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AL, GA, MD, MS, TX join distance ed agreement
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Press Release

SREB News



Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi and Texas Join SARA

SARA helps more states make distance education more accessible across state lines

November 2, 2015 — Atlanta — This week, Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi and Texas were approved by the Southern Regional Education Board to join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). These states bring the number of participating states to 34, with over half of the SREB states now participating in SARA.

SARA is a nationwide initiative of states that makes distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and makes it easier for states to regulate institutions 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 state of Maryland is very fortunate to have a partnership with the State Authorization and Reciprocity Agreement because it affords increased opportunities for Marylanders to make right decisions in their pursuit of quality education, both in state and online. SARA's exceptional quality control standards will help assure equity in opportunity for all students on the continuum of college and workforce readiness," said Jennie Hunter-Cevera, acting secretary of higher education. "The Maryland Higher Education Commission's decision to become a part of SARA was strategically the right thing to do in this era of doing more with less, to ensure the delivery of high-quality, rigorous and relevant instruction."

SARA makes it easier for states to regulate interstate distance education, and it eliminates approval costs for colleges and universities that are often passed to students. Institutions in the five newly approved SARA states may now join the clearinghouse through the reciprocity agreements.

"Increasing the number of Mississippians with a credential of value beyond high school is crucial for our citizens and our state," said Glenn F. Boyce, the state's commissioner of higher education. "Joining SARA puts a wealth of courses at the fingertips of our students and eases the administrative burden on our universities. This initiative will be extremely beneficial to adult students, who are often place-bound and must manage classes with employment and family responsibilities."

"We are pleased that Mississippi will join in this effort to make it easier for our institutions to participate in interstate distance education," said Harold Fisher, chair of the Mississippi Commission on College Accreditation.

"Georgia educational leaders immediately recognized the value of participating in the State Authorization

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Nonpublic Postsecondary Education Commission and the Georgia Independent College Association collaborated to provide the necessary framework within the state. Each system realizes that joining SARA is a win-win situation for our students. We anticipate possible cost savings and a wider range of access to programs and degrees. SARA advances these objectives.”

“SARA increases access to education especially for adult students who juggle other responsibilities when they return to complete degrees,” SREB President Dave Spence said. “Education remains critical to state goals to increase college completion rates and build a better-educated workforce.”

“The availability of an excellent education has been expanded through distance learning and this added tool of membership in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement,” said Gregory G. Fitch, executive director of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. “The Alabama Commission on Higher Education always has advocated utilizing every available resource to keep pace with the ever-changing structure of an educational delivery system. The state’s partnership with the regional compact and National SARA Council will benefit Alabama’s citizens and our institutions in dealing with the competitive nature of offering higher education.”

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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 (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and WICHE) and is overseen by NC-SARA. Participating states and institutions operate under common standards and procedures, providing a uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states and better resolution of student complaints. <http://www.nc-sara.org>

The **Midwestern Higher Education Compact** is a nonprofit regional organization assisting Midwestern states in advancing higher education through interstate cooperation and resource sharing. MHEC seeks to fulfill 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 include: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. www.mhec.org

The **New England Board of Higher Education** promotes greater educational opportunities and services for New England residents. 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. www.nebhe.org

The **Southern Regional Education Board** 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 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. www.sreb.org

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education** 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

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Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate). www.wiche.edu

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 equitable, accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. www.luminafoundation.org

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