

Parry: USD-Sioux Falls Is Benefit, Not Threat, To Vermillion Campus

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It may be easy for residents of Vermillion who are keenly aware of the benefits that accompany living in the home of the University of South Dakota to be wary of the fairly new presence of the University of South Dakota -- Sioux Falls.

Jay Parry, the vice president of USD-Sioux Falls, told members of the Vermillion Rotary Club at its July 24 luncheon meeting that the somewhat new Sioux Falls presence of USD is providing stability to the Vermillion campus.

And, he said, it is not competing with nor diminishing the role always held by USD in Vermillion.

TODAY'S USD-SIOUX FALLS CAMPUS

Parry describes the USD-Sioux Falls campus as "non-residential," meaning there are no dormitories.

"We are a commuter campus. If a student wants the traditional college experience, if you want to go to a football game, if you are into clubs, fraternities and sororities, you are not coming to the Sioux Falls campus," he said. "Those students are going to come to Vermillion. The traditional college on campus experience is not what we are doing in Sioux Falls, and that way, what we are doing at the Sioux Falls campus complements, rather than competes with the main campus here in Vermillion with very few exceptions."

USD-Sioux Falls students are highly unlikely to ever consider attending the university in Vermillion in the first place, Parry said.

"In fact, I told most people, most of our students weren't going to go to college if they didn't come



Jay Parry, vice president of the University of South Dakota-Sioux Falls, describes the institution as "non-residential," with no dormitories. "We are a commuter campus. If a student wants the traditional college experience, if you want to go to a football game, if you are into clubs, fraternities and sororities, you are not coming to the Sioux Falls campus," he said. Courtesy of USD-Sioux Falls

to us, so it's a very different student body than you see here on the main campus (in Vermillion)," he said.

USD-Sioux Falls currently consists of three buildings. One is an administration building that also houses USD-Sioux Falls' health and health sciences programs along with its business office, its IT Help Desk and related services.

There is also a Graduate Education and Research Center building, also known as the GEAR Center, located on the Sioux Falls campus.

"That's home to our biomedical engineering programs. It's also an incubation space for very early stage startup companies and businesses in the life sciences, biotech and medtech industries," Parry said.

A third building -- USD-Sioux Falls' science and tech building -- houses all of the other academic programs offered in Sioux Falls, including the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, which provides noncredit courses to a target audience of people

ages 50 and over in Sioux Falls, in Brookings and in Vermillion.

Last year, USD-Sioux Falls had a total enrollment count of about 790 students.

“Those students can study at about 20 different degree programs that are available there. On the undergraduate side, our focus is on business, healthcare and education, but we also have a few programs that are in high demand by students,” Parry said.

He described them as “not necessarily workforce programs.” They include classes in psychology, sociology, and criminal justice that are pretty successful on the Sioux Falls campus.

“Nursing is our biggest undergraduate program, again, aligning with local workforce needs. I point out that doesn’t mean there isn’t nursing at the Vermillion campus,” Parry said. “You can have the option of either campus to study nursing, as is the case with most of our programs.”

GROWTH

Last year was USD-Sioux Falls’ first full year of operation and it saw its enrollment grow by 3.5% and its credit hours grew by 7%.

Parry admits that he doesn’t like to count his chickens before they’re hatched, but unofficially, compared to this time last year, “we are up 14% in head count. We were up 20% in credit hours and a little over 30% in projected revenue, which is always important, but there’s a lot of ground to cover before the semester starts, so don’t hold me to those numbers.

“The point is things are going well. It’s starting to resonate in the community. Again, I think that branding -- of having that USD name and that tuition -- is really what is driving the success there,” he said, adding that the Sioux Falls campus is good for USD as a whole, and also good specifically for Vermillion.”

Parry said a highly visible presence in Sioux Falls for USD is imperative, given the growing footprint of the city.

“I know that many people in South Dakota get frustrated and get tired of hearing about Sioux

Falls,” he said. “I get it – there is Sioux Falls fatigue. But let me share a few demographic facts that illustrate why USD needs that visible presence in Sioux Falls.”

Sioux Falls has doubled in population since the 2000 census, Parry said, adding that between 2010 and 2020, South Dakota, as a state, grew by 72,000 people.

“Two thirds of that was in Sioux Falls. The Census Bureau is estimating an additional 50,000 people will move to Sioux Falls in the next 10 years,” he said. “For context, if those 50,000 people formed their own city, it would be the third biggest city in South Dakota.”

