



North Dakota Legislative Council

Prepared for Higher Education Institutions Committee
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HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS STUDY

Senate Bill No. 2242 (2025) provides for the Legislative Management to establish the interim Higher Education Institutions Committee to study the institutions of higher education under the control of the State Board of Higher Education (SBHE). The study must include:

1. Methods to promote efficiency and collaboration among state institutions;
2. Consideration of statewide dual-credit expansion to develop standard 3-year bachelor degree programs;
3. An analysis of the cost of tuition and fees for students;
4. Consideration of the feasibility and desirability of a system of uniform transcripts and the waiver of fees to transfer credits within the state higher education system;
5. Consideration of the feasibility and desirability of consolidating colleges and universities and implementing satellite campuses of universities;
6. Research on the competitiveness among state institutions; and
7. An analysis of the quality of education provided at each state institution.

Background

Section 6 of Article VIII of the Constitution of North Dakota establishes the SBHE to control and administer state higher educational institutions, including:

- The state university and school of mines, at Grand Forks;
- The state agricultural college and experiment station, at Fargo;
- The school of science, at Wahpeton;
- The state normal schools and teachers colleges, at Valley City, Mayville, Minot, and Dickinson;
- The school of forestry, at Bottineau; and
- Other state institutions of higher education, as may be established.

Enabling legislation for the establishment of junior colleges in the state was adopted by the 1931 Legislative Assembly. Junior colleges were established at Bismarck in 1939, Devils Lake in 1941, and Williston in 1961. While subject to certain standards and criteria of the SBHE, their establishment depended upon approval of the local communities and the institutions were governed primarily by a local board until their control was legislatively transferred to the SBHE in 1983.

The State Board of Higher Education has constitutional authority over the institutions to prescribe, limit, or modify the courses offered and to organize the work of each institution. North Dakota Century Code Section 15-10-01.2 provides the institutions of higher education under the control of SBHE are a unified system of higher education, as established by the board, and are designated as the North Dakota University System. The University System consists of 11 higher education institutions under the control of the SBHE. Of the 11 institutions, 2 are doctoral-granting research institutions, 4 are regional universities offering baccalaureate degrees, 4 are colleges that offer associate and technical degrees, and 1 is a polytechnic institution that offers associate, technical, and certain baccalaureate degrees.

Institution Collaboration

University System institutions reported multiple collaborative efforts to the appropriations committees during the 2025 legislative session, including:

- Dakota College at Bottineau is an affiliate institution of Minot State University (MiSU) and operates under the administration of the MiSU President. Shared services include classroom and office space, accounting and payroll services, and human resources support.
- Valley City State University (VCSU) and Dakota College at Bottineau collaborate to offer 1-year practical nursing and 2-year associate degree nursing programs on the VCSU campus.
- VCSU and North Dakota State University (NDSU) collaborate to offer students dual degrees in human development and family science and elementary education.
- NDSU assists Mayville State University (MaSU) with payroll and employee benefits administration.
- MaSU provides nursing program administrator support to Dickinson State University to support the programs through an administrative and faculty transition.
- MaSU provides secondary education licensure programs on the Williston State College campus.
- NDSU and the University of North Dakota (UND) collaborate to provide biomedical engineering graduate degrees.
- NDSU and UND also collaborate on multiple research projects.

Dual Credit

A dual-credit course is a 1-semester college course taken through a 2- or 4-year institution of higher education for which the student earns one-half unit of high school credit. North Dakota's dual-credit program allows students in grades 10 through 12 to take college courses and receive college credit, which also may be used to meet high school graduation requirements. Tuition, fees, books, and other costs are the student's responsibility. Classes are taught by approved instructors, either face-to-face in the classroom, online, through the Center for Distance Education, or through an Interactive Video Network. The Higher Learning Commission requires teachers of dual-credit courses to have a master's degree or higher in the discipline or subfield in which they will be teaching. If the individual holds a master's degree or higher in a discipline or subfield other than that in which they will be teaching, a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours must be completed in the academic field in which they will be teaching.

State Board of Higher Education policy 469 authorizes 9 of the 11 institutions under the board's control, excluding UND and NDSU, to offer dual credit to high school students. The policy authorizes UND and NDSU to offer dual credit only when the course being offered can only be offered by that institution or when either institution is required to offer dual credit in order to fulfill a legislative mandate. The policy further authorizes NDSU to offer dual credit in Cass County according to the terms of an agreement between NDSU, the North Dakota State College of Science, and VCSU.

