

University of South Dakota

“One of the most important things we can do is to make sure our state develops economically. So much of the research we do is geared toward making a significant difference in South Dakota and to the economy.”

USD Focused On Growth

BY KAYLA PRASEK
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While the University of South Dakota's transition to Division I athletics was complete two years ago, President James Abbott's focus remains on ensuring the institution, as a whole, is on par with other regional Division I schools.

Part of that growth has included expanding from a sole focus on liberal arts, Abbott said.

“The university has for a long time, since 1862, been the designated liberal arts university for the state of South Dakota,” Abbott said. “While we believe and maintain that the university is grounded in the liberal arts, it's much more than that. We have a med school, the law school, an accredited business school and significant graduate programs, from accounting to psychology. We are pretty broadly based, and I expect that we will continue to be broadly based.”

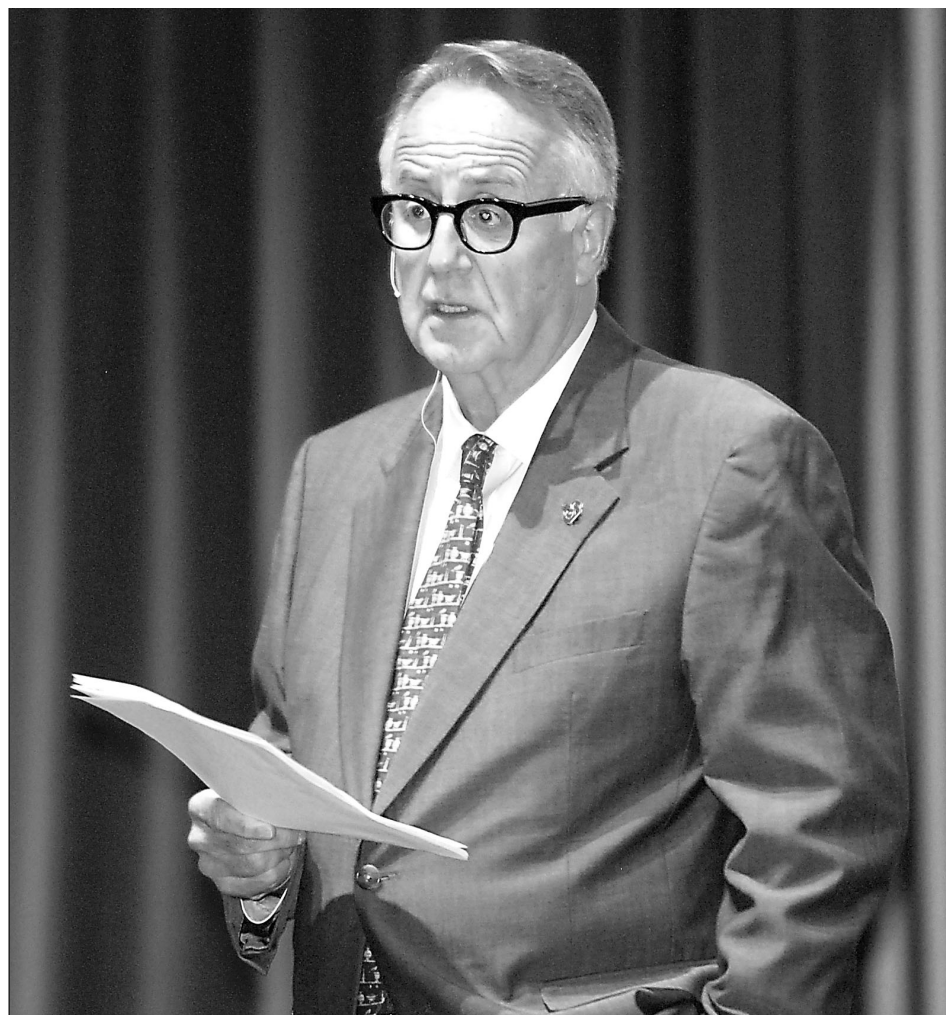
Abbott was named president of USD in 1997. From the beginning, Abbott said his focus was on renovating the campus.

“My feeling initially was that the university, while academically sound, was in poor shape,” Abbott said. “We had a number of buildings which were in disrepair. Fortunately, Old Main had been renovated just prior to the time I came here, but we needed a new medical school, business school and student union. Basically, we needed to revitalize the campus, and we've pretty much gotten that done.”

In between all the construction on campus, the university made the transition to Division I athletics, a move that wasn't initially on Abbott's radar.

