

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA

*STRATEGIC PLAN
2020-2026 REPORT*



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA

CONTEXT

Preface: During the 2019-2020 academic year, the University of South Dakota engaged in a collaborative strategic planning process that involved over 1,000 internal and external stakeholders. With this planning effort, we generated and agreed on six strategic themes designed to shape our time, attention, and resources over the next five years. When faced with challenges such as those that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, the university remained committed to a dynamic and flexible strategic plan that re-prioritized strategic themes as needed while preserving the mission and vision of the university.

Implementation was an intentional effort to continuously hold champions accountable for meeting the goals of the strategic plan. This included:

- Quarterly meetings with champions to discuss progress
- Periodic review with Executive Committee
- Annual reports to faculty and staff

Thanks to the shared commitment of our faculty, staff, and university partners, USD has made strides across the strategic themes identified in this strategic plan. As we enter the final year of the plan and prepare for the next planning process in 2026-2032, the university has a number of updates and documented outcomes to mark our progress.

The following pages provide a high-level overview of what has been accomplished in each area of the strategic plan, followed by the university's next steps in the strategic planning process.

MISSION

The University of South Dakota offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs within the South Dakota System of Higher Education. As the oldest university in the state, the University of South Dakota serves as the flagship and only public liberal arts university in the state.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA VISION AND VALUES **A PICTURE OF THE FUTURE.** *"We Are South Dakota"*

The University of South Dakota is regionally acclaimed and nationally recognized as a high-quality public liberal arts university with South Dakota's only schools of law and medicine. We are recognized for the quality of our faculty. Their excellent teaching, effective service, and innovative research are valued at USD. Our faculty are dedicated, experts in their fields, and accessible to our students. USD educates leaders of communities, states, and nations.

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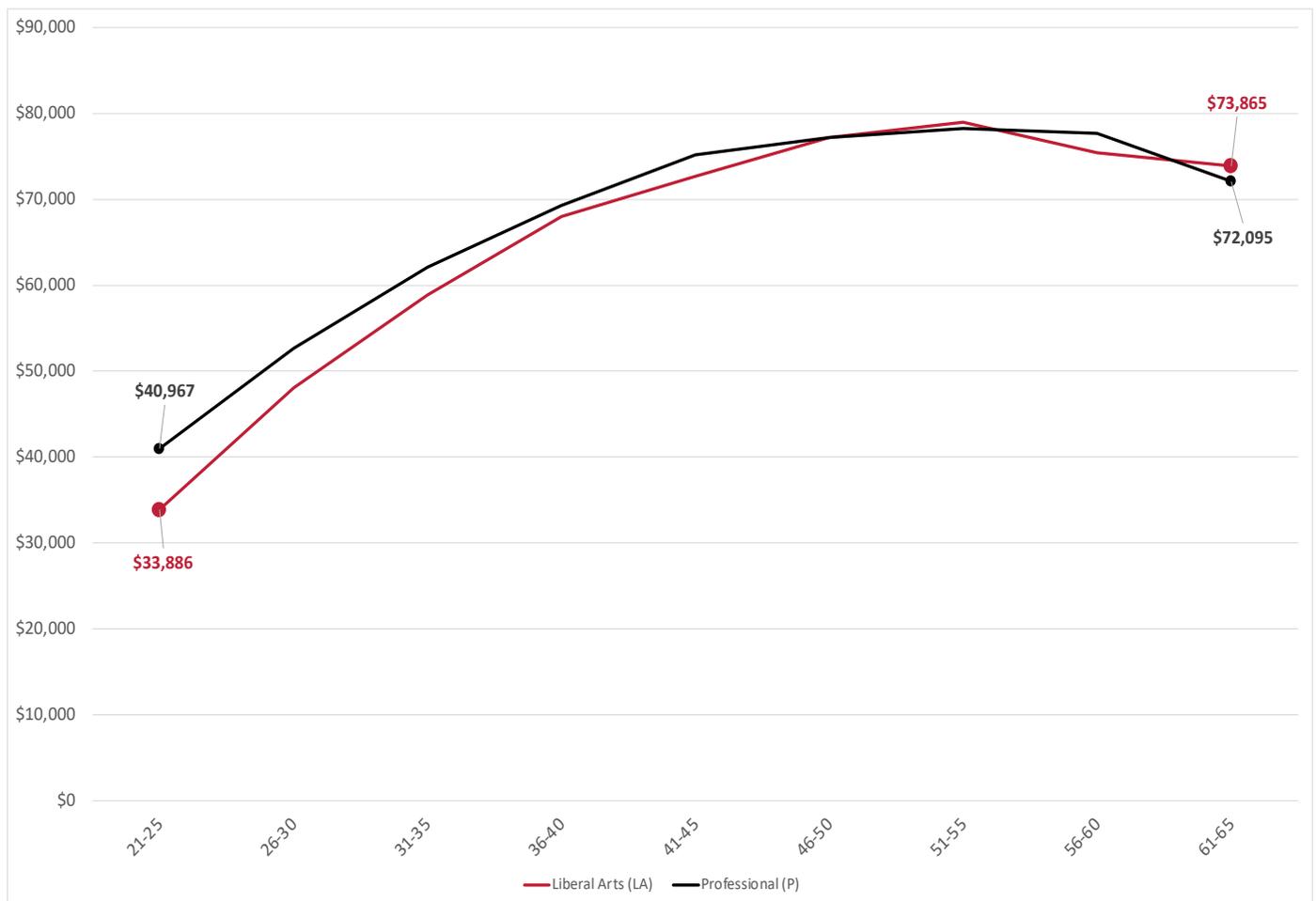
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Strategic Theme 1: Academic Excellence

