

**SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS**

**Academic and Student Affairs**

**AGENDA ITEM: 4 – A (2)**

**DATE: May 14, 2019**

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**SUBJECT**

**Credit Hours to Degree Report**

**CONTROLLING STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY**

None

**BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION**

During the [October 2011](#) meeting, the Board approved a set of degree program limits that moved the required number of credit hours from 128 to 120 within the Regental system. At the time, the Board sought to reduce the average number of credit hours completed by Regental graduates which had held at 144 credit hours for a number of years. Program modifications for all undergraduate majors were approved at the [March 2012](#) meeting which formalized this requirement. In subsequent years a Credit Hours to Degree report has been prepared for the Board to track the impact for reducing the total number of credits completed by graduates.

**IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Data in the report indicate that the average credits hours at graduation has declined from 144.3 in FY12 to 138.1 for the most recent academic year. Transfer students have seen the largest decrease in credit hours declining from 150.3 to 143.1, while non-transfer students have been able to decrease the total credit hours down to 133.2 since this policy decision was advanced by the Board.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment I – Credit Hours to Degree Report

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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 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 average 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, in this report, each graduate is counted only once per institution per term per degree earned.

### Analysis

The board adopted new credit hour limits 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 downtick in credit completions was expected to occur in FY2013.<sup>2</sup>

The charts below display credit completion data for undergraduate degree completers over the last several 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 regental 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 AY2013. Consequently, new credit hour limits applied to students admitted in AY2013 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 47 percent of the roughly 33,000 records analyzed here. See Appendix A for a 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 30,651 students earning a bachelor’s degree from the regental system since FY2012. Data indicate that, on average, regental graduates in FY2018 did indeed complete fewer total credit hours than 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 138.1 in FY2018, while mean regental credits fell from 126.5 to 117.8 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 the board’s new credit hour limits were established.