“It wasn't initially part of my plan,” Abbott said. “Athletics was not part of my long suit when I came here and it probably isn't now. However, it became clear to me within a short time that we would eventually have to move to D-I to be competitive. We really needed to make a move, and I think it's been a good move.”

Abbott said the transition to D-I was significant to the university as a whole, as it means being a D-I institution all the way



University of South Dakota President Jim Abbott is shown speaking at his annual “State of the University” address in Vermillion earlier this month.

around and always striving to be a better school. Currently that means making sure every program that can be specially accredited is accredited, increasing faculty salaries and continuing to improve facilities, Abbott said.

“We've tried very hard to increase faculty salaries so when we have vacancies we can hire a faculty member that is as good as, or perhaps even better than, the one who has retired, which is a challenge in this state,

where we do not get significant increased funding each year,” Abbott said. “Then, of course, facilities are a concern. We don't want to have an appropriate D-I basketball/volleyball facility and have inappropriate academic buildings. We're still working on that. We have a couple things left, but I think by far and large, we've done a good job on that.”

Abbott said East Hall and Dakota Hall, which are primarily used as offices for profes-

sors, need work, while Noteboom Hall, Julian Hall and Brookman Hall all need to come down.

“We have to find places for people who are currently in those buildings, and we simply don't have those places right now,” Abbott said. “At some point, we'll need a new residence hall.”

Other long-term goals for Abbott include increasing undergraduate class size and expanding graduate programming.

“We would like to have a few more undergraduates,” Abbott said. “We have about 1,200 first-time, full-time freshmen. We'd like to have about 1,500. This is significantly up from a few years ago, but we would like to have about 6,000 undergraduates on campus at all times.”

Abbott said the university should be able to expand its graduate programming during the next five to 10 years.

“We'll start by building off the success of things like our physical therapy and kinesiology and sport science programs,” he said. “Those have been very popular and very well-received. There are probably other programs that we do not have and should have and we're looking into that right now.”

When it comes to expanding programs, the university does it with two goals in mind, Abbott said.

“We're always looking at expanding programs to do two things — to fit the needs of our students, obviously, but also to help the state develop,” Abbott said. “One of the most important things we can do is to make sure our state develops economically. So much of the research we do is geared toward making a significant difference in South Dakota and to the economy.”

Ten years out, Abbott said he sees the university continuing to shine in the area of research.

“I see the university as a strong liberal arts institution with significant professional schools and graduate programming,” he said. “In 10 years, we'll have significant success in our GEAR center in Sioux Falls, and I think we'll be successful in populating the USD Research Park in Sioux Falls on the University Center campus. I expect that we will do well athletically. I expect our students will still continue to shine academically and in other ways. I expect our faculty will continue to have the highest qualifications and continue to lead our university academically.”

USD's Transition To D-I Presents Challenges And Opportunities

BY KAYLA PRASEK
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In the two years since officially joining Division I athletics, the University of South Dakota has experienced its share of struggles and triumphs, but its focus remains on continuing to be competitive in all areas.

Prior to the transition to Division I, USD was part of the North Central Conference in Division II, which USD athletic director David Herbster called “the best conference in the country.”

“In the '90s and early 2000s, the North Central Conference was arguably the best conference in the country,” Herbster said. “Top to bottom, it was as competitive as it could be, and in some ways, operated like a Division I conference. I was in it. I watched it from the outside and was at other Division II schools and saw how everybody looked up to the NCC like the Big Ten.”

Part of what made the conference so special was the rivalries and traditions that came with an 80-year-old conference, Herbster said.

“You had fans that traveled. You had home fans that understood who the visiting team was,” Herbster said. “Everybody came from the same geographic footprint as far as from a recruiting standpoint, so a lot of the kids actually knew each other from the other teams, so there was a lot of rivalry and camaraderie in that process. Everybody came from each other's home states so I think everybody was more apt to attend the home games and you had very knowledgeable fans because they understood the tradition and the histories and the rivalries there.”

Then, the North Central Conference fell apart.

“Our last four years of Division II, after Northern Colorado had left and North Dakota State had left and so on,



Herbster

it got a little watered down,” Herbster said. “You didn't have as many big games as you used to have. That's what it was like in the last portion of the Division II era.”

Once USD made the decision to move up to Division I, it had to spend four years in a transition period, a time in which the teams lost a lot of fans, Herbster said.

“For the first four years of the transition, you felt a little bit like a nomad,” Herbster said. “We had a conference, but it stretched from New Jersey to California down to the tip of Texas. Our non-conference opponents we brought in were irrelevant. So many people that came for so long stopped showing up for games, and it really impresses upon how important it is who you play and having that identity with those rivals or with those teams for people to validate the worth of even going to a game.”