Goal 1: Improve long-term outcomes and success of USD students as it relates to the liberal arts

As South Dakota’s designated liberal arts institution, USD is proud to provide students with enriching learning experiences that set them up for success in their careers. Communicating that value is a challenge and opportunity that USD explored in this strategic planning process. Through email communications, print materials, landing pages and events with key stakeholders, the university has made strides in articulating the value of the liberal arts and how our students carry that education into their careers. A data analysis on career-long earnings growth for liberal arts graduates, pictured below, was one tool developed to quantify the value of a liberal arts degree.

To improve student outcomes in the liberal arts, the Center for Career Design emerged as an important initiative. This resource-rich career services hub was launched to support and connect students, campus stakeholders and employers. This center helps students find and prepare for career opportunities, including helping them identify and intentionally apply transferable skills from their university experience to their careers.



A data analysis completed on earnings for liberal arts graduates highlighted that graduates with a liberal arts degree earn as much and sometimes more than those with professional degrees by mid-career and late-career stages.

Goal 2: Align teaching, research and service with the mission of the university

The university-level Expectations of the Faculty document was revised to reflect both the strategic plan and recent Board of Regents policy changes. Once the university-level document was completed, individual academic units then revised their unit level documents to account for discipline-specific nuances. All revised documents went into effect for the 2022-2023 academic year.

The Faculty Workload document was also revised to reflect both the strategic plan and recent Board of Regents policy changes. The final document incorporated feedback from faculty and contains appendices that clarify expectations that are unique to each school and college on campus. The revised document went into effect at the beginning of the spring 2023 term.

A highlight from this goal included developing a competitive fellow program that will support faculty and staff development of student mentoring. An endowed fund at the USD Foundation has been refocused to support this initiative. An initial goal of the faculty fellow position is to develop and deliver a mentoring program focused on teaching faculty and staff best practices in mentoring students. The initial faculty fellow will be selected during the fall of 2025, and the fellowship will begin with the fall 2026 term.

The framework for a third-year review process for tenure-track faculty was developed and distributed to schools and colleges. Each school/college developed a localized process that was implemented during the 2023-2024 school year.