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

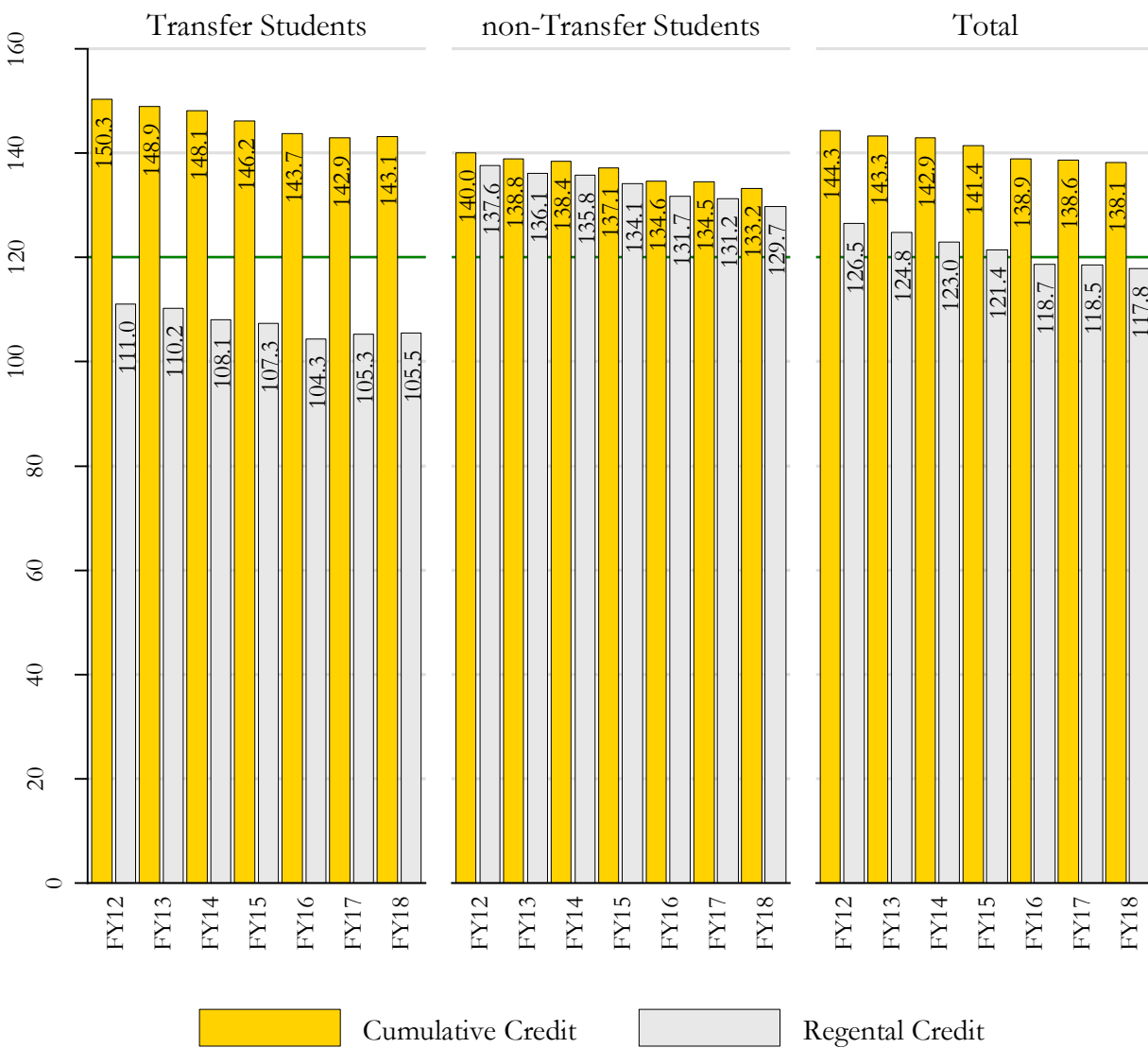
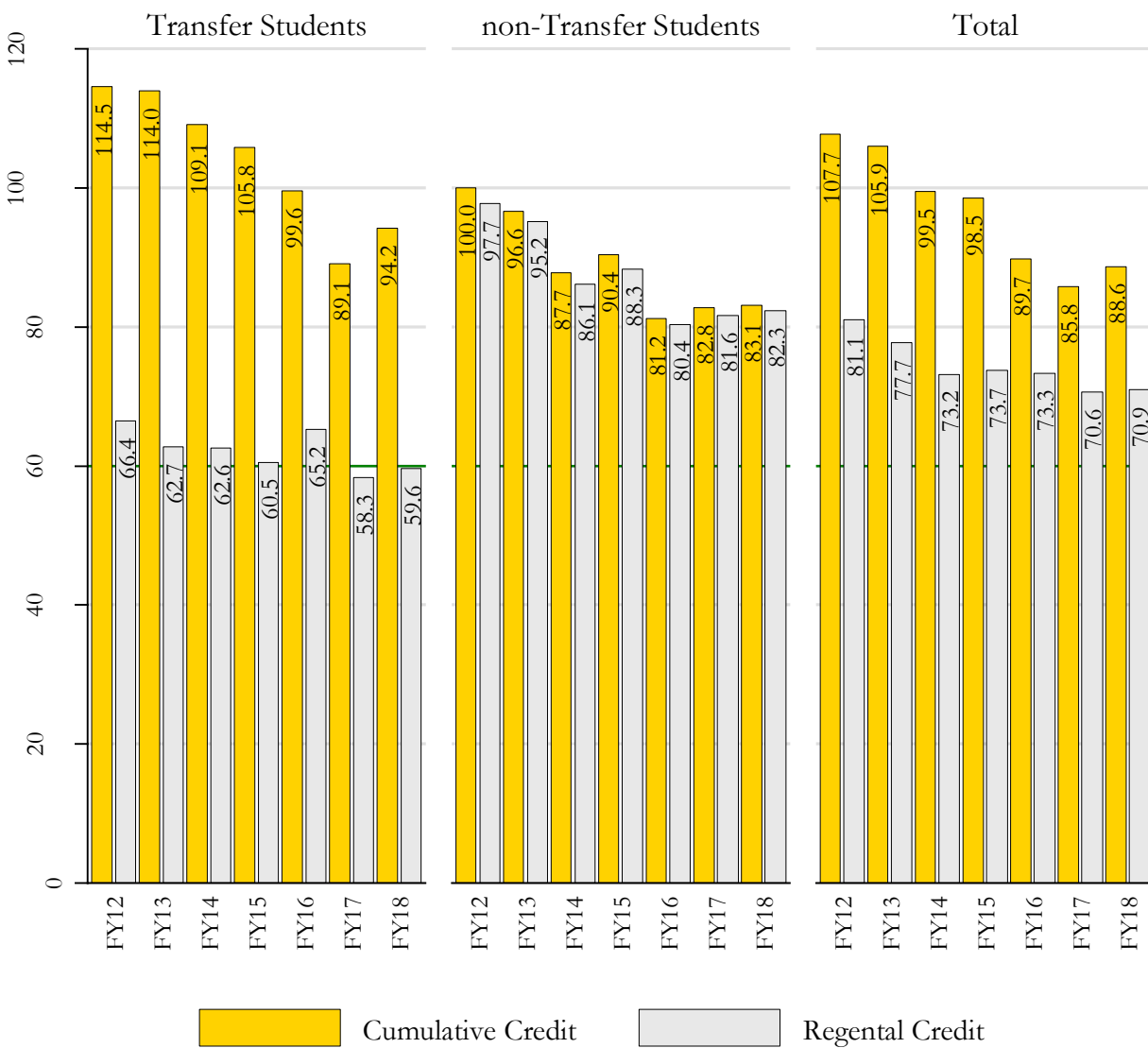


Figure 2 (below) shows analogous information for the university system’s 2,350 associate degree completers since FY2012. Again, data indicate a clear decline in mean credit hour completions since the implementation of new limits. From FY2012 to FY2018, mean cumulative credit completions fell from 107.9 to 88.6, and mean regental credit completions fell from 81.1 to 70.9.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, data indicate that – for bachelor’s and associate completers alike – the university system has begun to see a general plateauing of credit reduction trends over the last three years. This observation signals the possibility that the maximum effect of the original policy change may have been reached, and that further reductions – should they be desired – are unlikely to occur without additional policy action.

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



<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that the number of associate degree completions in the regental system has fallen significantly over this timeframe (see Appendix A), resulting in more year-to-year variance in mean credit completion figures.

## 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 (after which each graduate is counted only once per institution per term per degree earned).

**Table A1**  
Graduate Counts

Level and GradFY	Transfer Status		Total
	Transfer Students	non-Transfer Student	
<b>1.Assoc</b>			
FY12	220	193	413
FY13	261	224	485
FY14	253	207	460
FY15	148	134	282
FY16	107	123	230
FY17	115	128	243
FY18	119	118	237
Total	1,223	1,127	2,350
<b>2.Bach</b>			
FY12	1,655	2,297	3,952
FY13	1,877	2,394	4,271
FY14	1,950	2,271	4,221
FY15	2,051	2,269	4,320
FY16	2,224	2,452	4,676
FY17	2,221	2,323	4,544
FY18	2,298	2,369	4,667
Total	14,276	16,375	30,651