



## **SOUTH CAROLINA**

### **COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

CHE  
06/06/2019  
Agenda Item 6.02.F

June 6, 2019

#### **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Chairman Wes Hayes and Members, Commission on Higher Education

**FROM:** Chair Terrye Seckinger, and Members, Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing

#### **Annual Report on the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) and South Carolina Activities**

#### **Background**

This annual report includes a background of the SARA initiative and updates about NC-SARA and South Carolina activities.

SARA is a voluntary, interstate reciprocity agreement that establishes comparable standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education. Its member states and U.S. territories recognize each other's participating institutions as eligible to enroll students in distance education programs. SARA membership provides better access for students to enroll in courses and programs of good quality.

In March 2016, adoption of SC Code of Laws 1976, as amended authorized the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (the Commission) to seek membership in interstate post-secondary distance education through SARA or similar auspices on behalf of the state of South Carolina. South Carolina joined SARA in June 2016 and membership was renewed in June 2018. The Commission began accepting institutional applications to participate in SARA on July 1, 2016.

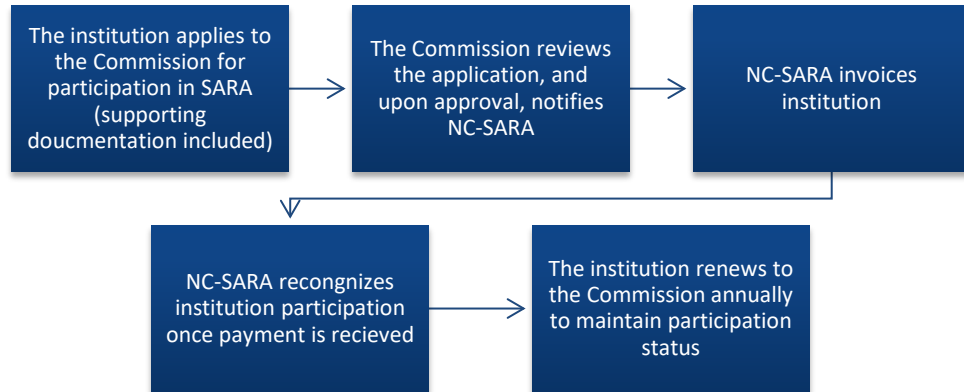
The structure of SARA is based on a model established collaboratively among officials from the four U.S. regional education compacts, state authorization agencies, and institutions. NC-SARA facilitates state approvals through the regional education compacts (for South Carolina, Southern Regional Education Board or SREB), which approve state membership, and requires application by an identified state entity (in South Carolina's case, the Commission). The SREB-SARA Steering Committee reviews and approves initial and renewal applications for state membership<sup>1</sup>. Afterwards, NC-SARA recognizes the approval from SREB-SARA.

---

<sup>1</sup> Renewals are reviewed every other year.