Strategic Theme 2: Engagement

Goal 1: Engage internal stakeholders

USD conducted the Skyfactor Benchworks Campus Climate Survey to better understand our community's perceptions of the university, identify priorities, and create action items that help support those needs. The survey proved to be an important tool for strategic planning efforts, with the results helping inform many action items that emerged across the themes. Results have been shared in various forums, such as at a University Senate meeting, an Executive Committee meeting, biannual dean/chair meetings, and Lunch & Learns.

A new employee onboarding program was identified as a goal for engaging internal stakeholders. The Intro to Yote Life program was developed in 2019 to provide new faculty and staff with an engaging introduction to our campus culture. The program offers faculty and staff an opportunity to meet their peers, learn about USD events and resources, and develop a network of colleagues. Since the launch of Intro to Yote Life, the USD – Sioux Falls and Sanford School of Medicine community in Sioux Falls have been incorporated into the programming. This onboarding event is just one component of a larger effort to cultivate a sense of belonging at USD.

Similarly, USD has made efforts to improve the experience for new and returning students as they are welcomed to campus. The convocation ceremony was renamed Coyote Welcome, with programming now focused on creating a high-energy experience where traditions are taught rather than a formal introduction from administrators.

Developing greater transparency with faculty and staff was another element of this goal; Lunch & Learns, Coffee & Conversations, biweekly Yote Life Insider newsletters, the presidential "In the Den" video series, and FAQ pages on the USD website are a few examples of action items that have emerged over the past two years to create more transparency and facilitate effective communication.

The EAB Navigate (Coyote Connections) system has been instrumental in streamlining communications with students. Through the platform, faculty and staff can email or text individual or groups of students. A companion mobile app was introduced in the spring of 2025. This has allowed students to more easily identify and communicate with members of their success team; connect with various campus resources; view progress reports, alerts and action items submitted by faculty or staff members; respond to university surveys; resolve holds on their accounts; and ask for assistance with the click of a button.



Goal 2: Engage external stakeholders

At the local level, USD and the City of Vermillion continue to strengthen a mutually beneficial partnership that supports faculty, staff, students, and community members. A notable outcome of this partnership includes enhancing facilities that serve both the university and the broader community; the city offered support for the construction of the USD Wellness Center, partnered on the National Music Museum Expansion and offered financial support for the Wellness Center Natatorium project. Through these initiatives, USD and the City of Vermillion have promoted the health and well-being of the community, expanded the arts and fostered a sense of connection between the campus and the broader community.

At the state level, capital investments in projects like the Center for Health Education building construction, the South Dakota Union renovation, and the Churchill-Haines Laboratories renovation have enabled USD to make significant progress in providing a state-of-the-art learning environment on campus and stewarding strategic facilities preservation.

At the federal level, achievements have included establishing the South Dakota Biomedical Computation Collaborative, a joint initiative between the University of South Dakota, Sanford School of Medicine, and South Dakota School of Mines and Technology to combine expertise in biomedical sciences, computer science, and engineering. USD has also expanded telemedicine training through the School of Health Sciences. USD became a partner university in the National Science Foundation Great Plains Innovation Corps Hub, a testament to the innovation and research happening at the university. In 2025 USD hosted a week of AI events, including the Workshop for AI-Powered Materials Discovery in the Great Plains, a workshop funded by the NSF that brought together more than 230 researchers and educators spanning physics, chemistry, materials science, computer science, biomedical engineering, and more.

Three key roles within USD emerged or expanded as a result of this theme in the strategic plan: a role for government relations was established to strengthen relationships with elected officials and policymakers, an external relations position was created to build partnerships with the Sioux Falls business community, and a role for tribal outreach was expanded and has supported efforts with the nine tribal nations in South Dakota and the Tribal Historic Preservation officers. These staff roles have each contributed to stronger relationships between USD and our external stakeholders.

The “We Are South Dakota” marketing campaign and a new partnership with an external marketing agency have further supported external relations activities, elevating the work of our faculty and staff and positioning USD as a leader in the state. Additionally, the Office of the President has completed a state-wide USD Update tour each fall for the last four years. These events provide the university with an opportunity to share data and priority initiatives with alumni and elected officials.

