



Promoting Postsecondary Access, Affordability, & Quality Assurance

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a nonprofit organization that helps expand students' access to postsecondary educational opportunities and ensure more efficient, consistent, and effective regulation of distance education programs.

NC-SARA serves as a national leader in enhancing quality and consumer protections in interstate postsecondary distance education by helping states, institutions, policymakers, and students understand the value of participating in state authorization reciprocity agreements (SARA).

What are State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements?

SARA is a set of agreements between member states, districts, and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate distance education program offerings. These reciprocity agreements help streamline distance education regulations, improve coordination between states and higher education institutions, and also help ensure member states and participating institutions adhere to a set of basic consumer protections for students.

All accredited degree-granting institutions in SARA member states – public, private, independent, non-profit, and for-profit – have the opportunity to participate in SARA. Institutions pay between \$2,000-\$6,000 annually to NC-SARA, based on enrollment – a starkly more affordable investment when compared to paying fees to states individually that could total upwards of 13 times this amount.

As of January 2021, roughly 90% of all U.S. postsecondary institutions that offer distance education programs (2,200 institutions) voluntarily participate in these agreements across 49 member states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In fall 2019 (the latest available data), more than 3 million students were enrolled exclusively in distance education programs at SARA-participating institutions – a 7.5% increase over fall 2018 enrollments.

NC-SARA'S INITIATIVES

NC-SARA undertakes key national initiatives on behalf of its member states and participating institutions. Here are some examples of our latest work:



Strengthening Student Consumer Protections.

NC-SARA member states provide student protections against false or misleading information by SARA-participating institutions through investigation and resolution of allegations of dishonest or fraudulent activity. NC-SARA maintains a publicly available online database of such SARA-related student complaints.



Improving Transparency through Annual Data Report on Interstate Distance Education Programs.

NC-SARA releases an annual distance education enrollment report and dataset, which analyzes the latest available data on distance education enrollment and out-of-state learning placements at SARA participating institutions. This information provides key insights for states, policymakers, and institutions into distance education enrollment trends across state lines.



Reporting on Return on Investment.

States pay no fees to NC-SARA, and annual costs for institutions are as low as \$2,000 – dramatically lower than an institution would pay for state-by-state authorization. The low cost of the SARA model reduces institutional costs that might otherwise be passed down to students and taxpayers. NC-SARA will release a national study in 2021 to learn more about these institutional cost savings.



Simplifying Access to Distance Education Program Information.

NC-SARA is developing a searchable database of verified distance education program information from SARA institutions nationwide in an effort to make it easier for current and prospective students to find the program that best fits their needs and career goals. This resource will launch in 2021.

BEFORE & AFTER NC-SARA

BEFORE

EXPENSIVE: The process of compiling and processing applications to offer distance education across state lines imposed costs on both institutions and states – costs that could be passed on to students in the form of higher tuition or fees.

OVERWHELMING BUREAUCRACY: Adhering to varying state requirements and regulations created enormous bureaucracy for institutions.

LACK OF PROTECTIONS: Because states had varying degrees of accountability requirements for institutions, students could not rely on a consistent set of consumer protections to help assure quality distance education programs.

CONFUSING: Institutions struggled to understand and juggle varying state requirements for distance education regulations, fee structures, and data reporting on different annual calendars.

LIMITED OPTIONS: Because institutions could not offer distance education programs across state lines without first obtaining specific approvals from each state, students' distance education programming options were limited.

INCONSISTENT DATA: States collect different data sets about higher education programs and outcomes, leading to inconsistent reporting on distance education programs.

COST



PROCESS



PROTECTIONS



REGULATIONS



OPTIONS



DATA



AFTER

AFFORDABLE: NC-SARA has maintained low fees for states to become members and for institutions to participate in order to more easily offer distance education opportunities across state lines.

SIMPLIFIED PROCESS: Because NC-SARA streamlined the application process for all SARA member states, it is now easier for institutions and states to ensure adherence to state authorization requirements for distance education across the country.

ENHANCED PROTECTIONS: SARA member states must adhere to a consistent set of requirements to help guarantee appropriate protections for students.

STREAMLINED REGULATIONS: SARA establishes one uniform set of state distance education regulations, ensuring more efficient and effective oversight of distance learning programs.

CHOICE: Because 49 states and three territories are SARA members, and more than 2,160 institutions are participating institutions in SARA, students now have a wide variety of interstate distance education programming options.

BETTER DATA: NC-SARA requires institutions to annually report in-state and out-of-state online enrollments and out-of-state learning activities such as practice teaching, clinical work, etc., and compiles that information into a publicly accessible database.

BENEFITS OF SARA

- Improves distance education program quality nationwide.
- Makes it easier for students to access distance education across state lines.
- Reduces costs and bureaucracy for states and institutions.
- Improves coordination between states on higher education opportunities.
- Provides valuable oversight of distance education programs.
- Shares out-of-state learning experience data like clinical hours, internships, and practice teaching.

To learn more about our student consumer protection efforts, visit www.nc-sara.org.



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