

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

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New Mexico, Vermont and Wyoming join SARA; National SARA board meets

New Mexico and Wyoming have been approved by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to become members of the WICHE State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (W-SARA). In addition, Vermont has been approved by the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) as the second state in the region to join the New England State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (N-SARA).

These states join 20 others (Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington and West Virginia) as members of SARA. SARA is a nationwide initiative of states that will 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. The effort is funded by a \$3 million grant from Lumina Foundation, \$200,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and fees paid by institutions.

The New Mexico Higher Education Department will serve as the state “portal” agency for SARA and provides oversight of all “private postsecondary educational institutions” operating within the state of New Mexico, including academic, vocational, technical, business, professional, or other schools, colleges or universities, other organizations or persons offering courses, instruction, training or education from a physical site in New Mexico, through distance education, correspondence, or in person. The Department is now accepting institutional participation applications.

The Vermont Agency of Education provides leadership, support and oversight to ensure that the Vermont public education system enables all students to have the knowledge and skills necessary for success in college, continuing education, careers and citizenship. The Agency works to achieve this goal within federal policy and intensifying public focus on cost effectiveness and accountability. The Agency will serve as the state “portal” agency for SARA and will begin accepting institutional participation applications in late fall 2015.



The Wyoming Community College Commission (WCCC) will serve as the state “portal” agency for SARA. WCCC contributes to Wyoming’s quality of life through serving as a partner in the statewide community college system and adult education programs, thereby strengthening and enriching communities. The agency’s contribution to this partnership entails coordination, accountability, communication, reporting, leadership, oversight and support for the colleges and students of Wyoming. WCCC will begin accepting institutional participation applications mid-July 2015.

On May 7, 2015, board members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) gathered in Boston to review, discuss, and take actions affecting the initiative’s continued advancement. These 20 leaders from various sectors of higher education and government help guide the activities of SARA.

At this meeting, the board gave approval to additions and modifications to the NC-SARA Policies and Standards. A proposed policy regarding the participation of Native American tribal colleges in SARA was added and states: Colleges otherwise eligible to participate in SARA that are chartered and/or controlled by federally recognized Indian tribal governments may participate in SARA by signing an agreement to do so with the appropriate SARA portal agency of the state where the principal campus of the college is located. A modification process for SARA Policies and Standards was also approved by the board. An amendment to the NC-SARA Policies and Standards was approved to provide clarification of how a SARA institution may be denied further participation. The board also made changes to the complaint resolution process to

require state-to-state notice of appealed complaints. The board also took steps toward moving to 501(c)3 status for NC-SARA.

Information items covered in the meeting included: liability insurance for members of NC-SARA; renewal process and form for SARA institutions; the first reporting of appealed complaints by SARA portal agencies; U.S. Department of Education actions affecting state authorization; and the NC-SARA staff work plan for FY 2016. FAQs added since the December NC-SARA board meeting regarding hybrid programs; aviation programs; and state authority to bill for costs of investigating institutions were also reviewed as well as the following upcoming FAQs: Must an institution offer distance education to participate in SARA?; Does SARA cover dual enrollment courses taken by high school students?

As of May 12, 2015, SARA-enabling legislation has passed in an additional six states and four states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation in SARA.

News

FIRST REPORTING OF APPEALED COMPLAINTS BY SARA PORTAL AGENCIES

SARA states were surveyed to determine the status of any appealed complaints. The report is posted to the NC-SARA website at: <http://www.nc-sara.org/content/complaint-reports>

RENEWAL PROCESS FOR INSTITUTIONS

1. Eligibility

Institutions previously approved by their home state portal agency as SARA participating institutions are eligible for renewal. During the review process portal agencies may pay particular attention to institutions operating under provisional admission (Section 3(2)).

2. Process

State portal agencies shall review institutional renewal applications to confirm the institution's past compliance with SARA policies and standards and affirm its willingness and ability for continued future compliance. The following steps provide general guidelines that will govern the renewal process.

1. NC-SARA provides to institutions a notice of upcoming renewal no later than 90 days prior to the institutional renewal date. The portal agency is also notified of the institutional renewal notice.
2. The chief executive officer or chief academic officer of the institution completes and submits the application to the state portal agency within 30 days of receipt of such notice.
3. The portal agency shall review the application, approve, deny or return the application for additional information, render a decision and notify the institution and NC-SARA no later than 30 days after receipt. State portal agencies have the option of charging institutions applying to participate in SARA a fee to cover the state's costs in administering SARA.
4. Upon notice of an approved renewal application, the institution shall submit the renewal fee to NC-SARA within 30 days. A 30-day grace period beyond the institutional renewal date may be granted upon request; however, if renewal is not complete after 30-day grace period, a late fee of 25% of the institution's renewal fee is applied and SARA status is indicated as "Pending Renewal" on the NC-SARA website. Institutions not fully complying with all renewal processes and procedures within five business days after expiration of 30-day grace period will no longer be listed as participating SARA institutions.
5. If institutional membership renewal is denied, the portal agency will provide to the applicant institution a written reason for the denial. The institution may appeal the denial of its renewal application to its regional compact to ensure SARA policies and standards were upheld during the review process.

[Application for institutional renewal to participate in SARA \(save file for fillable pdf option\)](#)

Upcoming Presentations

**Education Commission of the States
National Forum on Education Policy
June 29 - July 1, 2015
Denver, Colorado**

**National Association for College
Admission Counseling (NACAC)
October 1-3, 2015
San Diego, California**

**President's Forum Annual Meeting
November 18, 2015
Washington, DC**

SARA mentioned in Gates report

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the report, Postsecondary Success Advocacy Priorities in March 2015. The foundation's postsecondary success advocacy plan will support these efforts by building a supportive policy environment focused on four priorities: data and information, finance and financial aid, college readiness, and innovation and scale. The goal of the innovation and scale priority is to support the development and oversight of programs that shorten time and credits to credential and better fit with career and family obligations. State regulation of distance education programs is one of three areas these efforts will focus on. In the report, the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is cited for its work in assisting states to simply, rigorous, and consistent requirements for authorizing distance education programs to enroll their students. ([Link to document](#), reference on page 10.)



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

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