



Q&A - 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines NC-SARA Webinar June 21, 2021

The following categories of questions were not able to be addressed during the webinar offered on June 21, 2021; NC-SARA has done our best to answer them in this document. Please feel free to address additional questions to info@nc-sara.org. Please also see NC-SARA's 6.1.2021 Updated Information and FAQs about the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines for accreditors on the [NC-SARA website](#) for more information.

Are the 21st Century Guidelines replacing the 2011 C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education?

On March 23, 2021, C-RAC accepted the 21st Century Guidelines and has retired their 2011 Guidelines. See C-RAC's announcement [HERE](#).

Will there be a reporting requirement for these guidelines?

There is the expectation that the 21st Century Guidelines will serve the same purpose as the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines for the purposes of SARA. SARA State Portal Entities (SPEs) have the authority to review whether institutions are abiding by the Guidelines when issues arise concerning quality. Should a concern about an institution in a SARA member state come about, SPEs may refer to the Guidelines to investigate complaints or claims that the institution does not meet the Guidelines, or as a basis to engage in conversation with an institution's accreditor about the institution's accreditation status.

Is the two-year timeline for institutions to come into compliance or is it for accreditors to adopt their new practices? Or, both?

The two-year implementation timeline that NC-SARA staff will propose to the NC-SARA Board is to allow sufficient time for SARA State Portal Entities, regional compacts, and institutions to learn about the Guidelines in alignment with SARA policy. Additionally, NC-SARA will work collaboratively with accreditors as well as other distance education organizations to support institutional transitions to meeting the expectations identified in the 21st Century Guidelines. Each accreditor will continue to perform its review of distance education through its own accreditation processes and standards. However, the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines, and now the 21st Century Guidelines, function as a point of reference for accreditors.

What if our accreditor decides not to use them, as each guideline can be clearly mapped to current criteria or standards for accreditation?

Institutions may wish to develop and maintain a documentation list that addresses their accreditor's standards for the review of distance education and the *21st Century Guidelines*. Then, if a concern arises from SARA, institutions are able to address the concern using the documentation they already have on hand for accreditation purposes. In addition, alignment with the *Guidelines* as outlined in SARA policy must be demonstrated.

Can you clarify the expectation for disaggregation of outcomes by modality?

This item is a description of what information prospective students should have access to, under the category of Institutional Transparency and Disclosures, The group of distance education and quality assurance experts that created the *21st Century Guidelines* believe that being able to disaggregate outcomes by modality is an essential practice to ensuring equity of outcomes regardless of delivery model, and that prospective students should have assurances that regardless of modality, they should expect equitable student success outcomes.

Can you please clarify if the *21st Century Guidelines* as NC-SARA would be using them only apply in the context of enrolled students taking credit-bearing courses offered by the SARA participating institution, or is the application broader?

The scope of SARA covers all of the institution's interstate distance education offerings; SARA is not programmatic in nature.

Is there an update from the Higher Learning Commission regarding the *21st Century Guidelines*? What about Middle States Commission on Higher Education?

HLC has posted "a statement of guidelines as a resource for its member institutions and its Peer Corps" on its website, [HERE](#). MSCHE has not publicly announced anything regarding the *21st Century Guidelines*. NC-SARA will continue to monitor accreditors' potential acceptance and share this information with SARA constituents.

What if NC-SARA's Board adopts the guidelines but an accreditor doesn't?

For SARA purposes, institutions would still need to attest that the institution meets and agrees to comply with the *21st Century Guidelines*. Adherence to the guidelines is a requirement for institutions to participate in SARA.

Where do I go for additional information?

NC-SARA will continue to share more information about the implementation timeline, resources to help states and institutions, and process details after the October NC-SARA board meeting. For additional information, you may always contact info@nc-sara.org