



National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

A voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of distance education

Minutes of the NC-SARA Board Meeting May 11, 2017

Atlanta Airport Marriott, Atlanta Georgia
9:00 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Council Members in Attendance:

Barbara Ballard
Chris Bustamante
Joe Garcia
Larry Isaak
Paul Lingenfelter
Lean Matthews
Patricia O'Brien
Pamela Quinn
George Ross

Kathleen Curry Santora
Paul Shiffman
Peter Smith
Dave Spence
Michael Thomas
Leroy Wade
Larry Tremblay
Belle Wheelan
Michael Zola

Council Members Not in Attendance:

Dianne Harrison*
M. Peter McPherson*

Kathryn Dodge*
Teresa Lubbers

*Joined via conference call

NC-SARA Staff in Attendance:

Alan Contreras
Marshall Hill

Holly Martinez
Jennifer Shanika

Regional Compact SARA Directors and Staff in Attendance:

Emily Jacobson, MHEC-SARA
Jennifer Parks, MHEC-SARA
Sandra Doran, NEBHE-SARA
Rachel Stachowiak, NEBHE-SARA

Kris Biesinger, SREB-SARA
Mary Larson, SREB-SARA
Betsey Martin, SREB-SARA
John Lopez, WICHE-SARA

Guests:

Joel Hauff, Chair, AZ SARA Council



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Welcome and introductions: Paul E. Lingenfelter, Chair

After general introductions, the Chair welcomed four new board members - Kathleen Curry Santora, Peter Smith, Larry Tremblay and Michael Zola. New members spoke briefly of their background and their pleasure in joining the Council. The Chair asked members to review, sign and return to staff the annual Conflict of Interest Policy.

Agenda Item I (ACTION): Approval of minutes of the October 20, 2016 meeting

Belle Wheelan noted that she did attend the 2016 fall meeting but was not included on the attendance list. She moved to approve the minutes with that correction. Michael Zola seconded. The motion passed with all members present voting “yes”.

In reviewing the minutes, Paul Lingenfelter noted that he made an embarrassing omission, his own name, when preparing the slate of board members for the fall 2016 meeting who are willing to continue and require re-election for the term 2017 to 2019. In addition, a review of the minutes for the December 2015 meeting revealed that, while electing officers for the years 2016-2017, the Board did not elect non-officer members of the Executive Committee for those years. A motion to correct these oversights, electing Paul Lingenfelter to a second three-year term, 2017 to 2019, and extending the election of non-officer members of the Executive Committee for a second two-year term, 2016 and 2017, was made Patricia O’Brien and seconded by Belle Wheelan. The motion passed unanimously.

Agenda Item II: Update on the progress of the SARA initiative

a) Marshall A. Hill, NC-SARA

Hill noted that more than 1,500 institutions now participate in SARA, with average fees of \$3,500. The majority are small institutions. The breakdown by sector has remained stable. Renewal rates are about 99 percent.

Hill described the changing focus and increasing workloads of NC-SARA staff. Staff receive many questions that reflect continuing student and institutional confusion about state authorization. Leroy Wade noted it was important to communicate at the state level as well as regional level so everyone is on the same page to communicate the same message. Pam Quinn inquired about who handles the questions sent to NC-SARA. Hill responded that Jennifer Shanika and Holly Martinez answer the majority and refer complex questions to regional staff and/or the executive director when necessary.

b) Larry Isaak, Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)

Larry Isaak asked the MHEC Regional SARA Director, Jenny Parks, to give the MHEC update. Parks noted that all MHEC states are SARA members and many have now gone through a renewal cycle. She reported high rates of institutional participation in the Midwest; in some states 100% of eligible institutions are participating. MHEC is doing numerous webinars to keep institutions informed.

c) Michael Thomas, New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE)

Thomas noted that five of the six NEBHE states are members of SARA, with two non-compact affiliated states (NY and NJ) now participating, as well. Massachusetts remains challenging. Thomas mentioned that NEBHE has engaged a former Massachusetts attorney general to assist in SARA-related discussions with the state.



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d) David Spence, Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)

Spence remarked he was amazed at the progress made by SARA, especially as he was an early skeptic. He extended his congratulations to all involved with the growth of SARA. He mentioned SREB's very positive experience with its "Electronic Campus," which has been operating for 19 years.

e) Joe Garcia, Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE)

Garcia mentioned that Navajo Tech (NM) is the first tribal institution to join SARA. Garcia discussed continuing issues with California and its considerations about joining SARA and added that many in the state are supportive of the idea of SARA. WICHE will continue to work with California regarding SARA.