Parry said earlier this year the Census Bureau declared Sioux Falls to be the fastest growing city in the Midwest.

“The city of Sioux Falls now represents a little over one-third of the state’s population. It is over one-third of the state’s K-12 population,” he said. “So, the future students that are going to go to college live in Sioux Falls and about 38% of the state’s workforce is currently in greater Sioux Falls.

“If you look at the trends, those numbers are expected to just keep growing and getting more disproportionately high in Sioux Falls compared to the rest of the state,” Parry said.

He noted that 3.5 million tourists visit Sioux Falls every year, and that the USD-Sioux Falls campus, with its USD branding, is going to give the university greater visibility.

“One-third of the current USD alumni base lives in greater Sioux Falls. If Vermillion or USD as a whole wants to raise money from their donor base of alumni, your first stop is the city of Sioux Falls, whether you want to go there or not,” Parry said. “I know people don’t always like them, but those are all truths and having that Sioux Falls campus for USD adds some visibility that we’re going to need.”

ENROLLMENT CLIFF

People involved in higher education view what they call an “enrollment cliff” coming up in the near future, he said.

“That’s due to the decline in the number of projected high school graduates nationally and regionally. For context, between today and 2037 there’s expected to be a 9% drop nationally in the number of high school graduates,” Parry said. “In the Midwest, there will be an 11% drop in the number of high school graduates in the three states that we recruit the most heavily for out of state: Minnesota, Nebraska and Iowa.”

It is projected that by 2037, Minnesota is going to have 3,500 fewer graduates every year. Iowa will have 2,000 fewer graduates every year and Nebraska will have 1,000 fewer high school graduates every year.

“That’s a tough landscape for USD to enter, to recruit, to keep Vermillion strong, to keep the campus strong. But an hour up the road, you have Sioux Falls which is countering all of these trends,” he said. “It’s a place where the population is growing, where the number of high school graduates are growing and dominating.”

The Sioux Falls market of students provides one of the best options for keeping enrollment high as a whole and keeping that enrollment in Vermillion, Parry said.

“I think the Sioux Falls campus actually gives a pretty significant advantage to USD and to the Vermillion campus. Students are going to grow up in Sioux Falls, driving past that campus seeing that USD sign, they’re going to see USD on billboards,” he said. “There’s the USD Foundation presence in downtown Sioux Falls. They also have offices here in Vermillion, too.

“That subliminal messaging will resonate over time with students. Moreover, those Sioux Falls-based K-12 students are coming to Sioux Falls for events,” Parry said.

For example, USD-Sioux Falls hosts a regional spelling bee and is home to such events as Omni Tech, which attracts 300 young women in eighth through 12th grades who are interested in STEM

(Science, Technology, Engineering And Math) courses.

“They’re inundated with USD messaging everywhere they go,” he said. “That kind of thing will have a big payoff for those folks who want that traditional college experience. A lot of those students, I think, will come down to the Vermillion campus.”

Parry said the Sioux Falls campus will also serve as an “on ramp” to the Vermillion campus.

“We have some students who want to save money and live at home during the first year of college. They may want to take their general education courses there. They’re not quite sure what they want to major in before they come to the Vermillion campus,” he said. “They may not be emotionally mature enough. They may have a family commitment, something there that keeps them from immediately coming to Vermillion.”

Before USD-Sioux Falls, those Sioux Falls-based students who weren’t ready immediately to come to Vermillion for an on-campus experience were lost to the University of Sioux Falls or Augustana University or to online programs.

“Now we have this USD campus in Sioux Falls. You can come do that first year there, and then you’re not even transferring when you come to Vermillion because it’s all part of the same institution,” Parry said. “It’s an easy, easy gateway, an easy step between the two campuses which gives USD a pretty unique advantage.

“I am incredibly optimistic about the future of that Sioux Falls campus in terms of enrollment, but also how it can contribute to USD overall. I will also remind everybody that that student body in Sioux Falls is a very different student body that you have here, and so the Sioux Falls campus is not a threat in any way to Vermillion,” he said. “It literally will help long term what you’re doing in Vermillion as a community.”

Editor’s Note: Look for a story in next week’s Plain Talk that describes how the University of South Dakota became involved in offering higher education courses in Sioux Falls.