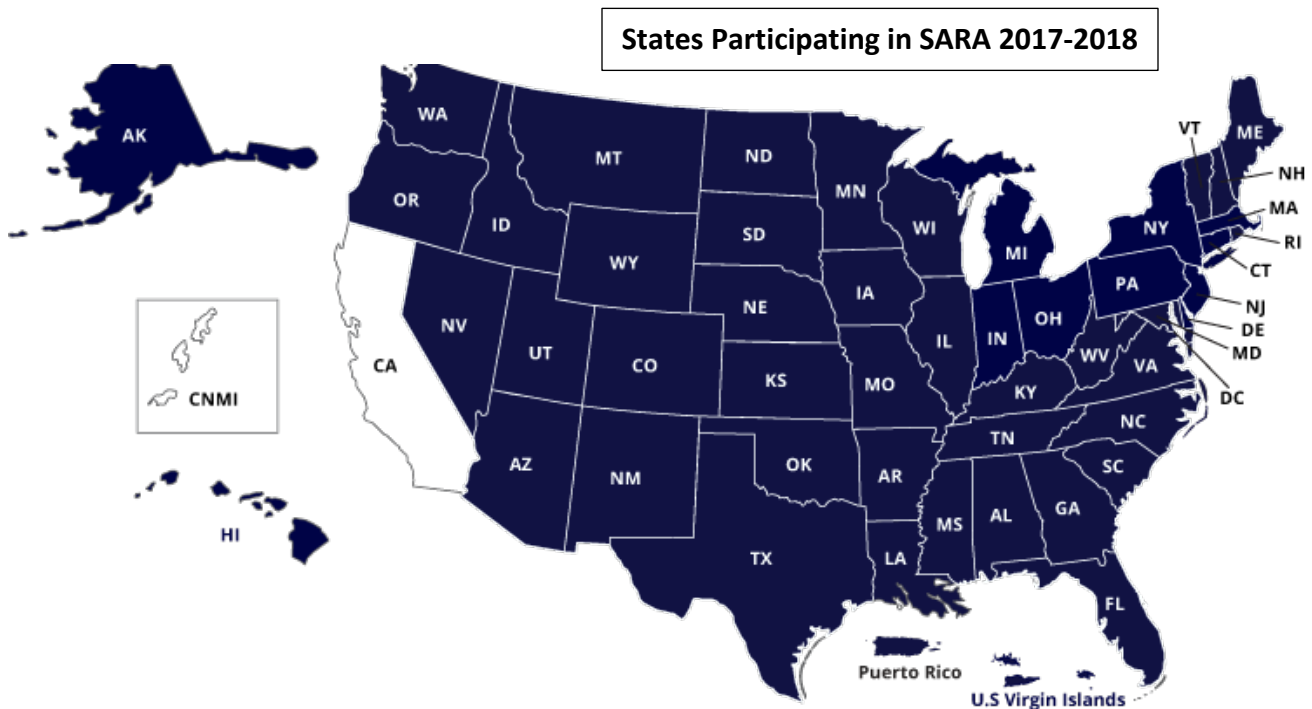
**Steps for Institutional Approval to Participate in SARA**

The process to approve South Carolina institutions to participate in SARA is as follows:



**NC-SARA Activities**

The 2017 enrollment reporting period<sup>2</sup> for SARA showed that 1,494 institutions in 47 states and the District of Columbia participated in SARA with total student participation at 986,627. The 2018 reporting period shows that 1,804 institutions in 49 states and the District of Columbia are participating in SARA with total student participation at 1,084,008. This student participation is a 9% increase over the previous year. Since the 2017 SARA enrollment reporting period, the states of Florida and Massachusetts and the territory of Puerto Rico joined.<sup>3</sup> The following chart provided by NC-SARA shows participating states in dark blue.



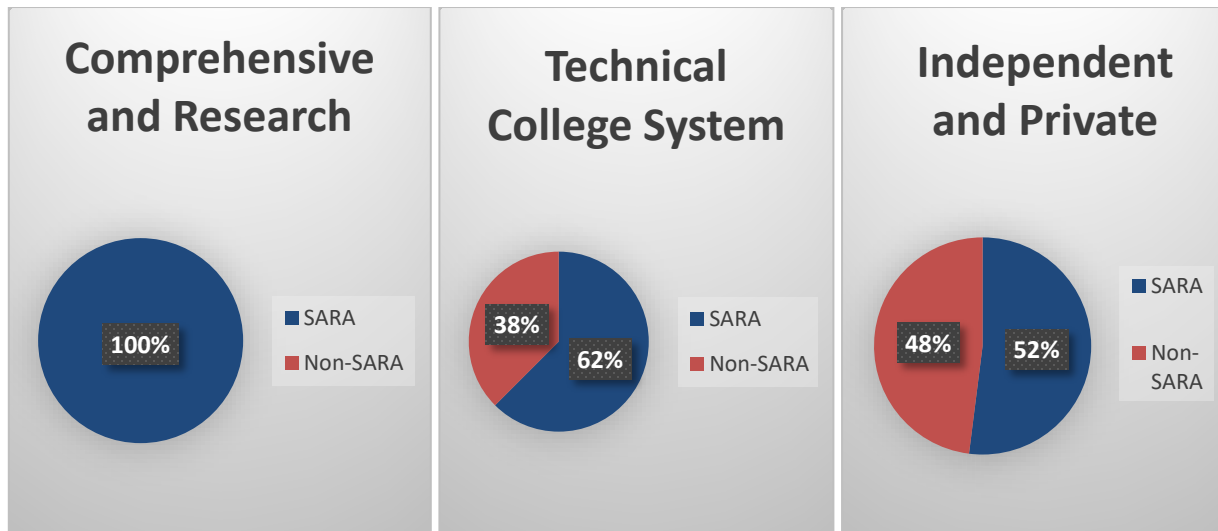
<sup>2</sup> The enrollment reporting period for SARA is conducted May-June annually and is a requirement for SARA institutions.

