

SOUTH DAKOTA BOARD OF REGENTS

Committee on Academic and Student Affairs

AGENDA ITEM: I – C

DATE: June 10-11, 2015

SUBJECT: FY2015 Section Size Report

As South Dakota’s 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.

Readers should note that due to a policy change adopted by the Board of Regents in October 2011, summer sections are now excluded from this analysis. This change may affect trend data presented in this report, beginning with data for FY2013.

RECOMMENDED ACTION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Information only.

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.

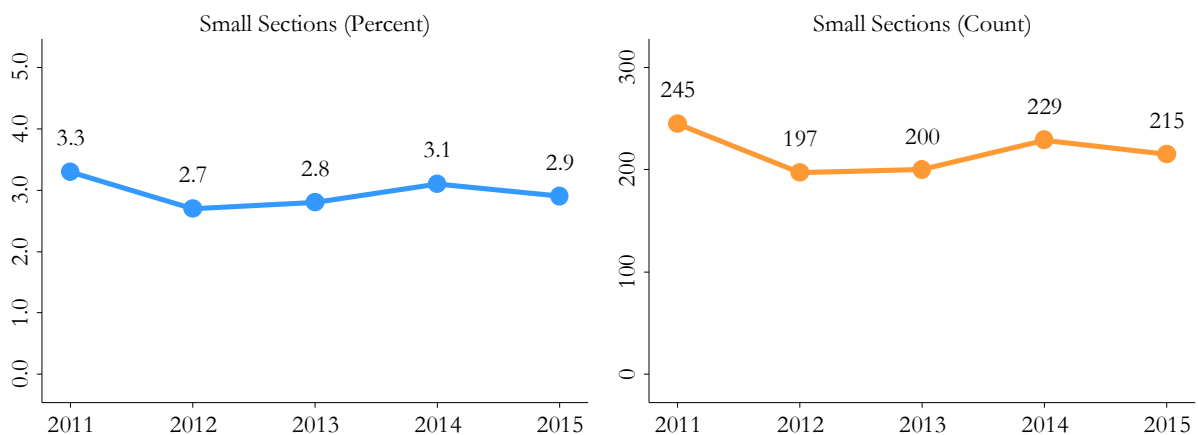
This so-called "4-7-10 rule" applies only to state-supported course sections delivered through "selected" instructional methods (e.g., lectures, seminars).¹ Exceptions to the 4-7-10 rule are allowed for up to four percent of selected sections at BHSU, DSU, and NSU and up to three percent of selected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

Analysis

Small Sections

A total of 11,899 state-supported sections were offered in the university system during FY2015, 7,306 of which (61.4 percent) were selected sections. Overall, 2.9 percent of selected sections ($n=215$) were classified as "small" under the 4-7-10 rule. Figure 1 shows that these figures are consistent with those recorded over the last several years. Of the 215 small sections recorded in FY2015, 182 (84.7 percent) were undergraduate sections, 16 (7.4 percent) were dual-listed sections, and 17 (7.9 percent) were graduate sections.

Figure 1
Small Sections by Year



¹ See Appendix A for detailed definitions of "selected" and "non-selected" instructional methods.

² All data presented in this report refer to state-supported sections only.

Table 1 shows that small section percentages in FY2015 ranged from a high of 4.0 percent at DSU to a low of 2.3 percent at SDSMT. USD's figure of 3.1 percent in FY2015 was slightly higher than the annual exception limit stipulated for that university in BOR policy (3.0 percent).

Table 1
Small Sections by Institution and Year
(Percentages)

	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015
BHSU	2.9	2.4	3.7	5.7	2.4
DSU	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.8	4.0
NSU	2.6	3.0	3.6	3.6	3.2
SDSMT	3.1	2.7	1.9	2.4	2.3
SDSU	3.9	2.7	2.7	2.6	3.0
USD	2.5	2.4	2.4	3.0	3.1
System	3.3	2.7	2.8	3.1	2.9

Table 2 dives further into FY2015 small section offerings by displaying institutional counts of small sections by course level. It can be seen that, for all institutions, undergraduate courses account for the majority of small sections. Note that these data are provided for reference only; no specific exception limitations have been established with respect to particular course levels.

