



— STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA —
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

KRISTI NOEM | GOVERNOR

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South Dakota Board of Regents
306 E Capitol Avenue
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To the South Dakota Board of Regents:

Across the nation, higher education is in a state of crisis. For the last several decades, many states have allowed liberal ideologies to poison their universities and colleges. Once a hotbed of ideological diversity, debate, and the pursuit of truth and discovery, many institutions have become one-sided, close-minded, and focused on feelings rather than facts. Professors have discarded reason and logic in favor of subjectivity and relativism. Higher education leaders have rejected universal truth and knowledge and replaced it with "individual truth."

On campuses across the country, students have been taught the importance of diversity and equity and given access to "safe spaces" instead of learning to tolerate the disagreement, discomfort, and dissent that they will experience in the real world. In many cases, students and their parents are not even aware of the damage these ideas have caused.

Less than half our students are even graduating, compared to 63% nationally. Students are also graduating with more debt and lower prospects at obtaining gainful employment. 43% of students who completed a college degree were underemployed after graduation.¹ Countless students have been set up for failure – and charged tens of thousands of dollars for their trouble.

As a country, we should be ashamed of this. As a state, South Dakota can show the nation what quality higher education is supposed to look like.

I am charging the Board of Regents with the responsibility of revitalizing the institutions under its control and leading the nation by example. We must work together to ensure that we are providing an education that truly prepares our kids for the world they are entering. We must teach our kids a true and honest history of our great country. We must equip them with skills that will enable them to find meaningful, fulfilling careers. We must empower them to improve their communities, engage in the political process as well-educated citizens, and teach their kids to protect the gift we've all been given as citizens of the United States of America.

¹ Burning Glass Technologies and Strada Institute for the Future of Work (2018), "The Permanent Detour: Underemployment's Long-Term Effects on the Careers of College Grads"

I am calling on the Board of Regents to work with me to take the following actions.

1. Currently, BOR schools have a 47% graduation rate.² In 2020, the national graduation rate for public schools was 63%.³ **The Board of Regents should aim to raise graduation rates to 65% by 2028.**
 - At the K-12 level, we are taking steps to improve our standards and expand school choice in South Dakota so that all kids have access to a high-quality education that prepares them for whatever comes next after high school.
 - For those who choose to start attending a university after graduating, less than half are graduating. We must do better than that. I look forward to working with you all on ideas to improve our graduation rates.
2. In addition to increasing graduation rates, students should feel confident their degree will allow them access to high-earning careers. **The Board of Regents should take more steps to partner with businesses on registered apprenticeship programs and offer the lowest possible credit rates.**
 - Collaboration between colleges and employers is critical. Today, employers are often overlooked, and colleges fixate on skills that may not necessarily prepare students for gainful employment.⁴
 - Registered apprenticeship programs get students engaged with South Dakota businesses before they even graduate. These programs are an excellent way to keep more students in South Dakota and ensure they are gainfully employed right after graduating.
3. Some colleges and universities have all but required students to provide and adhere to "preferred pronouns." **The Board of Regents should remove all references to preferred pronouns in all school materials and any enforcement of such.**
 - This practice has instead created an exclusive environment for students who are ultimately compelled and coerced to provide speech they do not agree with.
 - In fact, the National Institute for Health has stated that "intentional refusal to use someone's correct pronouns is equivalent to harassment and a violation of one's civil rights."⁵
 - Students should have the ability to exercise their right to free speech. Colleges and universities should never compel students to speak or take a position on any issue.

² Data was collected from the U.S Department of Education College Scorecard. This is the average of all BOR Institutions.

³ National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Undergraduate Retention and Graduation Rates. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.

⁴ David Deming, Joseph B. Fuller, Rachel Lipson, et al. (April 2023). Delivering on the Degree: The College-to-Jobs Playbook, Harvard Kennedy School.

⁵ National Institutes of Health Sexual & Gender Minority Research Office (2023.). Gender Pronouns in the Workplace Resource Gender Pronouns & Their Use in Workplace Communications.

4. Some universities have restricted free speech in topics some deem "offensive." **The Board of Regents should remove any policy or procedure that prohibits students from exercising their right to free speech.**
 - Black Hills State University was recently challenged on and ultimately removed a policy that allowed administrators to silence opinions they disagreed with.⁶
 - Colleges and universities need to review and revise all policies that may infringe on students' right to free speech.
 - Additionally, colleges need to implement policies and practices that develop and strengthen resiliency among students. Students need to be prepared to address opposing ideas in a civil way, and we have a responsibility to provide an environment that prepares them to do so.
5. Our universities should not be hosting and/or promoting drag shows, regardless of whether they are sponsored by a student organization. **Board of Regents should prohibit drag shows from taking place on university campuses.**
 - Just as other dangerous theories have been allowed to thrive on college campuses, gender theory has been rebranded and accepted as truth across the nation.
 - These theories should be openly debated in college classrooms, but not celebrated through public performances on taxpayer-owned property at taxpayer-funded schools.
 - Our universities should require the highest standards of behavior and decency. These standards do not mean that free expression must be stifled.
6. The cost of a college degree has skyrocketed across the nation. **The Board of Regents should find ways to cut costs to ensure the affordability of college.**
 - For many years, the Board of Regents has kept tuition low by backfilling their own budgets with state taxpayer dollars. This practice does not address spending issues within our universities.
 - We need to shift our focus back to the pursuit of knowledge, not growing administrative positions and services.
 - The cost of a degree at our institutions should align with the value it provides. We must address excess spending to make that happen and keep tuition costs low for the future.
7. Civics and American history have been all but dismissed in higher education, and the result is abject indifference and lack of competency in our youth. **The Board of Regents should require a course in American Government and a course in American history as part of the general education graduation requirements.**
 - While U.S. Government is a requirement for high school graduation, it's clear that the knowledge doesn't necessarily stick. Less than half of U.S. adults

⁶ Schwerha, A. (2023). South Dakota University Ditches Policy Used By Official To Silence Pro-Gun Students, The Daily Caller.

(47%) could name all three branches of government, down from 56% in 2021 and the first decline on this question since 2016.⁷

- Our institutions are clearly not adequately preparing students to exercise their civic duty; to preserve our Republic, our citizens must understand it.
- The Board of Regents can ensure the foundational principles and functions of our government are reinforced and last a lifetime.

8. China poses a significant threat to the United States, and they have attempted to influence American students through our colleges and universities. **The Board of Regents should immediately review all funding sources of university centers and all donations to ensure there is no money coming into our educational system from China.**

- The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been known to fund Confucius Institutes and other similar centers at American universities in order to provide skewed Chinese cultural training for U.S. students.
- This is part of a multi-faceted propaganda effort, and money from the CCP has no place in South Dakota. The Board of Regents should reject any donations from CCP sources and any other government that is hostile to the United States.

To help keep our institutions accountable – and ensure that we are all aware of what is occurring at our taxpayer-funded colleges and universities – I will be setting up a whistleblower hotline. Students, parents, taxpayers, and anyone who wants to continue to transparency and accountability within our institutions will be able to access this hotline at 605-773-5916. We will use the information we learn to guide policy decisions moving forward.

As Governor, my duty is to protect the people of South Dakota, ensure that their tax burden remains low, and spend those taxpayer dollars wisely. Together, we can and must set an example to the nation of what strong, conservative higher education can look like.

I look forward to working with you on this incredibly important goal.

Sincerely,



Kristi Noem
Governor

⁷ University of Pennsylvania (2022). Americans' Civics Knowledge Drops on First Amendment and Branches of Government. The Annenberg Public Policy Center.