

DE, DC, NC, SC join distance ed agreement
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Press Release

SREB News



Delaware, District of Columbia, North Carolina and South Carolina Join SARA

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

June 10, 2016 — Atlanta — Delaware, District of Columbia, North Carolina and South Carolina have been approved by the Southern Regional Education Board to become members of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). These new members bring the number of participating states to 40 plus DC, which means close to 1,000 institutions participating in SARA.

SARA is a collaboration of states that work to make distance education easier and safer for students. The effort was originally funded by a \$3 million grant from Lumina Foundation, \$200,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and fees paid by institutions.

“Distance education classes are key to helping many students earn degrees, which is critical in developing better-educated citizens and workers,” says Southern Regional Education Board President Dave Spence. “Adult students who juggle other responsibilities when they return to complete degrees stand to benefit in particular.”

“Distance education can play an important role in helping students attain degrees and other credentials that have become so essential to workforce readiness, especially in the District of Columbia,” says District of Columbia Office of the State Superintendent of Education Hanseul Kang. “DC’s participation in SARA has the potential to expand academic offerings available to District residents, while also providing necessary consumer protections and providing the opportunity to collaborate with other states on best practices.”

“Anything we can do to offer more options to our residents to pursue higher education is a good thing for our state. We appreciate this interstate partnership, which also allows those in other states the opportunity to learn through the classes offered by our Delaware institutes of higher education,” comments Delaware Secretary of Education Steve Godowsky.

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 these states and districts may now join the clearinghouse through the reciprocity agreements.

Interim Executive Director of the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education Gary Glenn says, “South

Carolina is pleased to become a member of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement. The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education's focus is to promote access, affordability and excellence in postsecondary education. We feel that SARA supports this goal by providing students flexibility and increased access to educational opportunities, reducing regulatory costs for institutions, and enhancing quality oversight of distance education. The South Carolina Legislature and every postsecondary institution in the state overwhelmingly supported this initiative, and the commission and the institutions look forward to the benefits it will provide to students."

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

"SARA allows states to focus on their home-state institutions, rather than on institutions from many other states," explains Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. "SARA can help expand educational offerings available to state residents and will significantly reduce costs for institutions that are active in online education, lessening this particular need to raise fees and thereby supporting affordability."

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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. 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 are 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 wellbeing 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 education's contributions to the region's social, economic and civic life. WICHE's members are Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South 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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