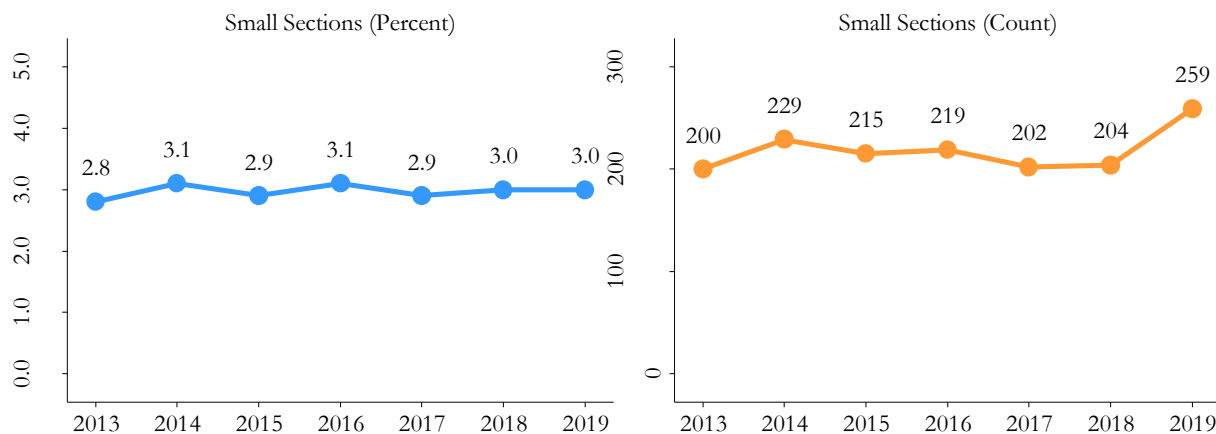
This so-called “4-7-10 rule” applies to all state-supported and self-supported course sections delivered through “selected” instructional methods (e.g., lectures, seminars).<sup>1</sup> Exceptions to the 4-7-10 rule are allowed for up to five percent of selected sections at BHSU, DSU, and NSU and up to four percent of selected sections at SDSMT, SDSU, and USD.<sup>2</sup> These exception limits are based on cumulative data from the fall and spring terms.<sup>3</sup>

## Analysis

### Small Sections

A total of 13,019 course sections were offered in the university system during FY2019, 8,688 of which were “selected” sections. Overall, 3.0 percent of selected sections ( $n=259$ ) were classified as “small” under the 4-7-10 rule. Figure 1 displays recent trends for these indicators, and suggests that – despite a growing *number* of small sections (due ostensibly to the policy change noted above) – the *percentage* of sections considered small has remained relatively unchanged.

**Figure 1**  
Small Sections by Year



<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for detailed definitions of “selected” and “non-selected” instructional methods.

<sup>2</sup> Readers should be aware that a [policy change](#) approved by the board in March 2018 resulted in two key changes to the university system’s rules related to small section management. The first change was that section size minimums began to be applied not only to state-supported sections, but also to self-supported sections. The second change was that small section exception limits were raised by one percentage point for all regental institutions. Both of these changes became effective in FY2019.

<sup>3</sup> Data for this report are sourced from census date extracts.

Table 1 shows that small section percentages in FY2019 ranged from a high of 4.9 percent at DSU to a low of 1.9 percent at USD. As displayed below, no regental institution exceeded its annual exception limit stipulated in board policy.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1**  
Small Sections by Institution and Year  
(Percentages)

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019
BHSU	2.4	3.1	4.5	4.7	3.2
DSU	4.0	4.1	3.8	3.9	4.9
NSU	3.2	4.0	4.0	4.0	2.5
SDSMT	2.3	2.2	2.6	2.2	2.5
SDSU	3.0	2.8	2.6	2.9	3.4
USD	3.1	3.3	2.5	2.2	1.9
System	2.9	3.1	2.9	3.0	3.0

Table 2 displays FY2019 small section counts by institution and course level. It can be seen that, for all institutions, undergraduate courses account for a majority of small sections. Note that these data are provided for reference only; no specific exception limits have been established with respect to particular course levels.

