



## National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

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

### media release

## SARA Launches Website & Releases FAQs

**Boulder, Colorado** — The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) has launched its website and released guidelines, FAQs, and other information for states and institutions that want to streamline the approval process for interstate operations of distance education. SARA, funded by a \$2.3 million grant from Lumina Foundation, is a national initiative that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines, as well as making it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE), which manages the grant and is home to the NC-SARA offices, along with its regional partners – the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) – will create interstate reciprocity in the regulation of postsecondary distance education.

“Each of the four regions is committed to making this a high-quality, rigorous, voluntary system,” says David Longanecker, WICHE president. “SARA will allow states to trust each other, ensure high standards in their authorization of distance learning institutions, and protect students.”

States that wish to participate in SARA will have to demonstrate to their regional SARA entity that they have an effective process for authorizing institutions. That process must include, at a minimum: acceptance of national or regional accreditation as evidence of academic quality for approving institutions to participate in reciprocity; acceptance of an adequate federal financial responsibility score (1.5, or 1.0 with justification, at a minimum) for such participation; and an effective state process for consumer protection (including addressing consumer complaints) and ongoing oversight. States will also need to have the authority to enter into the reciprocity agreement, which in many will probably require modest changes in current state legislation. In the West and Midwest, a number of states – including Alaska, Hawai'i, Idaho, Indiana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, and Washington – have already secured legislative authority to proceed. Lastly, states and territories that don't belong to a regional compact but want to participate in SARA may either become full members of a compact or join, at reduced dues, solely to be part of SARA.

As the last step in SARA's ramping-up process, accredited degree-granting institutions offering distance education courses will seek approval from their home states. Once approved, they'll be able to operate in other participating SARA states without seeking independent authorization. This process is entirely voluntary (as is the process for states). An institution that chooses not to use SARA can continue to work with individual states.

At a time when our country is increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025, SARA seeks to be part of the solution and will save states and institutions time and money. “Everyone involved is working hard to implement this more efficient process for securing state authorization, and there is a great deal of interest,” says Marshall Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. State policymakers, legislators, and institutional decision makers in the WICHE region are invited to participate in a regional forum on W-SARA (<http://wiche.edu/newscap/current>) in Denver on

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December 10. A MHEC regional forum on SARA will be held in Chicago on January 10. NEBHE and SREB have tentatively scheduled their SARA forums for December and late January. "Continue to check our website for further developments," says Hill.

## **About NC-SARA, WICHE, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB & Lumina Foundation**

**NC-SARA** ([www.nc-sara.org](http://www.nc-sara.org)) is a national initiative seeking to make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines, as well as making it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. It's funded by a \$2.3 million grant from Lumina Foundation.

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education** ([www.wiche.edu](http://www.wiche.edu)) and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic, and civic life. Our programs—Student Exchange, the WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies, Policy Analysis and Research, and Mental Health—are working to find answers to some of the most critical questions facing higher education today. WICHE's 16 members include Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states (the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands is the first of the group to participate).

The **Midwestern Higher Education Compact** (<http://mhec.org>) is a nonprofit regional organization assisting Midwestern states in advancing higher education through interstate cooperation and resource sharing. MHEC seeks to fill its interstate mission through programs that expand postsecondary opportunity and success; promote innovative approaches to improving institutional and system productivity; improve affordability to students and states; and enhance connectivity between higher education and the workplace. Member states are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The **New England Board of Higher Education** ([www.nebhe.org](http://www.nebhe.org)) promotes greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England. It works across the six New England states to engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance; promote policies, programs, and best practices to assist the states in implementing important regional higher education policies; promote regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources; and provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England.

The **Southern Regional Education Board** ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)) works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Atlanta. SREB states currently participate in SREB's Electronic Campus Regional Reciprocity Agreement, and SREB is working closely with SARA to expand reciprocity nationwide. Member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

**Lumina Foundation** ([www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)) 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.

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