



MEDIA RELEASE

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First SREB states join SARA

Boulder, Colorado – Louisiana, Virginia and West Virginia have been approved by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), as the first states in the compact's region to become members of the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA). Virginia has an effective operational date of today; Louisiana and West Virginia have an effective operational date of December 1, 2014. These states join Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota and Washington as members of SARA. SARA is a nationwide initiative of states that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The effort is funded by a \$3 million grant from Lumina Foundation and fees paid by institutions.

“For many students, online classes are key to graduating, which is critical to state goals to increase college completion rates and build a better educated work force,” explained SREB President Dave Spence. “Adult students who juggle other responsibilities when they return to complete degrees stand to benefit in particular.”

Louisiana's Board of Regents will serve as the state “portal” agency for SARA. The Regents coordinate efforts for the state's 34 public colleges, universities and professional schools. They also serve as the state liaison to Louisiana's accredited, independent institutions of higher learning. The Board of Regents represents the public higher education community before all branches of government and the public and maintains close contact with student interests through the Council of Student Body Presidents.

“Distance education has been like the Wild West, growing so fast that meaningful regulation and student protection has been difficult,” said Peter Blake, director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). “This agreement brings some much-needed organization to the process and saves the institutions time and money.” SCHEV is the Commonwealth's coordinating body for higher education and will serve as the state portal agency for SARA. SCHEV makes higher education public policy recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly in such areas as capital and operating budget planning, enrollment projections, institutional technology needs and student financial aid.

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission develops and oversees a public policy agenda for West Virginia's four-year colleges and universities. A source of support for institutions and students, the Commission's work includes academic affairs, administrative services, finance and facilities, financial aid, health sciences, human resources, legal services, policy and planning, science and research, and student affairs. The Commission will serve as the SARA state portal agency. “Making distance education courses more readily accepted across state lines will help more students progress toward their degrees,” said Dr. Paul L. Hill, Chancellor of the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. “Our institutions are doing a great job at growing and leveraging online offerings, and West Virginia's participation in SARA will serve to bolster those forward-looking efforts.”

The SARA agreements are overseen by the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and are being implemented by the four regional higher education interstate compacts: the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC), the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). Once a state joins SARA, accredited degree-granting institutions in the state that offer distance education courses can seek approval to participate in SARA from their state. When approved, these institutions will be able to operate in other participating SARA states without seeking independent authorization. Participating in SARA is entirely voluntary for institutions, as it is for states.

“SARA allows states to focus on their home-state institutions, rather than on institutions from many other states,” explained Marshall A. Hill, executive director of NC-SARA. “SARA can help expand educational offerings available to state residents and will significantly reduce costs for institutions that are active in online education, lessening this particular need to raise fees and thereby supporting affordability.”

As of October 16, 2014, SARA-enabling legislation has passed in an additional 13 states and three states have determined that no legislation is needed to enable participation in SARA.

About NC-SARA, MHEC, NEBHE, SREB, WICHE and Lumina Foundation

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) is a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education. The initiative is administered by the country’s four regional higher education compacts (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and WICHE) and overseen by NC-SARA. States and institutions that choose to participate agree to operate under common standards and procedures, providing a more uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states and better resolution of student complaints.
www.nc-sara.org

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact is a nonprofit regional organization assisting Midwestern states in advancing higher education through interstate cooperation and resource sharing. MHEC seeks to fill its interstate mission through programs that expand postsecondary opportunity and success; promote innovative approaches to improving institutional and system productivity; improve affordability to students and states; and enhance connectivity between higher education and the workplace. Member states are: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.
www.mhec.org

The New England Board of Higher Education promotes greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England. It works across the six New England states to engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development, and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance; promote policies, programs, and best practices to assist the states in implementing important regional higher education policies; promote regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources; and provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic well-being of New England.
www.nebhe.org

The Southern Regional Education Board works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Atlanta. SREB states currently participate in SREB’s Electronic Campus Regional Reciprocity Agreement, and SREB is working closely with SARA to expand reciprocity nationwide. Member states are Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.
www.sreb.org

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing, and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education’s contributions to the region’s social, economic, and civic life. WICHE’s members include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai’i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate).
www.wiche.edu

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina’s outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. For more information logon to www.luminafoundation.org.