

# UPDATE NEWSLETTER

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## *NC-SARA Board Meets on Key Decisions*

**Board members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) assembled for their second meeting May 14 in Chicago to decide on a number of key action items essential to the initiative's continued development.**



These 21 leaders from various sectors of higher education and government help guide the activities of SARA, a nationwide initiative of states designed to make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. SARA is funded by a \$2.3 million grant from Lumina Foundation.

“The SARA initiative has made significant progress since the first NC-SARA meeting on November 1, 2013,” noted Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. Hill reported that seven states (Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Nevada, North Dakota and Washington) have joined SARA. Additionally, he stated SARA-enabling legislation has passed in 16 states, legislation is pending in seven more and five states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation.

The NC-SARA board reviewed and approved a recommendation from staff to establish and operate NC-SARA under the provisions of federal IRC 501(c)(3) and have the organization incorporated and operated under the Colorado Revised Nonprofit Corporation Act, subject to final approval by the Executive Committee after a few technical issues are resolved. EducationCounsel, LLC, a Washington, DC based law firm, provided advice and counsel on the question of appropriate legal status for NC-SARA.

The board also adopted bylaws and elected the following officers and members to serve, along with board chair Paul Lingenfelter, as NC-SARA's Executive Committee:

- **Vice Chair:** M. Peter McPherson, President  
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
- **Treasurer:** Larry Isaak, President  
Midwestern Higher Education Compact
- **At-large members of the Executive Committee:**
  - Paul Shiffman, Chief Executive Officer  
Presidents' Forum
  - Michael Thomas, President  
New England Board of Higher Education
  - Leroy Wade, Deputy Commissioner  
Missouri Department of Higher Education
  - Belle Wheelan, President  
Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of  
Colleges and Schools

The final action item addressed by the board involved two issues that have been previously discussed but not yet established in policy: 1) the collection of data from institutions that participate in SARA, and 2) the reporting of complaints lodged against SARA institutions for activities carried out under SARA provisions. Based on recommendations from SARA staff members and an

advisory committee the board directed the staff to move ahead with plans for implementing these new policies, subject to final approval of the board.

The NC-SARA board is a nationwide coordinating entity that assures the four regional compacts establish uniform standards and procedures for accepting and monitoring states participating in each of their respective regional reciprocity agreements. The NC-SARA board includes the chief executive officers of the four regional compacts, four leaders from the National Commission and Presidents' Forum/Council of State Governments efforts, and additional members to assure that the perspectives of all stakeholder groups will be represented. A list of members is available at: <http://www.nc-sara.org/about/national-council>

## Five WICHE states join SARA

Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada and Washington have been approved by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) as the first states in the compact's region to become members of the WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). Combined, these states have 258 accredited higher education institutions. These states join Indiana and North Dakota, which were approved by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) in February and April, respectively.

"Distance education is a major part of higher education today," remarked WICHE President David Longanecker. "Having states in our compact join SARA advances the initiative to students with increased access to programs and provides better consumer protection in terms of complaint resolution. And as more states become members, the opportunities for institutions to benefit expand."

The SARA agreements are overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and are being implemented by the four regional higher education interstate compacts: the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Once a state joins SARA, accredited degree-granting institutions in the state that offer distance education courses can seek approval to participate in SARA from their state. When approved, these institutions will be able to operate in other participating SARA states without seeking independent authorization. Participating in SARA is entirely voluntary for institutions, as it is for states.

"SARA allows states to focus on their home-state institutions, rather than on institutions from many other states," explained Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. "SARA can help expand educational offerings available to state residents and will significantly reduce costs for institutions that are active in online education, lessening this particular need to raise fees and thereby supporting affordability."



## National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

*A voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of distance education*

## Upcoming Presentations

**Association of Private Sector Colleges and Universities (APSCU) Annual Meeting**  
June 17, 2014  
Las Vegas, Nevada

**Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) Summer Workshop**  
June 25, 2014  
Washington, D.C.

**Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)**  
June 25, 2014  
Washington, D.C.

## News

Rhonda Epper, W-SARA Director, will be joining the staff of the Colorado Department of Higher Education as CDHE's chief academic and student affairs officer. Rhonda's last day with W-SARA will be May 23. For assistance in the interim, contact:

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## New FAQ

*Can a state require a SARA applicant institution to prove in advance of joining SARA that it will meet the standards for operating under SARA?*

No. A state must accept an institution's self-certification that it will meet the standards required for operating under SARA once it is allowed to participate. However, as soon as an institution is accepted into SARA, the state portal agency has a right to evaluate whether courses or programs offered under SARA meet the C-RAC norms or other SARA requirements and must investigate any claims that the institution does not meet these requirements.