Efforts to increase engagement with potential students in the region include the expansion of the Teacher Pathway program, the introduction of the Ambassador Scholar Program and outreach in the Sioux Falls School District.



Strategic Theme 3: Facilities and Infrastructure

Goal 1: Renovate and modernize buildings to meet the needs of students, faculty and staff

This goal encapsulated reviewing master plans, determining priorities for renovation and modernization, sharing plans with stakeholders, and making progress on renovating and modernizing buildings. The review process revealed marked progress on the majority of these projects. In the last five years, USD invested approximately \$85 million in building and renovating academic facilities alone.

The finance and administration team developed an annual process to identify projects across campus. Each summer, deans and chairs are asked to provide information on projects they would like to have completed in their buildings. The facilities management team compiles the list and prioritizes requests based on available M&R funding and urgency for completion. Once the list is developed, it is reviewed by the deans and executive committee before being submitted to the Board of Regents.

Goal 2: Invest in technology and infrastructure to realize student success, research and creative scholarship

In the execution of this goal, cybersecurity was identified as one of the gaps in USD's technology needs. IT and the University Budget Committee worked together to dramatically reduce the university's cybersecurity risks, including the risk of ransomware attacks; a 24/7 cybersecurity platform was selected to provide managed detection and response of cybersecurity incidents and risks to augment the in-house security team. Before acquiring the new platform, the cybersecurity team could evaluate about 5% of all alerts, and two team members were on call 24/7. Since the change was implemented, 100% of all alerts are triaged, and the team's workload has become more manageable.

Other notable accomplishments include implementing a software review process and upgrading several campus classrooms with enhanced technology, such as web conferencing capabilities. ITS also replaced the home-grown account management system, which had been in use for more than 20 years, with a new commercial platform. This upgrade—funded in part by one-time support from the University Budget Committee—delivers more timely and accurate account management and introduces automated processes to manage access to digital resources.

Since 2020, ITS has completed 135 campus projects and 115 IT infrastructure projects, investing 72,000 hours.



USD ACADEMIC PROJECTS OVER \$500,000 - LAST 5 YEARS

<i>BUILDING</i>	<i>PROJECT</i>	<i>COST</i>	<i>YEAR COMPLETED</i>
Arts & Sciences	Basement renovation and upgrade HVAC	\$760,000	2022
Arts & Sciences	Renovate main floor and upgrade main floor HVAC	\$1,282,000	2025
Center for Continuing Education	Renovate existing building	\$920,000	2020
Churchill-Haines	Replace chiller	\$1,240,000	2024
Churchill-Haines	Phase 1 and 2 renovations (full project will go through 2027)	\$9,000,000	2025
Dakota Hall	Renovate 1st floor for counseling center	\$1,319,000	2023
Delzell	Renovate 2 classrooms and 2nd floor restrooms	\$700,000	2025
East Hall	Renovate 1st floor old dental hygiene space for anthropology and upgrade restrooms, classrooms and offices	\$800,000	2025
FM Storage Building	Build 30,000SF FM warehouse and shipping/receiving area for campus	\$1,500,000	2020
Fine Arts	Knutson Theatre renovation	\$2,160,000	2020
Fine Arts	Colton Theatre renovation	\$1,369,000	2021
Grounds Storage Building	Build new 12,000SF building for grounds	\$500,000	2020
Health Science Building	Build new health sciences building	\$22,875,000	2020
ID Weeks	Archive renovation on 3rd floor	\$526,000	2021
ID Weeks	Replace chiller	\$925,000	2024
Julian Hall & Julian Addition	Asbestos abatement and demolish buildings	\$1,200,000	2021
Law School	Main floor classroom renovations	\$550,000	2022
Law School	Basement renovation	\$1,400,000	2023
Law School	Renovate faculty suite and main floor library space	\$1,700,000	2024
Law School	Renovate dean's suite, exterior windows and entrances, and skylight (full project will go through 2026)	\$2,400,000	2025
Lee Medical	Basement renovation for health sciences	\$1,200,000	2021
Lee Medical	3rd floor renovation for health sciences	\$650,000	2021
McKusick	Renovate building for hearing disorders	\$2,605,000	2021
National Music Museum	Renovate and build addition at NMM	\$10,595,000	2020
President's Garden	Create park and new driveway into Inman House	\$600,000	2021
Campus	Parking lot #39 - build new parking lot south of SCSC	\$1,210,000	2021
Campus	Build new parking lot #23 - located where Julian & Julian Addition were located	\$2,500,000	2022
Campus	ARPA funds - Noteboom, Dakota and East Hall storm sewer work	\$1,500,000	2022
Campus	Upgrade Parking lots #14 and #15 - create one concrete parking lot #14	\$1,200,000	2023
Campus	ARPA Funds - fix tunnel issues	\$500,000	2024
Service Center	Renovation of building	\$1,400,000	2020
SD Union	Building renovation	\$7,820,000	2024

