SARA Overview and Update

State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement for Distance Education

NEBHE
SREB
NC-SARA
MHEC
WICHE

National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

A voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of distance education

What's the problem? (1)

- Our country lags many others in the educational attainment of our 18-34 age population.

- Distance education can play an important role in increasing attainment. We need to maximize its contributions.

What's the problem? (2)

- States and territories regulate higher education within their borders, with varying requirements for out-of-state institutions that want to do business in the state.

- At present there is no alternative to each institution separately pursuing any needed approvals (state authorization) in each state and territory where it enrolls students.

What's the problem? (3)

- Consequently, thousands of institutions must contact and work with as many as 54 states and territories, and, sometimes, with multiple regulatory agencies in those states.

- That process is inefficient, costly, and not effective in supporting access to high quality distance education throughout the country.
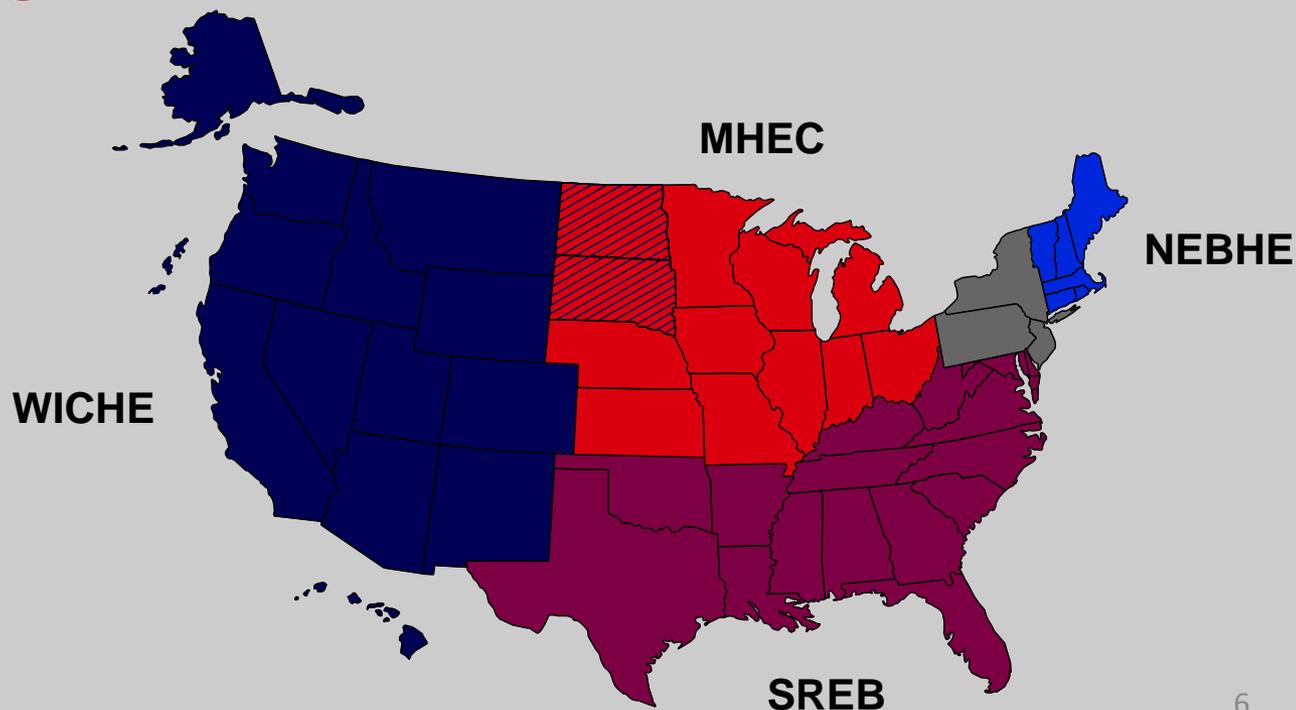
Goals

SARA establishes a state-level reciprocity process that will support the nation in efforts to increase the educational attainment of its people by making state authorization:

- more efficient, effective, and uniform in regard to necessary and reasonable standards of practice that could span states;

- more effective in dealing with quality and integrity issues that have arisen in some online/distance education offerings; and

- less costly for states and institutions and, thereby, the students they serve.

The SARA solution

A nation-wide system of reciprocity administered by the four existing regional compacts

MHEC

NEBHE

WICHE

SREB

Essential principles of SARA (1)

- Voluntary for states and institutions.
- Acknowledges the traditional roles within higher education's "accountability triad": federal government, states, and accrediting bodies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Essential principles of SARA (2)

- Lays out a framework for state-level reciprocity, including a governance structure, implementation by the four regional higher education compacts (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB, WICHE), a National Council for SARA to ensure comprehensive national coverage, and a financial plan to support operations.

Essential principles of SARA (3)

- Requires states to approve their in-state institutions for SARA participation (based upon institutional accreditation and financial stability) and resolve student complaints.

- SARA states agree to impose no additional (non-SARA) fees or requirements on institutions from other SARA states.

Essential principles of SARA (4)

- Open to degree-granting postsecondary institutions from all sectors: public colleges and universities; independent institutions, both non-profit and for-profit.

- Sets forth a reasonable, uniform set of triggers of "physical presence".

- Preserves state approval and oversight of on-the-ground campuses.

Essential principles of SARA (5)

- Shifts principal oversight responsibilities from the state in which the distance education is being received to the "home state" of the institution offering the instruction. (Host state can also work to resolve problems.)

- Initial funding from Lumina Foundation, eventual reliance on institutional fees paid to the National Council for SARA.

Benefits to institutions

- Enables more efficient provision of distance education to a broader market.

- Reduces number of applications to other states.

- Reduces number of other-state regulations to monitor for changes.

- Reduces costs.

- Reduced costs = potentially lower fees for students.

Learn more about SARA

- NC-SARA website: www.nc-sara.org
- To receive our newsletter, sign up at: www.nc-sara.org
- Regional Education Compacts:
    - MHEC – www.mhec.org
    - NEBHE – www.nebhe.org
    - SREB – www.sreb.org
    - WICHE – www.wiche.edu