



SB2003

House Appropriations – Education and Environment Committee

March 8, 2021

Nick Hacker, State Board of Higher Education Chair

Chair Monson and Committee Members: My name is Nick Hacker and I serve as the Chair of the State Board of Higher Education. I am here today to begin discussion of Engrossed SB2003.

The University system has undergone a transformative process given the extreme changes that COVID placed on our institutions, staff, faculty, and students. We have adapted, using the disruption as an opportunity to change for the better.

Across the University System, we readily equipped hundreds of rooms to accommodate online delivery these past months. However, we have just as many if not more classrooms that will require a similar transformation to meet the teaching and learning needs of the next generation classroom. Support for our budget will result in these investments being able to come to fruition to meet the hybrid demands and adaptive workplace requirements our students will need well beyond the pandemic. In short, we are in the middle of a massive pivot and the support of the State is critical during this time.

With your support, advancing our space utilization study to include classroom connectivity and online resource categorization is a priority for the next biennium. Keeping classrooms relevant to instructional capacity and ensuring they are equipped with the ability for online instruction is important for our continued success. We are not looking at additional academic space, but planning a future of retrofitting and replacing classrooms of the past with classrooms that meet our students needs now and into the future. An example of this capacity for change is the new University of North Dakota's college of business which is slightly less spacious than the old Gamble building that will be torn down.

Overall, the University System and the 11 institutions successfully navigated the fall semester despite the uncertainty going into it. Last week, the spring semester started for our students, faculty and students and I report to you today that their positive approach during these challenging times is inspiring. We will get through this. And beyond that, we are already starting to evaluate how post-pandemic future of higher education in the state will look.

We see three pillars that will guide us into the future. The first is innovation.

Our campuses continue to innovate throughout the system including in classroom study/space, research and adapting ever-evolving technology in learning spaces that eventually helps students innovate in the workplace. Examples of innovation include:

More online education – We were able to move 11,000 courses to online and hybrid learning last spring. This was a result of the dedication of our faculty, information technology teams and the systemwide use of Blackboard. This disruption created a great opportunity for the NDUS to expand on our pre-pandemic online success. For example, UND continues to be a leader in online offerings, with more than 125 online degree and certificate programs. The university had at least one online student in every North Dakota county and all 50 states this academic year. A total of 895 North Dakota residents were enrolled in online programs this fall.

E-COR – Electronic Curriculum Open Resources. The future of higher education will include increased pressure for high quality, relevant online education courses and content. By working as a system, we have an opportunity to create the best online higher education content and system in the country. The basic framework is that faculty can share course content they have created across the system with an incentive to reward the faculty member whose course is used more frequently. This will ensure content and courses are current, relevant and the best in the country.

Dakota Digital Academy - The Dakota Digital Academy (DDA) was launched to coordinate, expand, and enhance educational opportunities in computing and cyber sciences in North Dakota and the upper Midwest. DDA is funding several courses that will lead to certificates in Cybersecurity and Software Development. The courses will be offered through our new web portal and will become stackable in the near future.

Open Education Resources – The North Dakota University System (NDUS) played a key role in assisting students with lower costs for textbooks. During the Fall 2020 semester, more than \$130,000 was awarded to nearly 50 faculty from across the NDUS to develop Open Education Resources. NDUS anticipates that OER will be increasingly integrated into the educational mainstream, improving the effectiveness of education at all levels throughout the NDUS institutions.

COVID innovations – As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. When the pandemic reached the state last March, campus leaders, faculty and staff quickly and creatively responded:

- *Lake Region State College:* While the nursing program was fully engaged in teaching and learning this fall, the students and faculty also served on the front lines in the community, helping with flu shots and providing other COVID-related services. They even provided the local hospital with beds when the community numbers escalated.

- *University of North Dakota:* Covid-19 has greatly accelerated new techniques in tele-medicine and these new techniques will be extremely advantageous for rural states like ND. For example, Dr. Josh Wynne, Dean of the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences, used advanced technologies to meet remotely with students in the lab. While students listened to the heartbeat of a simulation mannequin, Dr. Wynne's remote connection allowed him to listen to the heartbeat and confer directly with the students. So, while Covid-19 forced a change in lab operations, the tools and technologies that were adopted are already making their way into mainstream medicine. These changes will greatly reduce the need for rural North Dakotans to travel for medical care.
- *Bismarck State College:* Students in the Electrical Line worker program completed their outside lab activities and instruction during summer session to successfully complete the program. The fifty-four students were assigned and scheduled into two groups to adhere to safe practices and distance associated in response to the pandemic. These two groups were then divided into small teams of three to four permanent members where they were able successfully & safely complete their hands-on lab activities and evaluations.
- *North Dakota State College of Science:* Students pivoted to online only education last spring but needed required lab, shop and clinical time for licensing and graduation. Through the college's leadership and the work of the faculty, students were able to complete required labs through all day sessions in just a couple of weeks compared to an entire semester.

Workforce training and innovative collaboration – Public private partnerships as well as partnerships with industry and business, are very important to both connect students with jobs and continue to build North Dakota's economy. Examples include:

- *College of Health Professionals:* Aldevron Tower was a privately funded \$28 million addition for North Dakota State University's College of Health Professions. Aldevron Tower's design promotes interprofessional education involving pharmacy, nursing, allied sciences, and public health disciplines. Students learn to work together in a setting that prepares them to be team-ready and practice-ready prior to joining the healthcare workforce. The Aldevron partnership includes a strong tie to the company's leadership to identify their needs as the high-tech workforce grows to more than 1,000 in a rapid timeline.
- *Career and Technical Education:* Dickinson State University is working with Dickinson Public Schools and Career and Technical Education on the proposed construction of a career academy to train area high school and post-secondary students in fields like welding, truck driving, diesel mechanics, CNA and other health care careers, and possibly even robotics.