<sup>3</sup> Enrollment reporting data for Massachusetts and Puerto Rico are not included in the 2018 enrollment reporting because these entities joined after the reporting cycle ended.

## SC-SARA Activities

Since its inception as a SARA member state in June 2016, 36 of 54 (67%) eligible South Carolina institutions have joined SARA, including 13 of 13 (100%) from the Comprehensive and Research sector, 10 of 16 (62%) from the Technical College System, and 13 of 25 (52%) from the Independent and Private sector.

### SC Institutions Participating In SARA

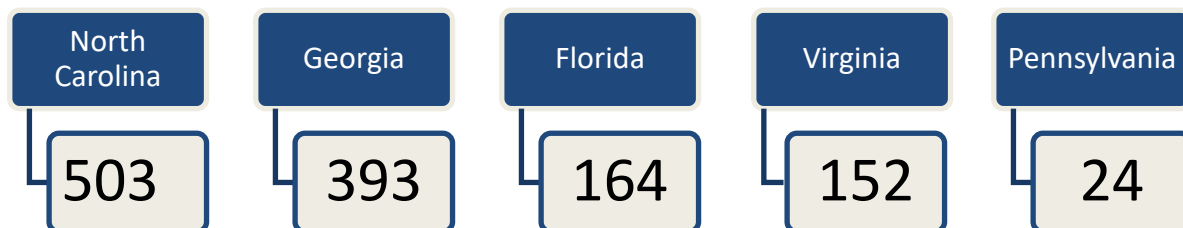


### Out-of-State Students Enrolled at SC Institutions Participating In SARA

During the 2017 data reporting period, 1,752 out-of-state students were enrolled in South Carolina institutions through SARA. Of those, 877 out-of-state students were enrolled in Comprehensive or Research institutions, 364 were enrolled at Technical Colleges, and 511 were enrolled in Independent or Private institutions. During the 2018 data reporting period, 2,301 out-of-state students were enrolled in South Carolina institutions through SARA<sup>4</sup>. Of those, 1,174, out-of-state students were enrolled in Comprehensive or Research institutions, 256 were enrolled at Technical Colleges, and 871 were enrolled in Independent or Private institutions. Overall, out-of-state students enrolled in South Carolina institutions through SARA increased 31% during the 2018 data reporting period.

The following chart shows the top five states from which South Carolina institutions enrolled distance education students through SARA and the number of students enrolled from that state.<sup>5</sup>

### Top Five SARA States from Which South Carolina SARA Institutions Are Enrolling Students



<sup>4</sup> Two SC institutions became SARA members after the 2018 reporting period ended and did not report.

