Enrollment up slightly at SD’s public universities

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By: **Chet Brokaw**, The Associated Press

PIERRE — Enrollment at South Dakota’s six public universities grew by slightly less than 1 percent this fall, due partly to a gain in older part-time students and the loss of those who left school for employment in an improving economy, higher education officials said Tuesday.

The Board of Regents reported that the head count of students enrolled at the schools both full- and part-time is 36,430, up 327 from a year ago. At the same time, the number of full-time equivalent students — a measure based on total credit hours taken — fell by slightly by about 1 percent.

Jack Warner, the board’s executive director, said the level enrollment is a good sign at a time when some students are dropping out to work and others are taking fewer courses as they devote more time to jobs.

“Our students many times tend to forgo schooling and go to work when the economic conditions improve and the employment market improves. I’m very pleased to have grown very slightly during an environment where we think some students may be headed toward the world of work,” Warner said.

The universities’ presidents said their campuses have sought not only to recruit new students, but also to develop programs that help students avoid dropping out.

The South Dakota School of Mines and Technology had the largest increase, a gain of 4.9 percent that put enrollment at 2,424 this fall. Duane Hrncir, acting president at the Rapid City school, said the increase is due to efforts to retain students once they enroll.

The University of South Dakota in Vermillion reported 10,284 students this fall, up nearly 3.2 percent from a year ago. President Jim Abbott said the gain is due in part to an 11 percent rise in the freshman class.

South Dakota State University in Brookings has 12,583 students, down 1.1 percent. Of the 142-student decline, 127 were in graduate programs, SDSU President David Chicoine said, noting some who have bachelor’s degrees left for jobs. Northern State University in Aberdeen has an enrollment of 3,622, a gain of nearly 1.2 percent due to increases in some master’s programs and a rise in people taking online courses from remote sites, NSU President Jim Smith said.

Black Hills State University is mostly unchanged at 4,407 students, down only eight students from a year ago. BHSU President Kay Schallenkamp said the enrollment at the school in Spearfish is still up about 9 percent over the past five years, but the school has lost some students to high-paying jobs in western North Dakota’s oil fields.

Dakota State University President David Borofsky said the computer-oriented school in Madison gained eight students, putting enrollment at 3,110. DSU benefited from a gain in transfers from other schools, he said.

South Dakota’s four technical institutes also reported an enrollment gain of nearly 3 percent, with a record 6,250 students attending the schools in Sioux Falls, Watertown, Mitchell and Rapid City.