

October 28, 2021

NC-SARA Board Initiates Accreditors' 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Working Group

Background

When SARA was first formed, the 2011 C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education were the primary guidelines for quality distance education as no other national standards existed. States wanted assurances, through their SARA membership, that they would have the leverage afforded by the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines to investigate participating institutions that might be in violation of SARA policy, and/or to work with institutions' accreditors to support quality assurance. Therefore, the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines became an important aspect of SARA – in policy and process – for helping assure student consumer protections for SARA state members.

Since SARA's inception, SARA State Portal Entity staff have used the 2011 C-RAC Guidelines to request assurance from participating institutions that they will abide by the Guidelines to ensure distance education quality. Then, as now, there is an expectation that the new 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines will serve the same purpose, should the NC-SARA Board approve their use in SARA policy.

Policy changes to replace the references to the 2011 C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education with the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines were tabled by the NC-SARA Board at the Spring 2021 Board meeting to give time to collect input during a two-month comment period June-August 2021. After listening to NC-SARA staff share about the feedback received in the comments, the Executive Committee of the Board at their August 20, 2021 meeting recommended tabling the policy changes again in favor of forming a 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Working Group.

Working Group Activity Period

Start date: October 30, 2021

End Date: October 31, 2022

Work Group Purpose and Charge

The purpose of the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Working Group is to review and consider input from multiple stakeholders and to make recommendations to the NC-SARA Board in

order to resolve issues associated with NC-SARA policy regarding the retired 2011 C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education and the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines. The Group is charged with:

1. Recommending changes to the SARA Policy Manual that references the retired 2011 C-RAC Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education. Key questions to be addressed include:
 - a. Should NC-SARA take out references to the retired 2011 C-RAC Guidelines?
 - i. If so, should the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines be substituted, given that several regional accreditors have adopted these instead?
 1. And if so, what guidance should NC-SARA provide to assist SPEs in the use of these guidelines in implementing SARA policy?
 - ii. If not, should the reference to accreditor guidelines be deleted altogether?
 1. And if so, should NC-SARA explore the possibility of working with SPEs to produce a set of additional provisions in SARA policy and/or SPE review processes, including a potential set of SPE guidelines for their reviews of SARA participating institutions to ensure quality?
2. Ensuring stakeholder input is received and included in the working group's recommendations to the board, as well as included in any policy change recommendations that NC-SARA staff brings forward, and that stakeholder input is received on these working group recommendations for process and/or policy changes prior to a board vote.
3. Preparing a final report with recommendations for SARA policy and process, taking into consideration the respective roles of accreditation and SARA with regard to the 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines. This report would be shared with the NC-SARA board for consideration by September 30, 2022, one month ahead of the Fall 2022 Board Meeting, with an update on progress to be shared with the Board for the Spring 2022 meeting.

Work Group Appointments

The NC-SARA Board's Executive Committee has called for a 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Working Group whose members are appointed by the Board Chair with input from the board, the NC-SARA staff, and the four regional compacts. The 21st Century Distance Education Guidelines Working Group will be chaired by two board members, Leah Matthews, president of the Distance Education Accreditation Commission (DEAC), and Patricia O'Brien, vice president at the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), an accrediting body, both with extensive experience in quality assurance in distance education through accreditation. The Working Group includes a state portal entity/regulator from each of the four regions and institutional representatives, most of whom are board members who also contributed to the development of the 21st Century Guidelines. The Working Group also includes NC-SARA's president Lori Williams. NC-SARA's Senior Director, Melanie Booth, a former WSCUC vice president, serves as a resource to the Working Group.

The following participants are invited serve on the Working Group:

Name	Title	State	Role/Region
Leah Matthews	President and CEO Distance Education Accreditation Commission	N/A	Board Member; 21 st Cent Guidelines contributor; Accreditor/SREB
Patricia O'Brien	Senior Vice President New England Commission of Higher Education	MA	Board Member; 2011 C-RAC Guidelines contributor; Accreditor/NEBHE
Pam Quinn	Retired Provost/CEO LeCroy Center Dallas County Community College District	TX	Board Member; 2011 C-RAC Guidelines contributor/SREB
Laurie Dodge	Vice Chancellor & Vice Provost, University of Massachusetts Global Campus	MA	Board Member; 2011 C-RAC Guidelines contributor/NEBHE
Chris Bustamante	Executive Director Arizona Community College Coordinating Council	AZ	Board Member; 2011 C-RAC Guidelines contributor/WICHE
Peter Smith	Orkand Chair and Professor of Innovative Practices in Higher Education, University of Maryland Global Campus	MD	Board Member; 2011 C-RAC Guidelines contributor/SREB
Leroy Wade	Deputy Commissioner Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development	MO	Board Member; Treasurer; SPE MHEC region
Heather DeLange	Director Office of Private Postsecondary Education	CO	SPE WICHE region
Alexander Nally	Assistant General Counsel Massachusetts Department of Higher Education	MA	SPE NEBHE region
Sarah Levy	Executive Director, Postsecondary Licensing, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education	KY	SPE SREB region

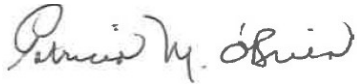
Michael Thomas	President NEBHE	MA	Board Member; NEBHE region
Lori Williams	President & CEO	N/A	NC-SARA
Melanie Booth	Senior Director, Educational Programs and Communications	N/A	NC-SARA; former accreditor; resource to the committee



Teresa Lubbers
Commissioner, Indiana Commission for Higher Education
NC-SARA Board Chair



Leah Matthews
President and CEO, Distance Education Accreditation Commission (DEAC)
NC-SARA Board Member



Patricia O'Brien
Senior Vice President, New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)
NC-SARA Board Member