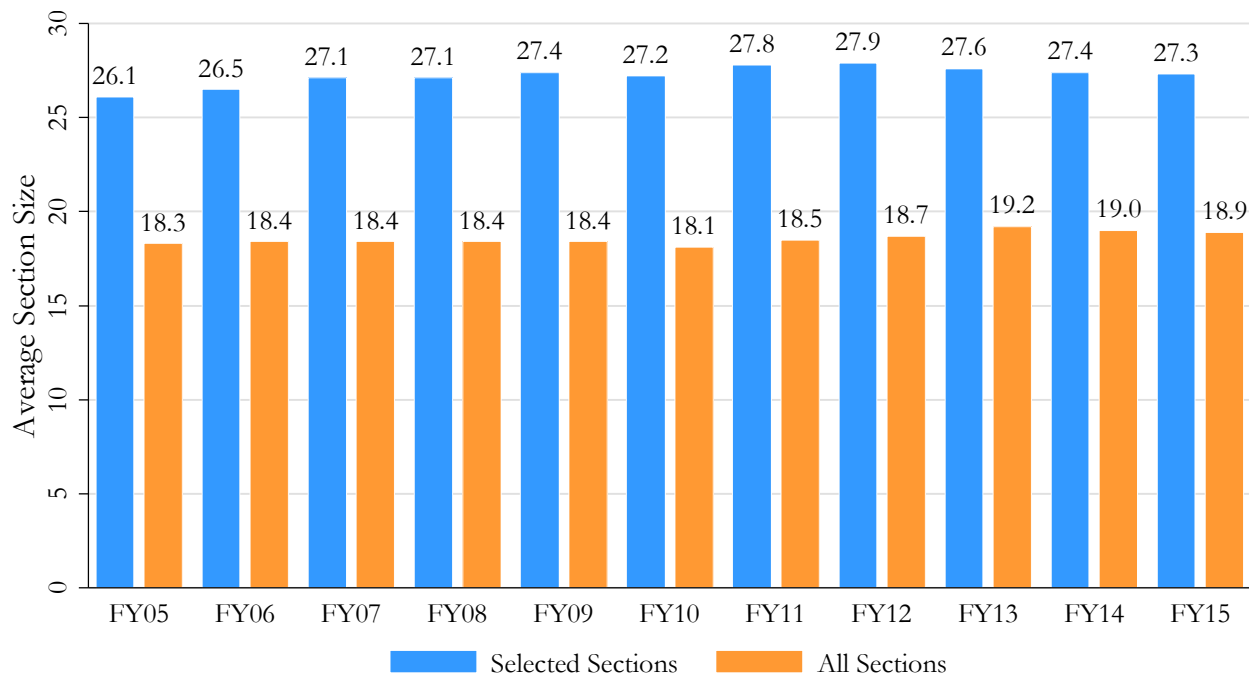
Table 2
Small Sections by Institution and Course Level

	BHSU	DSU	NSU	SDSMT	SDSU	USD
Undergraduate	14 (2.2%)	18 (4.5%)	19 (3.3%)	10 (1.5%)	81 (3.0%)	40 (3.2%)
Dual-Listed	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (6.5%)	3 (3.1%)	8 (5.3%)
Graduate	2 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.6%)	6 (2.2%)	5 (1.7%)
Total	16 (2.4%)	18 (4.0%)	19 (3.2%)	19 (2.3%)	90 (3.0%)	53 (3.1%)

Average Section Size

Average section size fell marginally in the university system in FY2015. Figure 2 shows that, across all institutions and course levels, the average section size among selected sections was 27.3 students, compared with a mean value of 27.4 last year. Average section size was highest among undergraduate sections (28.7), followed by dual-listed sections (23.9) and graduate sections (16.6).³ Across all section types (selected and non-selected combined), an average of 18.9 students enrolled in Regental course sections offered in FY2015.

Figure 2
Average Class 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.

³ These figures describe state-supported, selected sections only.

Of the 11,899 sections offered during FY2015, 131 (1.1 percent) had an enrollment of 100 or more students, down slightly from the prior year.⁴ As seen in Figure 3 below, 59.5 percent ($n=78$) of these sections enrolled 100-149 students, with approximately 7.6 percent ($n=10$) enrolling 300 students or more.

Figure 3
Sections with an Enrollment of 100 or More

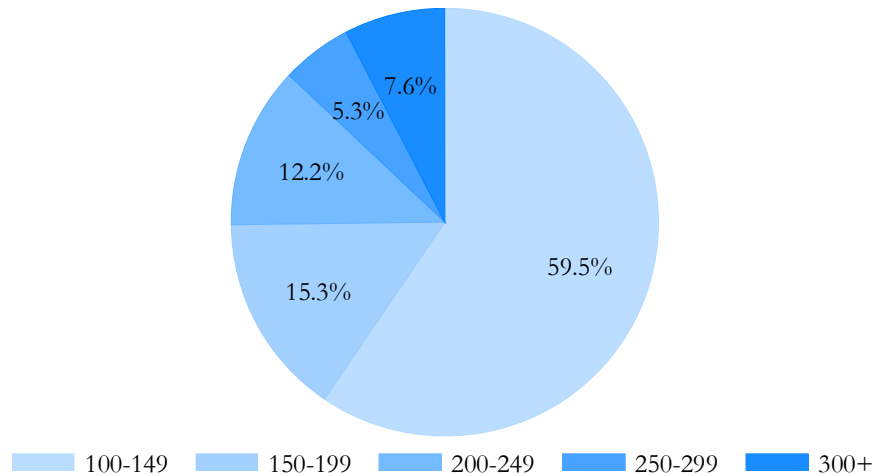


Table 3 shows historical institutional data, and indicates that SDSU has tended to deliver more large sections than any other university. In FY2015 specifically, enrollments in the university system's ten largest sections ranged from 301 to 368 students; all ten of these sections were delivered by SDSU.

Table 3
Large Sections by Institution and Year

	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015
BHSU	5	2	1	1	0
DSU	0	0	0	0	0
NSU	3	3	4	4	4
SDSMT	5	5	6	6	12
SDSU	71	86	97	95	90
USD	34	33	32	32	25
Total	118	129	140	138	131

⁴ "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

Every state-supported 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 BOR 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	Design/Research
Lecture Courses	Tracking
	Internship/Practicum
	Thesis or Thesis/Research Sustaining
	Workshop
	Restricted PE Activity