\$84,906,000

Strategic Theme 4: Community

Goal 1: Review and revise campus policies, procedures and professional development

Efforts with the Student Satisfaction Inventory, the National Survey of Student Engagement, and Skyfactor surveys continue and have proven valuable in informing campus priorities, as shared in Theme 2. In relation to Theme 4, the Skyfactor survey has elevated community priorities such as the desire to better recognize and celebrate faculty and staff contributions. The Legacy Awards were added to the State of the University Address and recognize faculty and staff for exemplary work. Based on feedback from USD's CSA Council, in 2025 the Office of the President announced an enhanced CSA employee of the month recognition program—increasing the award from \$150 to \$500 each month, adding a 40% discount off an item at Charlie's, and awarding \$25 in Coyote Cash. USD has established a fund at the USD Foundation to make that model sustainable. A subsequent goal is to create a recognition program for NFE employees.

In addition to designated survey review committees assessing and sharing data, the University Senate Faculty Affairs Committee reviewed Skyfactor survey data. The group created and shared a set of recommendations for faculty and staff, chairs and associate deans, academic deans, Executive Committee, and the Board of Regents to review and implement. These efforts have ensured that a number of perspectives from across campus contribute to the analysis of survey data and the action items that emerge from it.

The university has reviewed current professional development offerings and is exploring opportunities for expanding those programs. The President's Executive Leadership Institute is one example of a successful professional development program; HR and the President's Office are looking to expand PELI to include mentorship offerings to alumni of the program. Another goal is to create a development program for mid-level and new supervisors, designed to strengthen leadership skills and support employees transitioning into supervisory positions.



Goal 2: Recruit and retain faculty and staff

HR has explored various tools to support the university's efforts related to faculty and staff recruitment and retention. Examples include piloting an employee engagement survey and exploring an automated dashboard that analyzes turnover data. While considering these options, HR continues to report relevant data to the Executive Committee, complete reviews of deans and chairs, and improve exit surveys for all faculty and staff.

Over the course of the strategic plan, the university expanded the periodic review of administrators; in addition to regular dean and chair evaluations, members of the Executive Committee are also regularly evaluated using the same tool to provide a 360 assessment of university leaders.

USD Marketing and HR have partnered on marketing efforts focused on employee recruitment. HR now has a greater role in USD's LinkedIn account management so that this office can post priority job positions and monitor posts that originate from departments or employees. The university has also contracted with Job Elephant to enhance ad placements for open positions on campus. The analytics available in this tool support the HR department in making data-driven decisions about ad placement while also creating efficiencies in ad spending. Marketing and HR are also collaborating on opportunities to leverage the university's Sioux Falls Business partnership, such as by sharing relevant job postings in that publication.



