



March 2026 Tuesday Topic: SARA Student Complaints and NC-SARA Updates

March 10, 2026



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Webinar Logistics

- Please use the chat and/or raise hand feature to submit questions
- The Closed Caption option is available
- The webinar will be recorded
- The webinar recording and slides will be posted on the SPE Website



Part 1: SARA Student Complaints

- Welcome
- SARA Complaints Working Group Overview
- Walkthrough of Complaint Reporting Process and Draft Resources
- Q & A for Presenters
- Breakout Groups
- Break



Part 2: Report Out & NC-SARA Updates

- Breakout Groups Report-Out
- Q & A for Presenters
- NC-SARA Updates: Strategic Plan & Data Reporting
- Q & A for Presenters
- Closing Remarks



Welcome!

Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.
President
NC-SARA



Introduction of Speakers

- **Sara Appel, M.A.**, Director of M-SARA, Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)
- **Marianne Boeke, Ph.D.**, President, NC-SARA
- **Rachel Christeson, Ph.D.**, Senior Director, Research & Planning, NC-SARA
- **Sarah Levy, J.D.**, Senior Director, Policy & Regulatory Affairs, NC-SARA





SARA Complaints Working Group



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SARA Complaints Working Group Charge

The Complaints Working Group was tasked with providing direction on the implementation of the policy modification proposal to expand complaints data collection (reference PMP24-0641)

Section 7.1.a. Effective beginning January 1, 2026:

The number of complaints from out-of-state students, by SARA institution, **complaint type**, and **student location**, appealed to the state's SARA State Portal Entity after the person making the complaint has completed the institution's and/or governing board's (if relevant) complaint resolution process. **Complaint types will be determined between NC-SARA and SPEs and updated as needed.**



SARA Complaints Working Group Membership

- Sara Appel, MHEC
- Emily Bjornberg, CT SPE
- Tiamekia Cezaire, MA SPE
- Heather Delange, CO SPE
- Kathy Garrett, KY SPE
- Molly Hall-Martin, WICHE
- Kate McCartan, MN SPE
- Charlotte Ochs, NEBHE

NC-SARA Conveners: Rachel Christeson & Sarah Levy





SARA Student Complaints Collection and Submission



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SARA Student Complaint Types

1. Academic Quality

- i. Operation of distance education programs consistent with practices expected by institutional accreditors (and, if applicable, programmatic/specialized accreditors) and/or the C-RAC Guidelines for distance education.

2. Accreditation

- i. Accuracy of information about the institution's accreditation and/or any programmatic/specialized accreditation held by the institution's programs.

3. Professional Licensing

- i. Accuracy of information about whether coursework meets any relevant professional licensing requirements or the requirements of specialized accrediting agencies.
- ii. Lack of communication / disclosure regarding licensing requirements.



SARA Student Complaint Types

4. Recruitment and Marketing

- i. Veracity of recruitment and marketing materials, including admission requirements, time to completion statistics, accuracy of job placement data, and whether the institution has approval to offer distance education.

5. Tuition, Fees, and Financial Aid

- i. Accuracy of information about tuition, fees, and financial aid.

6. Technology

- i. Lack of technical support; additional undisclosed fees; undisclosed software requirements



SARA Student Complaint Types

7. Transfer of Credit

- i. Accuracy of information about whether the institution's coursework will transfer to other institutions.

8. Violation of Institution Policy / Procedures

- i. To include disability accommodations, withdrawal procedures, academic dishonesty / student misconduct, and any other administrative actions in violation of institution policy.
- ii. Not the decision - but was the process / policy followed in making the decision? Was the institution responsive to the student and SPE?
- iii. Could include the institution's complaint process as well.
- iv. Academic progress - barriers to completion; dissertation issues; advising; dismissal (not for conduct or grades); issues with institution providing necessary materials to agencies, licensing boards, etc.

9. Other



SARA Student Complaint Resolution Statuses

- Resolved in favor of the person making the complaint
 - Resolved to the student's satisfaction
- Resolved in favor of the institution
 - Resolved to the institution's satisfaction, but not the student's. Includes no violation by the institution.
- Resolved by agreement
 - Student and the institution mutually resolved the agreement.
- Pending resolution
 - Still investigating or awaiting institution response in that quarter.



SARA Student Complaints Collection and Submission

[LIVE DEMO]





SARA Student Complaints Draft Resources



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Draft SARA Student Complaints Reporting Handbook | Overview

This document provides detailed information about complaint reporting requirements, including step-by-step instructions on how to report complaints through the SARA Portal.



Draft SARA Student Complaints Reporting Handbook (cont'd)

- Why do I need to report complaints?
- When do I report?
- Which institutions do I need to report on?
- What do I need to report?
- How do I report appealed complaints?



Draft - SPE Best Practices for SARA Student Complaints | Overview

This document will help navigate the SARA State Portal Entity (SPE) to sections of the *SARA Policy Manual* that cover the complaint-related questions listed and connect to additional resources that may help SPEs understand the relevant SARA policy.



