



December 2020

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS REPORT

Beginning with the Annual Data Report that was published in December 2020, NC-SARA changed the nomenclature used for reporting periods and thus the titles of its reports. All distance education enrollments that were reported to NC-SARA took place the fall term before the report-date year, and Out-of-State Learning Placements (OOSLP) took place in the previous calendar year.

The report that follows is about fall 2015 distance education enrollment data.

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a voluntary, interstate reciprocal 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 coordinated 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

NC-SARA 2016 Inaugural Enrollment Report

Notes on the First NC-SARA Enrollment Reports September 22, 2016

The enrollment data posted on the NC-SARA website was reported to NC-SARA in May, 2016 in the first of what will be an annual reporting cycle. As expected, this first attempt was challenging for all of us – institutions and NC-SARA alike.

The data is organized in response to two basic questions accessed from the drop down menu: *Where are my state's institutions enrolling students?* and *Who's enrolling students in my state?*

First, many thanks to everyone who worked very hard to ensure accurate reporting; you've provided the best-available data on this topic. Next year should be much easier for you.

But the data clearly presents problems, the most obvious being that many, many institutions (about a third) reported their out-of-state enrollments to be *zero across all states*. A much smaller group of institutions (about 20) failed to report at all.

As part of the SARA application process, institutions agree to provide requested data; institutions that failed to report are therefore not abiding by that commitment. And while there certainly are reasons why a SARA institution could accurately report having zero enrollments in a particular state (they actually had no students there, or the number of students was fewer than ten and was therefore, as requested, reported as zero), institutions join SARA *because* they have out-of-state distance education enrollments.

While it is certainly possible that some institutions reporting zero enrollments across the board *could* be reporting in accordance with SARA data reporting directions, that is highly unlikely to be the case for all that did so. It seems more likely that institutions either chose to report in the easiest way possible (zeros across all states), the people who reported don't know how to access their institution's data, they don't know where their students are, or some combination of those factors. If institutions don't know where their students are, in addition to not meeting their commitment to SARA, they can't demonstrate that they are in compliance with other states' laws and regulations – an obvious problem in regard to state regulation and likely to be of serious consequence in coming federal Program Integrity rules. WCET's State Authorization Network (SAN) has done some "best practice" work on reporting; we'll work with them to make that information more widely available.

Some complications came from differences between NC-SARA reporting parameters and those of IPEDS; others came from confusion about reporting any internships or other face-to-face activities. NC-SARA will review those differences before the next reporting cycle. And the direction to report zero for state enrollments below ten undoubtedly led to many reported zeros; we will reconsider that issue, as well.

This fall, NC-SARA will convene its data working group to evaluate this first collection cycle and make recommendations for any needed modifications and/or consequences for failure to report. Let's all do a better job next time.

Marshall A. Hill