



MEDIA RELEASE

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NC-SARA open letter to NCLC

Boulder, Colorado – Staff members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) have written an open letter ([click to view](#)) to the National Consumer Law Center (NCLC) in response to a report, “Ensuring Educational Integrity: 10 steps to improve state oversight of for-profit schools” that NCLC published June 18, 2014. SARA staff consider the report valuable for advancing a shared agenda – the necessity to ensure good protections for students as consumers; however, they believe the report contains some misunderstandings about SARA and have written an open letter to address them. SARA is 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 NCLC report states that, “the need for strong state oversight of the for-profit higher education sector has never been greater and is critically important because both Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have explicitly left the student protection role to the states.” In response, SARA staff note that SARA allows no exemptions from home state responsibility for the enforcement of standards—providing a significant net increase in state oversight responsibility and student protection for many distance education courses.

The National Council for SARA has specific standards for all participating institutions, which require appropriate institutional behavior regarding:

1. Veracity of recruitment and marketing materials;
2. Accuracy of job placement data;
3. Accuracy of information about tuition, fees and financial aid;
4. Complete and accurate admission requirements for courses and programs;
5. Accuracy of information about the institution’s accreditation and/or any programmatic/specialized accreditation held by the institution’s programs;
6. Accuracy of information about whether course work meets any relevant professional licensing requirements or the requirements of specialized accrediting bodies;
7. Accuracy of information about whether the institution’s course work will transfer to other institutions; and
8. Operation of distance education programs consistent with practices expected by institutional accreditors (and, if applicable, programmatic/specialized accreditors) and/or the [Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education](#), adopted in 2011 by the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. (All SARA institutions will agree to comply with those [Guidelines](#).)

Any institution that fails in its duty to abide by SARA standards will not be allowed to continue in the initiative. Home states must enforce the standards and there are no “exemptions” based on accreditation.

About NC-SARA and Lumina Foundation

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education. The initiative is administered by the country's four regional higher education 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) and overseen by NC-SARA. States and institutions that choose to participate agree to operate under common standards and procedures, providing a more uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states and better resolution of student complaints.

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Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. For more information logon to www.luminafoundation.org.