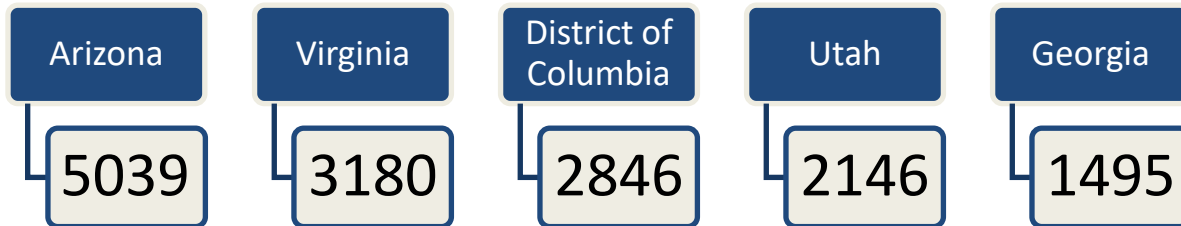
<sup>5</sup> NC-SARA uses the U.S. Department of Education's definition of distance education:

<https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/VisGlossaryPopup.aspx?idlink=713>

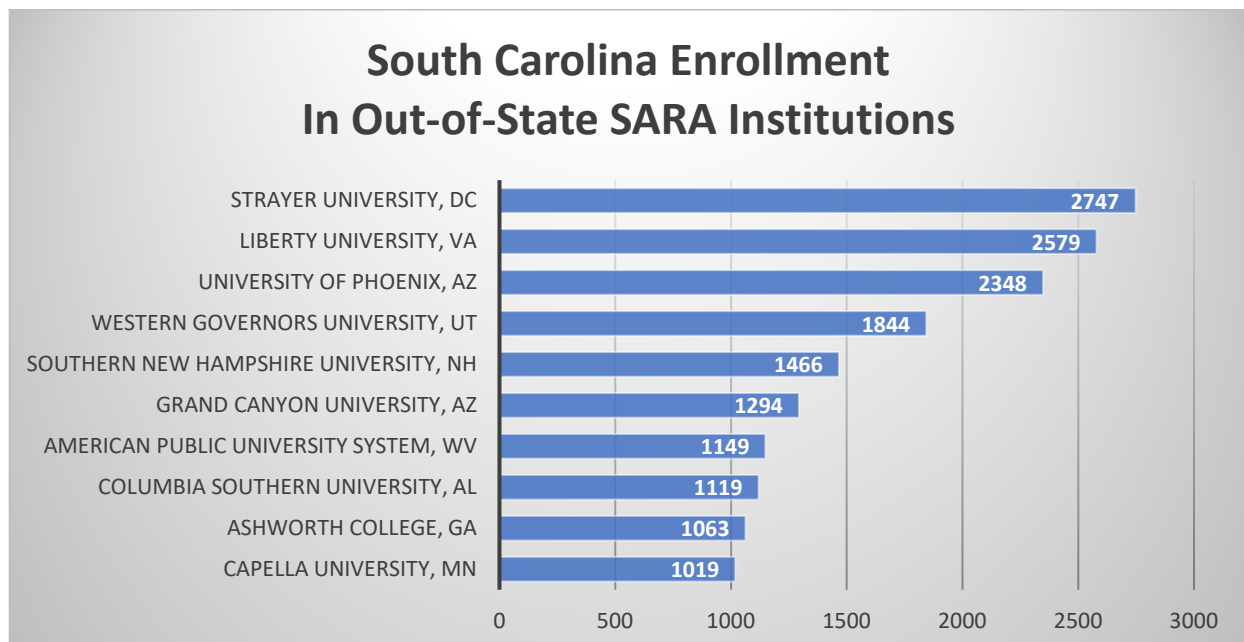
### South Carolina Residents Participating in Distance Education in Other SARA-Member States

During the 2017 enrollment data reporting period, 29,835 South Carolina residents enrolled in distance education at an out-of-state SARA-participating institution. During the 2018 enrollment data reporting period, 30,564 South Carolina residents enrolled in distance education at an out-of-state SARA-participating institution. This represents a 2.4% increase in SC resident enrollment at out-of-state SARA-participating institution from 2017 to 2018. The following chart shows the top five destination states for South Carolina (including the District of Columbia).

