INTRODUCTIONS

Host: Lori Williams, President and CEO, NC-SARA

Sally M. Johnstone, President, NCHEMS

Barbara Brittingham, President Emeritus, NECHE

Leroy Wade, Deputy Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development; SARA State Portal Entity; NC-SARA Board

Laurie Dodge, Vice Chancellor of Institutional Assessment and Planning, Brandman University; NC-SARA Board

Jeannie Yockey-Fine, General Counsel, NC-SARA

Melanie Booth, Director, Educational Programs and Communications, NC-SARA
• History and Context: the NC-SARA-commissioned project resulting in the *21st Century Distance Education Guidelines* for accreditors

• Development of the *21st Century Distance Education Guidelines*

• *C-RAC Guidelines* and SARA’s student consumer protections and reciprocity policies

• How SARA institutions and states reference and use the *C-RAC Guidelines*

• NC-SARA’s proposed next steps for adoption and implementation

• An update on accreditors' acceptance of the *21st Century Guidelines*
History & Context
The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements, in collaboration with the four regional higher education compacts, was established to develop and implement an effective and efficient reciprocal state-level authorization process for postsecondary distance education.

**Mission:**
- to provide broad access to postsecondary education opportunities to students across the country,
- to increase the quality and value of higher learning credentials earned via distance education, and
- to assure students are well served in a rapidly changing education landscape.
Development of the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines

Sally M. Johnstone, President, NCHEMS
Barbara Brittingham, President Emeritus, NECHE
A Little History....

• 1999 Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) asked us (WCET) to develop some common guidelines for DL.
• Revised by C-RAC members in 2011 based on originals.
• 2013 State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements formed (NC-SARA)
• 2019 NC-SARA contracted with NCHEMS to rigorously review uses of the C-RAC guidelines by quality assurance agencies and organizations using peer reviews.
• Report issued in August 2020
Results of Review

- Devolution into mild chaos
- Regional accreditors applied guidelines differently
- DEAC and QM relied on 2011 C-RAC guidelines
- NC-SARA used C-RAC guidelines in their standards for state regulators and member institutions
NCHEMS’ Process

• NCHEMS interviewed 25 online learning experts across the country and had over a dozen reviewers of the guidelines.
• Completed in February 2021
• They are posted on the C-RAC, NCHEMS, and NC-SARA websites.
Six categories

1. Institutional Capacity
2. Institutional Transparency and Disclosures
3. Academic Programs
4. Support for Students
5. Program Review
6. Academic and Institutional Integrity
Institutional Capacity

• Financial, tech infrastructure, data security, content expertise, ID, support for students, assessment of info resources
• Support for diversity, equity and inclusion in learning and support environments
• Quality supported by continual investments in technology, faculty and other student support staff development
• Students appropriately oriented to courses, LMS, and has tech support services
• Institution retains appropriate authority for academic programs regardless of relationship with OPMs/contractors/consortia
Institutional Transparency and Disclosures

• During admission process: program info, student outcomes disaggregated by modality, all costs, skills needed to succeed

• Expected levels of student engagement as active learners

• Support services available and professional licensure requirements

• Strong student orientation to include learning environment, technology, academic resources, access to support services
Academic Programs

• Academic team expertise – subject-matter, instructional design, student interaction & assessment
• Continual improvement based on evidence
• If same programs in multiple modalities – outcomes comparable
• Activities and assessments aligned with learning outcomes
Support for Students

- Academic & support staff able to guide students to services
- Continuing support toward becoming engaged learners
- Students able to access services when they need them
- Support is a collective responsibility
Program Review

- Regular cycle of review based on evidence
- Improvements documented

Academic & Institutional Integrity

- Culture of integrity
- DL programs integrated into all institutional systems
- Learning outcomes clear and public
States, SARA, and the C-RAC Guidelines

Leroy Wade
Deputy Commissioner, Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development; SARA State Portal Entity
Early on, as states began to join SARA, it was important to have distance education guidelines as a foundation for consumer protection and quality assurance.
Institutions and Distance Education Quality

Laurie Dodge

Vice Chancellor of Institutional Assessment and Planning, Brandman University
Institutions and Distance Education Quality

Institutional Benefits
• The Why
• The How
• The What

Accreditor Benefits
• Substantive Change Process
• Ensure Student Success
• Program Viability & Sustainability
• Evidence-based Continuous Improvement

U.S.D.O.E Distance Education & Innovation New Regulations
SARA Policy & C-RAC Guidelines

Jeannie Yockey-Fine
General Counsel
NC-SARA
To Be Eligible to Participate in SARA, Institutions Must:

• Be a **degree-granting** institution, awarding associate degrees or higher;

• Be physically located **in a SARA Member State**;

• Hold proper **authorization** from Congress, a U.S. State, territory or district, or a federally recognized Indian tribe to award Degrees; and

• Hold **accreditation** as a single entity from an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and whose scope of recognition, as specified by the U.S. Department of Education, includes Distance Education.