Halliburton sold a \$60 million piece of property for just \$6 million and the site will become the home of CTE in southwest N.D.

- *Training grants:* North Dakota State College of Science leveraged \$80,000 in N.D. Department of Commerce Smart Restart Technical Skills Training Grants toward a TrainND partnership with Microsoft to expand information technology certifications for individuals most impacted by COVID; as well to expand capacity to meet growing demand for CDL training, itself a partnership with 17 different transportation companies. Additionally, a three-year, \$1.4 million grant program will expand apprenticeships in partnership with Sanford Health, Aldevron, and Cat Remanufacturing.
- *Military partnerships:* North Dakota State University and the North Dakota Air National Guard formalized a MOU to provide quicker pathways for military students to earn their degrees by recognizing previously completed course work from a recognized military institution. This partnership allows guard members to focus their studies in their chosen major and creates transfer pathways that result in shorter time to degree completion.
- *Nursing Program Expansion:* Williston State College expanded its nursing program in the past 12 months to include new satellite sites in Tioga and Watford City. These two new nursing sites expanded WSC's training capacity from 24 to 40 students in its first year (practical nursing) program, with further expansion planned for 2021. The nursing expansion has been accomplished in collaboration with Williston State College, the Dakota Nursing Program, Tioga Medical Center, McKenzie County Health Systems, and the McKenzie County Skills Initiative.
- *Apprenticeships & Internships:* LRSC is continuing to work on apprenticeships, including with Northrup Grumman in New Town and another coming to the Grand Sky facility at the GFAFB. The college had been working with CTE on a Dept. of Labor grant to increase such opportunities in the state and to develop a statewide tracking system. Additionally, the college has been sending Simulator Tech students to internship and apprenticeship opportunities in Minnesota, Texas, Arizona, and North Carolina. LRSC has also expanded its Wind Energy Tech training to Tioga to train oilfield workers to work on wind farms.
- *NSA Certification:* Bismarck State College and North Dakota State University received certifications from the National Security Agency during April 2020 for their expanded cyber-related curriculum. The college and university were respectively named as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education and in Cyber Defense. Both the NSA and the Department of Homeland Security conveyed the designations, noting that the

schools' abilities to "meet the increasing demands of program criteria will serve the nation well in contributing to the protection of the National Information Infrastructure."

- *Dual Mission:* The dual mission committee worked with local and educational partners to bring new opportunities to Dickinson. Last year, DSU brought welding and CNA training to Dickinson. Building upon this, the first commercial truck driver training class was held this fall. The university also expanded certificate, associate, and graduate program offerings. Beginning fall 2020, there were six new associate degree programs including elementary education, secondary education and substance abuse counseling, and five new certificate programs including banking, digital communication, digital marking, music, and theatre.

The second pillar is student success.

Student Success is the cornerstone of our overall success. We know legislative support for scholarships such as the *Challenge Grant and Career Builders* has been valuable to students being able to access higher education needs throughout the system. We encourage continuation of these programs to support our students learning needs.

Equally important is student mental and behavioral health. We are in the business of educating the whole being of students to ensure their success. We have received direct feedback from our students emphasizing the importance of these needs and have responded through the Student Tele-mental Health, which has proven to be a great resource for our campuses.

We also advocate for advancing more dual credit opportunities for our students across the state. Students can save time and money through dual credit and begin a foundation for higher education attainment more quickly and at a lower cost. It is an opportunity that can mean college is more affordable and more accessible. Dual credit enrollments have grown by 25% in the past five years and 97% of dual credit students received a passing grade.

Relatedly, Dakota College at Bottineau's addition of the LEAP Beyond program (Leading to Education and Advanced Preparation) allows high school students to earn an associate's degree alongside their high school diploma, saving students up to two years of time and \$67.49 per credit thanks to the discounted dual credit rate.

The final pillar is adequate financing and budget stabilization.



The State Board of Higher Education voted unanimously to support a needs-based budget to fund higher education in North Dakota. This budget also has investment opportunities for the state that would create economic diversification through research and further innovation on our campuses.

We continue to find great success through Public Private Partnerships and strive to continue utilizing them across the system to address capital funding needs. This lowers the burden to the state and allows for needed improvements. Examples: include the UND Steam Plant's \$90 million upgrade, WSC energy efficiency and academic space renovations of \$11 million and more to come as you hear from the institutions.

We support the development of a stabilization fund that would make higher education less susceptible to the highs and lows of the markets, which currently hinders our ability to create opportunities for students and feasible job skills for the workplace.

In closing, we are committed to preparing students for lifelong learning and to support a broad spectrum of workforce needs throughout the state. In our pursuit of connecting students to careers, we want to ensure North Dakota is also prepared to meet the challenges ahead. We will continue to work toward the betterment of the entire state and delivering the benefits of higher education our communities are accustomed to.

The University system and its 11 institutions provide the state with an educated workforce ready to meet the challenges of an ever-changing work environment while providing outreach and continuing education programs for the state's residents and businesses. We will continue to create and support jobs and employment opportunities through research, extension, and teaching activities, all of which provide economic benefits to enhance local and state economies. NDUS economic impact was \$5.42 billion in Fiscal Year 2019.

I am available to answer your questions. Thank you.