Strategic Theme 5: Serving South Dakota

Goal 1: Address key statewide issues by leveraging USD expertise

From positioning faculty as experts to introducing academic programming that responds to workforce needs, USD has taken an active role in addressing statewide issues. Notable achievements include introducing the Teacher Pathway program to address the teacher shortage in multiple locations across the state, expanding programming at USD – Sioux Falls to meet specific workforce needs, introducing an Executive Master of Business Administration to develop leadership in Sioux Falls, adding a Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice to address a state shortage of Certified Registered Nursing Anesthetists, developing an emergency medicine department, and presenting to the legislature on a number of topics. Alongside these accomplishments, the university has also expanded efforts to educate policymakers on USD's expertise and promote awareness of USD's role in serving the state through the "We Are South Dakota" campaign.

One initiative USD has led in response to statewide issues is the Coyote Business Consulting program. The Beacom School of Business introduced this program in 2020, when businesses faced unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program connects South Dakota businesses with student consulting teams to help solve critical problems for their organizations; with the guidance of a faculty advisor, Coyote Business Consulting student consultant teams provide project-based work to South Dakota businesses, bridging higher education and the business industry. Since its launch, this program has consulted on 204 projects across 43 counties, involving over 300 students.

The Knudson School of Law is actively addressing needs across the state through its clinics; students gain practical experience while providing essential services to individuals and communities in need. Through the Veteran Legal Education Group, for example, law students provide free legal advice to veterans, active and reserve duty service members, and their families.



Goal 2: Collaborate with all constituents to improve the quality of life in South Dakota

USD has increased its efforts to connect with students across the state and respond to workforce needs in Sioux Falls. Converting the former University Center/Community College for Sioux Falls into the University of South Dakota – Sioux Falls was a notable milestone in this effort. This satellite campus focuses on programming that supports local workforce demands—such as health care, business, and education—and serves as a complement to USD’s main campus in Vermillion. A current focus for USD in Sioux Falls is meeting with stakeholder groups in the city to increase recruitment of New American students and ensure all students can envision their path to higher education.

USD has partnered with the Sioux Falls School District and the South Dakota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to ease the pathway to higher education for biliterate students and to support all students in envisioning their future in higher education. One key outcome that emerged from this partnership is a pathway for students to receive college credits in languages they are proficient in; students who demonstrate biliteracy proficiency through the South Dakota State Seal of Biliteracy may be granted an equivalent number of language credits toward a Spanish major or minor or any general education foreign language credits. This was approved by the Board of Regents in October of 2025.

USD continues to expand recruitment and relationship-building with Native American-Serving schools. Staff attend the Lakota Nation Invitational annually and connect with students, educators and tribal leaders. USD has also focused efforts on improving student recruitment and retention in smaller rural communities, such as directing funds from a \$1.1 million grant toward supporting the success of rural students.

The USD Discovery District has gained great momentum since the beginning of this strategic plan. This research district—which is made possible through a partnership between USD, the City of Sioux Falls, the South Dakota Board of Regents, the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and Forward Sioux Falls—is a hub of innovative research and commercialization in Sioux Falls. In January of 2025, the USD Discovery District opened the doors of its first building—a 50,000-square-foot, two-story facility for innovators in biotech and life science.

Among the most significant advancements within this goal of the strategic plan is moving the first 18 months of the M.D. program and the Division of Biomedical & Translational Sciences to Sioux Falls. This change, which was announced in 2025, will position the medical school to enhance its medical education and research experiences. With closer proximity to three of the state’s four major health systems, the medical school will be better able to promote advancements in medicine and equip students with more hands-on learning experiences and preparation, leading to improved health for South Dakotans across the state.



Strategic Theme 6: Affordability

Goal 1: Increase financial resources for students

Important outcomes of this goal included developing the USD Student Emergency Fund to provide financial assistance to students experiencing unexpected expenses, such as broken laptops, car repairs, or unexpected medical expenses; creating the Coyote Beginnings Fund to bridge gaps in students' financial aid needs; and connecting students to the South Dakota Freedom Scholarship. Together, these resources help make a college education more affordable and reduce barriers for students as they pursue their educational and career goals.

The first table on page 15 illustrates the impact of the South Dakota Freedom Scholarship. The Student Emergency Grant has remained a steady resource that helps students in times of need and promotes retention; see the second table.