And other requirements as detailed in the **SARA Policy Manual**.
Institutions Agree To All SARA Policies

• Abide by *C-RAC’s 2011 Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education* and policies of the SARA Policy Manual.

• Be responsible for actions of any third-party providers used by the institution to operate under SARA.

• Notify home state's SARA Portal Entity of any negative changes to its accreditation status.

• And other requirements detailed in the SARA Policy Manual.
The 2011 C-RAC Guidelines are an important element of SARA’s suite of student consumer protection policies, specifically in Section 4.7 of the SARA Policy Manual, “Incorporation and use of C-RAC Guidelines”
State Portal Entities

Per the *SARA Policy Manual* regarding the institution's application for SARA participation:

“As soon as an institution is accepted into SARA, the State Portal Entity has a right to evaluate whether the institution in its work through SARA meets the C-RAC Guidelines or other SARA requirements and must investigate any claims that the institution does not meet these requirements.”
21st Century Guidelines - Updates

Melanie Booth
Director, Educational Programs & Communications
NC-SARA
Accreditors

To date: The *21st Century DE Guidelines* have been formally accepted by two of C-RAC’s accrediting commissions:

- **NWCCU’s** Distance Education Policy was revised and adopted by its Commission in April 2021.

- **NECHE’s** Guidelines for Preparing Substantive Change Reports on the Establishment of Academic Programming Offered Through Distance Education, and their statement on the *21st Century Distance Education Guidelines* was posted in May 2021, asking that “institutions now use these instead of the C-RAC Guidelines in their reports.”

- National, programmatic, and specialized accreditors have reviewed and welcomed the *21st Century Guidelines* as well.

**Crosswalks:**
- Accreditors may provide such resources to their members in regard to their own policies and practices.
Institution Resources

1 - Session at *In The Field: NC-SARA Institution Conference* - July 20, 2021

2 - Institutions are encouraged to directly or indirectly reference the *21st Century Guidelines* in their own internal quality assurance processes for distance education, including in their processes for:

- Accreditation documentation
- Program review of existing distance education programs
- New program development policies or processes
- Faculty development
- Partnership agreements

3 - Stay in touch with your institutional accreditor (or accreditation liaison for your college or university) to learn about updates to accreditation policies or processes and any resources available.
State Resources

1 - Session at *In The Field: NC-SARA Institution Conference* - July 20, 2021

2 - SPEs are encouraged keep open communication with their institutions' accreditors to learn about updates to accreditation policies or processes and any resources available.

3 - Session at *Annual SPE Conference* – September 1-2, 2021
Next Steps - Policy

Between now and Monday August 2, 2021 – Comment Period:

• SARA state members will receive specific guidance from their regional compacts about the process by which to share comments on the 21st Century Guidelines
• SARA participating institutions were emailed a survey link from NC-SARA in order to submit comments on the 21st Century Guidelines.
• Members of the public may submit comments on the 21st Century Guidelines by emailing info@nc-sara.org. Please include a detailed rationale for your suggestions or comments.

October 2021 – NC-SARA Board Meeting:

• Board discussion and vote whether to replace language that references the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines in the SARA Policy Manual.
• NC-SARA staff will be recommending an implementation / transition period of 2 years for SARA purposes.
Next Steps - Implementation

If approved by NC-SARA's Board, NC-SARA will focus on outreach and education to support implementation:

• Continued collaboration with and outreach to C-RAC, accreditors, and CHEA
• Identification and dissemination of exemplar institutional practices and case studies
• Educational programming for SARA states and institutions – workshops, webinars, online learning modules, tools, etc.
• Continued partnership with other organizations in the distance education space, including Quality Matters, OLC, UPCEA, USDLA, WCET/SAN, and others.
Q & A
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