

UPDATE NEWSLETTER

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New Hampshire joins SARA

New Hampshire has been approved by the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) as the first state in the region to join the New England State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (N-SARA). This state joins 17 others (Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, 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.

“SARA is bringing quality assurance and consumer protection in step with the fast-moving world of online learning,” said NEBHE President and CEO Michael K. Thomas. “New Hampshire will be a critical part of an expanding network of proactive states that are working to benefit students and to strengthen institutions’ online program provision.”

New Hampshire’s Higher Education Commission will serve as the state “portal” agency for SARA. The 22-member group, headed by Division Director Edward R. MacKay, currently serves 26 institutions and provides educational leadership and services which promote equal educational opportunities and quality practices and programs that enable New Hampshire residents to become fully productive members of society.

“There has been overwhelming support for the concept of SARA from New Hampshire’s college and university presidents and from the state’s executive branch,” said MacKay. “We all look forward to making New Hampshire’s high-quality higher education offerings available to more learners, and enabling the efficiencies of the SARA partnership.”

New Hampshire has targeted January 15, 2015, as the effective operational date when the state will begin accepting institutional applications for participation in SARA.

“Kudos to New Hampshire for being the first New England state to adopt this innovation to create greater access for students,” said Ed Klonoski, president of Charter Oak State College in Connecticut and a member of NEBHE’s SARA Regional Steering Committee.

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 from their state to participate in SARA. When approved, these institutions will be able to operate in other participating SARA states without seeking independent authorization from those states. Participating in SARA is entirely voluntary for institutions, as it is for states.

“It is wonderful to have New Hampshire join SARA as the first member state in the New England region and we look forward to having their institutions participate in the initiative. Having 18 member states illustrates the importance of SARA in providing a streamlined alternative to the current state-by-state approach of authorization. We are excited about this progress and continued advancements in all four higher education compact regions,” explained Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA.

As of December 15, 2014, SARA-enabling legislation has passed in an additional seven states and three states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation in SARA.

NC-SARA Board meets on next steps

Board members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) assembled on December 2, 2014, in Atlanta to decide on a number of 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.

The board gave final approval to two policy issues that were first considered at the meeting on May 14, 2014: 1) policy on data to be submitted by SARA institutions, and 2) policy on reporting of complaints. Based on recommendations by SARA staff and an advisory committee, the board approved data requirements to be reported annually to NC-SARA starting in fall 2015. The data will be reported on the NC-SARA website; its collection is designed to improve national information on SARA institutions serving students who live in other states. Similarly with staff and committee advice, the board approved the quarterly reporting by SARA states of appealed complaints. Required reporting will begin in April 2015, and the gathered information will appear on the NC-SARA website to provide timely identification for students and states of any SARA institution for which complaints are appealed to their state's SARA portal agency. The context of that reporting will include the institution's total out-of-state distance education enrollments.

The board also approved clarification of the term "legal domicile" and the addition of the possibility of institutions being approved by their states to join the initiative on provisional status. The definition added to the NC-SARA Policies and Standards identifies the "legal domicile" of an institution for purposes of SARA eligibility as the state in which the institution's principal campus holds its institutional accreditation and, if applicable, its federal OPEID number. By creating the possibility of provisional status for some institutions, the board addressed the concerns of some SARA states about institutions that meet current SARA eligibility requirements but have other problems/challenges of which the state is aware. This permits special attention for institutions facing academic, financial and consumer issues.

In terms of physical presence standards, the board approved modifications to the NC-SARA Policy and Standards regarding clinical placements and recruiting. Clinical placements would be removed from the "Physical Presence" subsection, recognizing they are a unique and significant aspect of SARA that will require continuing work. A detailed explanation of supervised field experiences covered by SARA, including contracts and licensing, was provisionally approved by the board, subject to review of a re-draft. And the board agreed to add recruiting to the list of activities by SARA institutions that do not trigger physical presence in SARA states. That provision is already included in the regional SARA agreements.

A progress report was given on a number of items including NC-SARA's pursuit of 501(c)3 status. Members of the NC-SARA executive committee voted to initiate the process of obtaining 501(c)(3) federal tax-exempt status for NC-SARA based on analysis provided by EducationCounsel, LLC. The process, including preparation of the application, is estimated to take six to nine months. New FAQs on SARA's use of federal composite scores; states' use of those federal scores in determining institution eligibility for SARA; tutoring and physical presence; and aviation programs were also brought to the board's attention.

Upcoming Presentations

**California Community College System
Distance Education Coordinators and
Managers Monthly Meeting**
January 16, 2015
Online/phone conference

**Council of College and Military Educators
Annual Symposium**
January 29, 2015
Anaheim, California

**Open SUNY Center for Online Teaching
Excellence (COTE) Summit**
February 27, 2015
Syracuse, New York

SARA Update Webinar
March 24, 2015 – 1:00 p.m. CT
Register: www.mhec.org/sara-webinars

**The Higher Learning Commission 2015
Annual Conference**
March 28-31, 2015
Chicago, Illinois

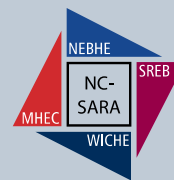
**American Association of Collegiate
Registrars and Admissions Officers
Annual Meeting**
April 12-15, 2015
Baltimore, Maryland

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*A voluntary, regional approach
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