**Table 2**  
Small Sections by Institution and Course Level, FY2019

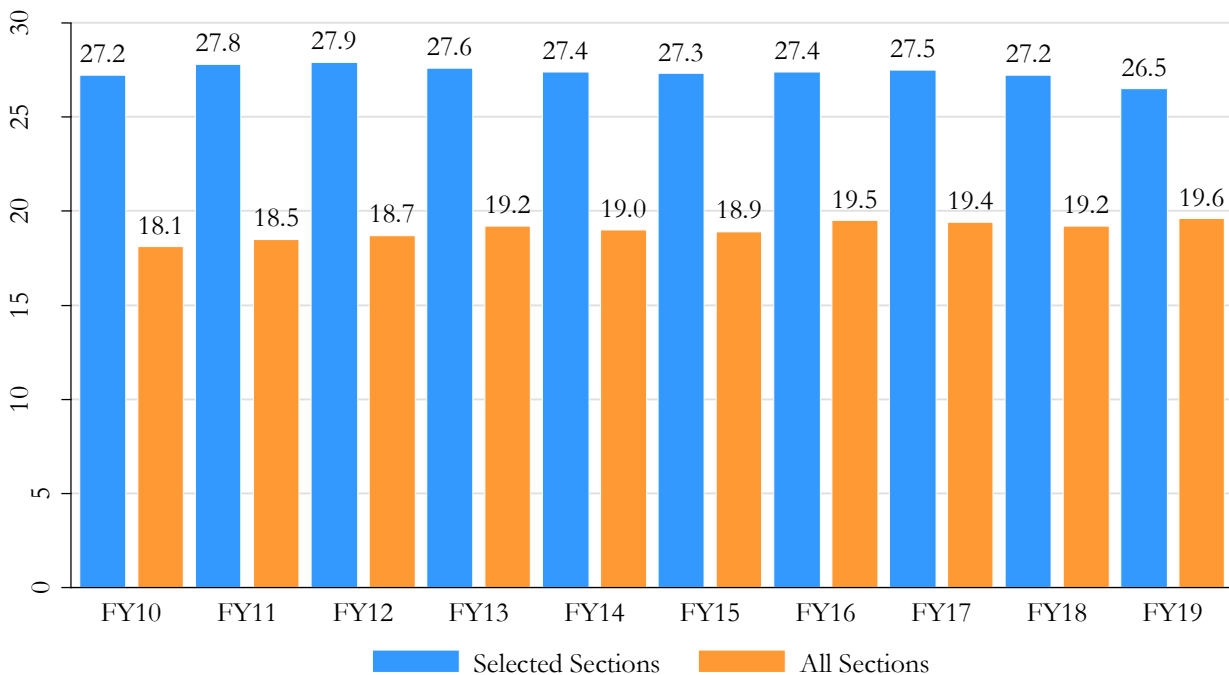
	BHSU	DSU	NSU	SDSMT	SDSU	USD
Undergraduate	28 (3.4)	38 (5.2)	17 (2.6)	9 (1.4)	85 (2.9)	31 (1.9)
Dual-Listed	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.2)	6 (8.8)	10 (7.4)	3 (2.3)
Graduate	0 (0.0)	2 (2.4)	0 (0.0)	5 (5.9)	17 (6.3)	7 (1.7)
Total	28 (3.2)	40 (4.9)	18 (2.5)	20 (2.5)	112 (3.4)	41 (1.9)

<sup>4</sup> Again, as stated in board policy, exception limits are five percent at BHSU, DSU, and NSU, and four percent at SDSMT, SDSU, and USD.

## Average Section Size

Average section size remained steady in the university system in FY2019. Figure 2 shows that, across all institutions and course levels, the average section size among selected sections was 26.5 students. Average section size was highest among undergraduate sections (27.9), followed by dual-listed sections (25.0) and graduate sections (15.5).<sup>5</sup> Across all section types (selected and non-selected combined), an average of 19.6 students enrolled in regental course sections in FY2019.