#### Top Five Destination States for South Carolina Residents



The chart below shows the top 10 out-of-state colleges or universities in which SC residents enrolled; enrollment in these institutions accounts for 54% of the 30,564 SC residents (16,628) enrolled in distance education in an out-of-state SARA-participating institution. Highly concentrated distance education enrollment within a few select institutions is not a unique situation for South Carolina. As mentioned in the [NC-SARA 2018 Enrollment Report](#), "The 2018 NC-SARA reporting reveals that the three institutions reporting the largest distance education enrollments together represent 21.9% (267,767) of all distance education enrollments reported to NC-SARA." These three institutions (University of Phoenix, Western Governors University, and Southern New Hampshire University) also are among the top 10 colleges or universities in which SC residents enrolled in an out-of-state SARA institution.



As noted in last year's annual report, the number of SC students enrolled in SARA-participating institutions outside of the state is higher than the number of students in other states enrolled into SC institutions through SARA. Based on the limited information available, the reason for this early trend is unknown. Assessment of this data suggest the following, however:

1. The top five states with the highest SARA enrollments are home to institutions that have maintained high online course and program enrollments across many U.S. states: Arizona (University of Phoenix), Virginia (Liberty University), District of Columbia (Strayer University), West Virginia (American Public University System), and Utah (Western Governors University). South Carolina is not home to institutions with such profiles.
2. No data is available about the 30,564 SC residents enrolled through SARA in out-of-state institutions, including whether these students were previously enrolled prior to SARA or are new students representing an influx of new enrollees due to SARA.

### **SARA-Related Student Complaints**

As the state's portal agency for SARA, the Commission is the final authority for SARA-related student complaints against SC institutions participating in SARA. The Commission is required to report quarterly to NC-SARA about any complaints received. As with 2017, during the 2018 data reporting period, the Commission received no SARA-related student complaints.

### **Reporting Requirements for NC-SARA**

Participating SARA institutions are required to report out-of-state distance education enrollments. During the 2018 reporting period, SARA participating institutions were given the opportunity to participate in the pilot year of the, [NC-SARA 2018 Out-of-State Learning Placements Report](#), which includes reporting of on-ground and out-of-state learning placements<sup>6</sup>. These additional reporting requirements will be mandatory beginning with the 2019 reporting period.

### **November 2018 ACAP Meeting**

In 2018, SREB-SARA commissioned NCHEMS (National Center for Higher Education Managements Systems) to conduct a SARA cost savings study in the region. The [SREB SARA Cost Savings Study](#) mentioned that the SC SARA participating institutions<sup>7</sup> would have incurred \$5,779,200 for state authorization elsewhere if not for NC-SARA. At the November 2018 ACAP meeting, Commission staff facilitated a discussion about the cost savings with members and they affirmed that the cost savings were a benefit.

### **May 2019 CAAL Meeting**

At the May 14, 2019 meeting of the Committee on Academic Affairs and Licensing (CAAL), commission staff presented this report, highlighting developments and changes in out-of-state and in-state distance education enrollments for South Carolina SARA participating institutions since 2017. Committee members inquired about the trends and variables influencing the changes in the number of South Carolina students enrolling in out-of-state distance education programs compared to out-of-state students enrolling into South Carolina institutions. Commission staff informed the Committee that the upcoming 2019 reporting from institutions will include new, additional data on each institution's distance education enrollments from their home state and data on out-of-state learning placements (e.g., rotations, student teaching, internships, etc.). Committee members confirmed

---

<sup>6</sup> Examples of learning placements include: clinical rotations, student teaching, and internships.

<sup>7</sup> 32 SC institutions were participating in SARA at the time the survey was conducted.

interest in reviewing the new levels of institutional data reporting, which will allow for more comparative and in-depth program-level review.

**Summary**

More than half of eligible South Carolina institutions (67%) participate in SARA. The Commission anticipates that institutional participation will remain the same in the upcoming year. Furthermore, the Commission staff continues to provide support to current SC institutions participating in SARA and remains abreast of current issues about national activities to best support student access to higher education.