



News Release

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South Dakota Joins National Distance Education Initiative

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota was approved this week to join a nationwide effort making distance education courses more accessible to college students across state lines.

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement, known as SARA, also makes it easier for higher education institutions to participate in interstate delivery of distance education and for states to regulate the process, said Jack Warner, executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents. The Board of Regents will manage South Dakota's SARA agreement on behalf of all participating public and private postsecondary education institutions in the state.

"As distance delivery of postsecondary education grows, we must help students gain access to these opportunities, ensure that the programs are of high quality, and help resolve any complaints on behalf of consumers," Warner said. "This SARA agreement helps to make all of that possible."

South Dakota joins a regional SARA agreement being implemented by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. 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. Once approved, these institutions may then operate in other participating SARA states without seeking additional, independent authorization. Participation in SARA is voluntary on the part of all institutions.

Warner noted that by participating in SARA, South Dakota can focus on its home-state institutions, rather than on institutions from many other states. "This serves to expand educational opportunities for South Dakota citizens, while also reducing the bureaucracy, paperwork, and costs our colleges and universities encounter when working with regulations in other states," he said.

Regents' officials will begin accepting applications next month from postsecondary institutions in South Dakota that wish to participate in SARA.

There are 31 postsecondary institutions in South Dakota serving a full-time equivalent of 43,115 students, based on 2012 data reported to the U.S. Department of Education. In the six-university Board of Regents' system alone, more than 22,500 students enrolled in a distance education course last year. Major indicators of headcount, enrollment, and credit hours delivered by distance have been growing, often by large margins, since 2010.