**Figure 2**  
Average Section Size by Section Type and Year



## Large Sections

Large sections (those with an enrollment of 100 or more) are used for a variety of purposes in the regental system. For example, introductory courses (e.g., Introduction to Sociology, United States History I) offer students an overview of a discipline. Other large sections (e.g., Biology Survey I, General Chemistry I) require students to enroll in supplemental laboratory experiences that allow for small group interaction in a traditional classroom environment. Participation/orientation courses (e.g., Marching Band, Orientation to Nursing) are experiential requirements for particular degree programs. Nearly all large sections are associated with one of these broad categories.

<sup>5</sup> These figures describe selected sections only.

Of the 13,019 course sections offered during FY2019, 124 (1.0 percent) had an enrollment of 100 or more students, down slightly from the prior year.<sup>6</sup> As seen in Figure 3 below, 57.3 percent ( $n=71$ ) of these sections enrolled 100-149 students, with approximately 4.0 percent ( $n=5$ ) enrolling 300 students or more.

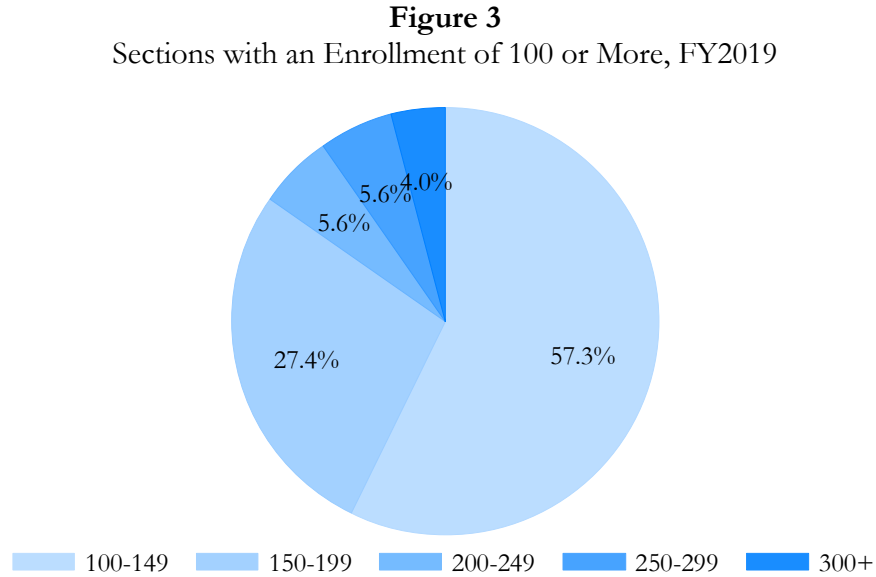


Table 3 shows historical institutional data, and indicates that SDSU has tended to deliver more large sections than any other university. In FY2019 specifically, enrollments in the university system's ten largest sections ranged from 260 to 356 students; all ten of these sections were delivered by SDSU.

**Table 3**  
Large Sections by Institution and Year

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019
BHSU	0	0	0	0	0
DSU	0	0	1	1	1
NSU	4	3	1	0	0
SDSMT	12	8	6	5	6
SDSU	90	92	102	95	91
USD	25	26	24	20	26
Total	131	129	134	121	124

<sup>6</sup> "Large" sections are defined here as those with enrollments greater than or equal to 100; enrollments are reported as aggregations of all cross-listed sections. Unless otherwise noted, the figures presented in this section refer to *all* unduplicated sections, not just *selected* sections.

## Appendix A Background Information

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For purposes of small section management, every course section offered in the university system can be classified into one of two categories: *selected* or *non-selected*. The distinction between these categories is based on the instructional method through which the section is delivered. Selected instructional methods are traditional delivery formats whose nature is such that course enrollments are not unusually limited. Non-selected instructional methods, on the other hand, include delivery methods that by definition tend to enroll a limited number of students. As delineated in board policy, selected and non-selected instructional types are defined as:

Selected Instructional Methods	Non-Selected Instructional Methods
Discussion/Recitation	Studio / Small Group Instruction / Small Ensemble
Seminar	Competency-Based / Self-Paced Study
Large Ensemble	Clinical Laboratory or Experience
Laboratory and Alternate Laboratory	Independent Study or Private Instruction
Physical Education Activity	Restricted PE Activity
Lecture Courses	Design/Research
	Tracking
	Internship/Practicum
	Thesis or Thesis/Research Sustaining
	Workshop