Since officially becoming a Division I school in 2012, Herbster said the fan base has started to recover.

“The football fans have come back,” he said. “Basketball fans have not totally come back yet. You can see in our attendance figures that we still need to get them back, but a lot of that translates to success on the court. Of course, women winning the league last year and going to the NCAA tournament is a big shot in the arm for us, but we lost them for four or five years there, and we've got to get them back.”

On the competitive side, Herbster said the university's teams are close to being at the level they need to be at.

“Right now, we're a top-three team in the Summit League in the all-sports trophy. I want to be that number one team. So it tells me we're extremely competitive. You see those glimpses of

success even when you have track individual athletes win All-American and national championship honors so it has meant a home, it has meant an identity and it's meant, even for our fans, teams that they can now begin to identify with.”

Herbster's focus now is on building the volleyball/basketball arena.

“This next year comes down to, from a facilities standpoint, getting the construction up and running and continue the fundraising to finish off the facilities like we want and need to,” Herbster said. “Getting our facilities on line is going to be an incredible shot in the arm for us. Right now we have pretty much everything under one roof. Now, we'll be able to actually spread out. From a recruiting standpoint, that's going to help us tremendously. Getting those facilities on line and doing it right is a big key.”

As for long-term goals, Herbster's focus is on increasing the number of coaching staff and their pay.

“Right now we are below the average in probably almost every category in the Summit League, and certainly in the Missouri Valley,” Herbster said.

“We're the lowest paid football staff in the Missouri Valley, so we've got to do a better job of that if we not only want to retain our coaches but attract our coaches as well.”

Finally, Herbster wants every USD athletic team to be among the best in the Summit League.

“My long-term goal is to have us vie for the Summit League All-Sports Championship every year,” he said. “That doesn't mean that we have to win every conference championship but we get to the point where I expect we finish in the top four in every sport we participate in, so we've got to resource our sports to do that while maintaining the academic component of that 3.2 area of a grade point average.”

YC

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training and graduating over 40 students to serve remote small churches within the UCC of South Dakota and North Dakota.

Yankton College was offered the opportunity for a new home, as time went on, when the City of Yankton and the Yankton School District were building a new common-use facility and needed alternate financial assistance to fund a mini-theater. The YC trustees were approached and they approved to contribute funds for the 106-seat theater named for Yankton College. Office space was included in the arrangement and available on a 30-year lease through 2024. By entering the agreement, the board reasoned it offered the opportunity of a continuing association with education consistent with Joseph Ward's goals and provided greater visibility in the community.

It is 30 years since the campus doors suddenly closed and Yankton College continues with a vibrant existence! 19-member Board of Trustees gather twice a year to oversee the alumni relations, finances, scholarship awards, programming and legacy of Yankton College. Another nineteen make up the Alumni Advisory Board and meet concurrently with the BOT to assist with alumni outreach. A three-person staff manages the day-to-day operations and volunteers (mostly alums) assist with projects. Dr. Charles N. Kaufman currently serves as the 15th president.

Alumni outreach is still emphasized. Living alums

are fewer (the youngest are in their 50s) but the memories and connections from their “Yankton experience” continue to grow. This is evident when nearly 300 YC alums continue to attend the All-Class Reunions in Yankton every two years. Three thousand alumni receive annual mailings; 1,000 receive a monthly E-newsletter and a detailed website includes on-line shopping for YC apparel and souvenirs.

The U.S. Federal Prison Camp is a camp(us) providing inmates a non-traditional education. It has been continually mindful of the 103-year history of YC and what it means to the alumni and the community. Inmates renovated and maintain the historic buildings. A representative from YC serves on their Community Relations Board. Campus tours are permitted every YC reunion complete with viewing a floral display on Observatory Hill designed to pay tribute to the college.

By 2024, Yankton College should have a permanent home within the walls of the historic Mead Building, as part of a preliminary agreement with the Dakota Territorial Museum and the Yankton County Historical Society, answering pleas from alumni that YC continue a physical presence in Yankton for future generations. Historic documents, student records and college memorabilia will be on permanent display and there will be a procedure for administering YC scholarships in perpetuity.

Today, Yankton College Forever is the banner that the trustees proudly wave — to which they examine ways to assure that YC does, indeed, live forever — long beyond the lives of the alumni.

Teachers plant seeds of knowledge that grow forever!

Thank you to the teachers, administration and staff of our local public and private schools for all your hard work and dedication. We appreciate you!



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