Charlie's Career Closet and Charlie's Cupboard have been impactful initiatives that reduce financial burdens for students. Charlie's Cupboard is an on-campus, student-run food pantry available to all USD students as an effort to promote food security. There were more than 3,000 uses of the cupboard during the fall 2024 semester alone. Since its founding, Charlie's Cupboard has also expanded to USD – Sioux Falls. Charlie's Career Closet has helped hundreds of USD students prepare for professional opportunities by providing them with new or gently-used professional clothing free of charge. The closet has distributed thousands of professional clothing items to students and was relocated from East Hall to the Burr House in 2025 to accommodate its growth and position it closer to similar resources.

Goal 2: Increased affordability through a comprehensive review of all student-facing processes related to financial aid and academic programs

From 2021-2022, USD completed assessments of processes and policies for the Office of Financial Aid, the Registrar's Office, the Business Office, and academic advising. Priorities that emerged from these assessments included clear and concise communication, step-by-step financial aid instructions, self-service resources like Coyote One Stop, WiFi dependability, and functionality of the USD website. Departments have taken steps to improve processes with these priorities in mind.

Additionally, the Business Office moved to the Belbas Center following renovations to join the Office of Financial Aid and the Registrar's Office. This relocation enables synergies in campus processes and allows students to find related resources in one place.



SOUTH DAKOTA FREEDOM SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

NEW STUDENTS

	<i># OF AWARDS</i>	<i>AMOUNT AWARDED</i>
2022	105	\$525,000
2023	82	\$410,000
2024	65	\$325,000

CURRENT STUDENTS

	<i># OF AWARDS</i>	<i>AMOUNT AWARDED</i>
2022	130	\$730,000
2023	179	\$712,500
2024	182	\$877,500

TOTAL AWARDS

	<i># OF AWARDS</i>	<i>AMOUNT AWARDED</i>
2022	235	\$1,255,000
2023	261	\$1,122,500
2024	247	\$1,202,500

STUDENT EMERGENCY GRANTS AWARDED

<i>ACADEMIC YEAR</i>	<i>TOTAL GRANTS</i>	<i>AMOUNT AWARDED</i>	<i>STILL ENROLLED</i>	<i>GRADUATED</i>	<i>RETENTION/GRAD RATE (1 YEAR AFTER RECEIVING)</i>
2020-2021	37	\$20,000	12	17	78%
2021-2022	22	\$21,400	21	2	95%
2022-2023	41	\$19,489	30	9	95%
2023-2024	47	\$23,781	25	17	89%
2024-2025	39	\$17,275	27	7	87%
Total	182				

COYOTE BEGINNINGS GRANT AWARDED BY COLLEGE/SCHOOL (FALL 2025)

<i>COLLEGE OR SCHOOL</i>	<i>TOTAL AWARDS</i>	<i>AMOUNT AWARDED</i>
Beacom School of Business	18	\$27,500
College of Arts & Sciences	43	\$71,100
College of Fine Arts	1	\$1,000
School of Education	8	\$12,000
School of Health Sciences	38	\$57,500
Total	108	\$169,100

Next Steps

With the collective input and efforts of the university community, USD has made great progress in accomplishing the goals identified in the 2020-2026 strategic plan. Looking toward the future, USD will continue the momentum in these areas while also mapping out goals that reflect its current position and future aspirations.

As USD initiates development of the next strategic plan, it is evident that ongoing work is needed within the current framework. The attention and consistency demonstrated in the implementation of the current plan surpass those of previous efforts. The process involved gathering input from thousands of stakeholders and assigning champions for each theme and goal; these efforts ensure the framework drives real progress rather than being set aside after drafting. USD's commitment to advancing the goals in our strategic plan remains steadfast.

To support the next round of planning for 2026-2032, USD is currently working to retain an outside facilitator to assist in the planning process. The university recognizes that higher education is facing many internal and external challenges that manifest in different ways throughout the university. Leveraging the collective expertise and experience of the entire USD community will be essential in developing the next strategic plan and continuing our progress as South Dakota's flagship university.