Tuition and Fees

Section 15-10-17 authorizes the SBHE to set tuition and fees. The State Board of Higher Education defines tuition as the basic charge assessed enrolled students, on a per-credit hour basis or at a flat rate assessed at either 12 or 13 semester hours, for classes or programs for which students earn academic credit that may be applied toward a degree. Tuition may be assessed in differential tuition tiers that differ by academic program or course subject based on programmatic needs. Institutions may also charge varying tuition rates based on student residency and the course delivery method. Section 15-10-19.1 defines a resident student for tuition purposes generally as an individual who is a legal resident of the state and has resided in the state for 12 months immediately prior to the beginning of the academic term. In its 2024-25 annual budget report, the University System reported estimated tuition and fee income for the fiscal year to be \$439.4 million. The following schedule identifies resident undergraduate tuition rates by institution:

Institution	2023-24 Academic Year	2024-25 Academic Year	2025-26 Academic Year
Bismarck State College	\$5,209	\$5,209	\$5,522
Dakota College at Bottineau	\$4,530	\$4,530	\$4,584
Dickinson State University	\$7,470	\$7,470	\$7,770
Lake Region State College	\$4,249	\$4,249	\$4,504
Mayville State University	\$6,517	\$6,517	\$6,875
Minot State University	\$7,168	\$7,168	\$7,597
North Dakota State College of Science	\$4,683	\$4,683	\$4,870
North Dakota State University	\$9,309	\$9,309	\$9,868
University of North Dakota	\$9,237	\$9,237	\$9,791
Valley City State University	\$6,619	\$6,619	\$6,983
Williston State College	\$4,138	\$4,138	\$4,386

The University System noted tuition and fees for resident undergraduate students as a percentage of median household income is as follows:

	2021-22 Academic Year	2022-23 Academic Year	2023-24 Academic Year	2024-25 Academic Year
Doctoral institutions				
North Dakota average	12.1%	12.1%	11.1%	10.6%
Regional average	12.7%	12.2%	11.8%	11.6%
4-year institutions				
North Dakota average	9.5%	9.5%	8.7%	8.2%
Regional average	10.2%	9.7%	9.3%	9.1%
2-year institutions				
North Dakota average	6.2%	6.3%	5.8%	5.5%
Regional average	5.6%	5.3%	5.1%	5.0%

The University System reported average public institution student loan debt incurred per year as follows:

	2020-21 Academic Year	2021-22 Academic Year	2022-23 Academic Year	2023-24 Academic Year
North Dakota average	\$5,757	\$5,829	\$6,025	\$6,077
National average	\$6,378	\$6,535	\$6,665	\$6,794

Transcripts and Credit Transfers

State Board of Higher Education policy 412 directs institutions to establish and publish policies and procedures for the transfer of credits. The policy directs University System institutions to accept college and university level courses from institutions accredited by an organization recognized by the United States Department of Education and to recognize common general education programs and courses. Board policy 460 provides for common course numbering among University System institutions and directs the institutions to recognize common general education programs and courses that are outlined within a general education requirement transfer agreement maintained by the University System's director of academic affairs. University System procedure 460.3 provides additional guidance regarding common course numbering, including course numbers, officially authorized titles, and generic course descriptions.

Campus Consolidation

Dakota College at Bottineau is an affiliate institution of MiSU and operates under the administration of the MiSU president. Shared services include classroom and office space, accounting and payroll services, and human resources support. Dakota College at Bottineau was previously a branch campus of NDSU and Williston State College and Lake Region State College were previously branch campuses of UND.

The 1989-90 interim Higher Education System Review Committee considered two resolutions to amend the Constitution of North Dakota to implement changes to the higher education system. One resolution would have amended subsection 1 of Section 6 of Article VIII and Sections 12 and 13 of Article IX of the Constitution of North Dakota to remove the names and locations of institutions of higher education and also to remove language in the constitution regarding the missions of the various institutions. Another resolution under consideration by the committee would have amended subdivisions d and e of subsection 6 of Section 6 of Article VIII and subsection 7 of Section 6 of Article VIII of the Constitution of North Dakota, relating to the administrative structure and the handling of funds of institutions under the SBHE. This resolution would have removed the language that provides that funds appropriated by the Legislative Assembly and specifically designated for any one or more of the institutions could not be used for any other institution. The resolutions were both recommended by the committee, but ultimately failed to gain the approval of the 1991 Legislative Assembly.

Education Quality

Section 15-18.1-05 provides all postsecondary educational institutions with a physical presence in the state must be accredited, have a federal financial responsibility composite score greater than 1.5, and provide students with institutional public disclosures as defined by the board. Accredited is defined as approved by an accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education. All 11 institutions under the control of SBHE are accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, an independent agency founded in 1895 to accredit degree-granting colleges and universities in the United States.