



MEDIA RELEASE

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3005 Center Green Drive, Suite 130, Boulder, CO 80301

Contact: Lisa Greco
NC-SARA Communications Coordinator
lgreco@nc-sara.org
p 303.541.0267

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North Dakota joins SARA, first institutions approved

Boulder, Colorado – North Dakota has been approved by the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) as the second state to join the Midwestern State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (M-SARA). North Dakota joins Indiana, which was approved for membership in February. Additionally, four North Dakota and two Indiana institutions have been approved by the North Dakota University System (NDUS) and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE), respectively, as the first institutions to participate in M-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.

“This agreement is great for students and campuses in North Dakota and the Midwest. The agreement will also help protect both students and institutions,” said Senator Tim Flakoll, Senate Education Committee chairman and MHEC commissioner. There are 19 colleges and universities in North Dakota. The North Dakota University System contains 11 public colleges and universities with a total of over 17,500 online course registrations in the Fall 2013 term. This number represents a 7.9 percent increase over a one-year span.

“We are pleased to be one of the first states to receive SARA approval, and we thank our legislators, board and staff members who helped make this possible,” stated Dr. Larry C. Skogen, interim chancellor for the NDUS. “Online enrollments are on the rise, and it is critical that we help ensure our students have access to high-quality online courses. This agreement does that and provides a method for reducing the high costs for state authorization.”

Larry Isaak, MHEC president and former chancellor of the NDUS, said he is very pleased that North Dakota is taking a leadership role in this effort of states to streamline online education throughout the country.

“North Dakota University System institutions are dedicated to providing educational excellence to students regardless of modality or geographical location and have always been pioneers in finding innovative ways to do so. SARA provides an avenue for students to continue their educational program of choice even if they move to another state for work or military transfer. I am pleased that North Dakota distance educators are once again leading the nation, this time in their support of SARA,” noted Tanya Spilovoy, director of distance education and state authorization for NDUS.

NDUS approved Valley City State University (VCSU), Bismarck State College, Lake Region State College and Minot State University as the state’s first M-SARA institutions. Enrollments at those schools total 7,583 students. “Valley City State University is excited to be approved as part of the Midwestern State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement,” remarked Steven W. Shirley, VCSU president. He added, “VCSU has been a leader in delivering online educational opportunities to students regardless of their geographic location, and this new approval will allow us to continue making these opportunities available to current and future students. We appreciate the National Council’s efforts to address this significant need. VCSU looks forward to participating in SARA and knows the benefits from this participation will be important to our university as well as our students.”

Indiana’s institutions approved for M-SARA participation by ICHE are Indiana State University and the seven campuses of Indiana University, representing over 105,000 FTE students. “I am excited to learn that Indiana State has been accepted by SARA as one of its first recognized institutions,” said university President Dan Bradley. “The goal of removing hurdles for students and institutions to obtain degrees and courses online is important and will help us meet President Obama’s goal of making the United States once again first in the world in higher education.”

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 will be 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.

“For institutions that are active online, with students in many states, the potential benefits of SARA are obvious. SARA can enable more efficient provision of distance education to a broader market. It can reduce the number of other-state regulations institutions must monitor and respond to, reduce the number of applications to other states, and, most obviously, significantly reduce costs for obtaining and renewing authorization,” said Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. For students, SARA will expand access to educational offerings, improve overall quality and should lead to better resolution of complaints from students in SARA states. Furthermore, by reducing costs to institutions, SARA can reduce a rapidly growing institutional cost that is in one way or another is passed along to students.

SARA is funded by a \$2.3 million grant from Lumina Foundation. As of April 7, 2014, SARA-enabling legislation has passed in 13 states, legislation is pending in 10 more and five states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation.

About NC-SARA, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB, WICHE 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 (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and 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.

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 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.

www.mhec.org

The New England Board of Higher Education 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.

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 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.

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 include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, 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 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.