Draft SPE Best Practices doc (cont'd)

- What is a SARA student complaint?
- What is my responsibility as a SPE regarding SARA student complaints?
- What resources do I have as a SPE to help with SARA student complaint responsibilities?
- How as a SPE am I held accountable for my SARA student complaint responsibilities?
- What communication is expected that I will/may have with another SPE?
- What is a SARA-participating institution's responsibility regarding SARA student complaints?



Managing SARA Student Complaints (SPE Online Learning Course) | Overview

In this course SARA SPE staff will learn about the SARA policy that affects the management and reporting of SARA Student Complaints. Experienced SARA SPE staff share their process for managing student complaints and communicating with students, institutional staff, and other stakeholders.



Managing SARA Student Complaints (SPE Online Learning Course, cont'd)

- An Overview: How SARA Protects Students
- The Student's Journey to Filing a Complaint
- SARA Policy & Process Regarding Student Complaints
- What Kinds of Complaints Does SARA Address?
- Effective Practices for SARA SPE Management of Student Complaints
- Reporting SARA Complaints to NC-SARA



Questions?

Please use the chat and/or raise hand feature to submit questions





Breakout Group Discussions



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Discussion Group Questions

1. What other questions do you have about handling SARA student complaints?
1. What other questions do you have about reporting SARA student complaints?
1. What examples / scenarios would be helpful to include?
1. Are the resources missing anything?

Breakout Group Facilitators

Breakout 1 - Emily Bjornberg, CT SPE

Breakout 2 - Tiamekia Cezaire, MA SPE

Breakout 3 - Heather DeLange, CO SPE

Breakout 4 - Kate McCartan, MN SPE

**Breakout 5 - Charlotte Ochs, SARA
Director (NEHBE)**

The background of the slide features a blue-tinted photograph of two women. On the left, an older woman with short white hair and glasses has her hands clasped in front of her, looking intently at a laptop. On the right, a younger woman with dark hair and glasses is also looking at the laptop, appearing to be in a collaborative discussion. The overall scene suggests a professional meeting or a mentorship session.

TRANSITION TO BREAKOUT ROOMS



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BREAKOUT SESSIONS IN PROGRESS





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BREAK

11:05 AM - 11:15 AM MT

Discussion Group Report Out

1. What other questions do you have about handling SARA student complaints?
1. What other questions do you have about reporting SARA student complaints?
1. What examples / scenarios would be helpful to include?
1. Are the resources missing anything?

Facilitator

Sara Appel, Director, M-SARA

Breakout 1 - Emily Bjornberg, CT SPE

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Updates from NC-SARA



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NC-SARA Strategic Plan



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NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Started working on the strategic plan in 2024 with the NC-SARA Board Strategy Committee

- Reviewed the current higher education trends
- Reviewed the Mission Statement and Core Work of NC-SARA
- Reviewed the blurb of SARA and NC-SARA
- We surveyed 5 constituent groups in June 2025: NC-SARA Board; Regional Education Compact SARA staff; SPEs; SARA participating Institutions; & NC-SARA staff
- Listening Sessions in September & October 2025: NC-SARA staff; Regional Education Compact SARA Staff; and the NC-SARA Board



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Recommendations:

- Modernize Digital Tools and Submission Systems
- Strengthen Compliance Guidance and Oversight
- Expand Training and Onboarding Resources
- Continue and Deepen Federal Policy Engagement
- Enhance Storytelling and Public Communication
- Tailor Stakeholder Engagement Strategies



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Categories of risks / challenges identified:

- Mission, Role, and Governance Clarity
- Operational and Resource Capacity
- Policy Clarity, Consistency, and Compliance
- Strategic Alignment and Organizational Direction
- Federal and External Environment Pressures
- Data, Technology, and Process Infrastructure
- Culture, Communication, and Collaboration



NC-SARA Strategic Plan

Next steps:

- May 2026 – present outline of goals and objectives to Board
- August 2026 – prepare draft with Board Strategy Committee / Board
- October 2026 – review draft with Board
- Early 2027 – Board approves NC-SARA Strategic Plan





NC-SARA Data Reporting Updates



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Important Annual Data Reporting Dates

- **2025 Annual Data Handbook Available:** February 2026
- **2025 Annual Data Collection Webinar:** March 18, 2026
- **2025 Annual Data Collection Window:** May 15 – June 15, 2026



Changes for Future Data Collection

Under consideration for 2029:

- 12-month EDEE – **change reporting dates?**
- EDEE: Student program (6-digit CIP), degree level, military status, dual enrollment status
- OOSLP: **Placement program (6-digit CIP)**, degree level, site location

Future consideration:

- In-state and virtual learning placements
- Degree or course completions
- Non-credit offerings
- Additional student demographics (gender, age group, etc.)

Feedback? Take our survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NCSARAEExpandingDataCollection>



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Changes for Future Data Collection

Timeline:

- 2026 – consider options; PMP to remove dates and 2-digit CIP reference
- 2027 – finalize definitions and reporting process
- 2028 – institutions begin collecting new data; pilot reporting process; report in old format
- 2029 – begin reporting new data in new format



Feedback? Take our survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NCSARAExpandingDataCollection>



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Thank You!

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 info@nc-sara.org

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/nc-sara>