Agenda Item III (ACTION): Finance Report and related financial actions

Teresa Lubbers, Treasurer, was unable to attend the meeting due to a conflict with her board's schedule in Indiana. Lingenfelter mentioned that the Finance committee voted unanimously for the financial plan. Hill noted that SARA is in good shape financially. The board has a policy for the establishment of reserves, and initial accumulation of reserves for each of the compacts and NC-SARA has begun.

Additional policy details regarding reserves were discussed. Hill stated that NC-SARA's financial debt to WICHE will be retired within the month.

Two motions: The first is to accept the third quarter financial report. Thomas so moved, seconded by Wheelan. Motion passed unanimously

The second motion, to increase compact funding and reserve funding, was passed unanimously. Paul Shiffman moved to approve and was seconded by Belle Wheelan.

With extensive discussion on reserve funds for SARA partners, Michael Thomas presented a revision and simplification of the language proposed by staff. Wheelan moved approval, Wade seconded. Motion was passed unanimously.

Agenda Item IV: Report on actions taken by the executive committee

a) Smaller affiliation fees for some U.S. territories (See next item.)

Agenda Item V (ACTION): Additions and modifications to the NC-SARA Manual and other materials

a) Affiliation fees for small U.S. territories (approved by executive committee)

Motion to approve was made by McPherson and seconded by Garcia. Motion passed unanimously.

b) Modification of State Applications, Item 14

Hill stated that this issue was raised by Vermont, which is up for state renewal. Vermont had a small institution close last year. Despite best efforts, VT was not able to ensure that students were not harmed. After extensive discussion, Shiffman moved approval, seconded by Isaac. Motion passed unanimously.

c) Institutions that establish physical presence

Hill stated that the varieties of institutional practice continue to challenge clear definitions of "physical presence." Institutions generally want SARA to cover all of their activities in SARA states (except for establishing campuses); some states do not want that to be the case. The proposed language is



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recommended by staff to address the issue in somewhat greater specificity than current SARA policies. Motion to approve was made by Wade, seconded by Isaac and approved by all.

Agenda item VI (ACTION): Additions and modifications to the Unified Agreement

- a) Affiliation fees for small U.S. territories, as discussed earlier. Motion for approval by Garcia, second by O'Brien. Unanimously Passed.

Agenda item VII: Past the "EASY STUFF" – the continuing evolution of SARA

- a) Discussion and possible action

Three NC-SARA board members (Leah Matthews, Larry Tremblay, Paul Shiffman) and one regional SARA director (John Lopez) formed a panel (moderated by Paul Lingenfelter) to provide initial comments on Hill's recommendations to create additional student and institution focused information about state authorization and to create a searchable database of academic programs offered by SARA institutions.

Hill indicated that both projects could be implemented with available funds and that institutional participation in the database would be voluntary and would not require additional fees.

Phase I: Enhanced information for students and institutions

Matthews: NC-SARA is well positioned for this because there is a foothold as a board for the national issue. This group is best positioned for a centralized distance education initiative. Seems a natural next step. She noted that similar efforts by the U.S. Department of Education had not been successful.

Shiffman: NC-SARA is well positioned to provide such information. He noted that ultimate responsibility for providing clear and complete information on state authorization and licensure should reside with institutions, even though they face resource and other issues. He suggested that NC-SARA consider providing training to institutional staff on these issues.

Lopez: Absolutely a need for this. We are seeing an increase in inquiries around this area.

Tremblay: Great idea. He stated that the information is very complicated. His office tried to do something similar just for Louisiana, but staff realized it was too big a challenge. His office preferred to refer questions to individuals responsible for particular programs. Recommends that NC-SARA provide general language with series of links to discipline-specific sites.

Phase II: Searchable database of academic programs

Tremblay: SREB has similar program now. A similar national initiative could be valuable. Operational issues would be complex. Suggests further study and reconsideration in the future.

Lopez: Could be very valuable to students. Project would be operationally complex, but SREB has done solid work in this area for many years.

Shiffman: No question that this could be valuable, but would students use it? If it drives enrollment, it's worth it; if not, not worth it. Operational challenges unknown. Need more info there. Has to be up to date and accurate. Marketing needed. Would vote to pilot this and overview what SREB has done.



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Matthews: The data sources online right now cause concern and confusion for students. We have a clean slate to do this. If NC-SARA doesn't do this, another, less capable and qualified organization will. NC-SARA's moment to take a step forward on this.

See Agenda Item VIII for related actions.

Agenda Item VIII (ACTION): Proposed FY 2018 budget

Because Teresa Lubbers, Treasurer, was not in attendance, Paul Lingenfelter led the discussion.

Lingenfelter noted that there are three budget issues on table: NC-SARA's regular operating budget; projected costs for Phase I (student and institutional information); and Phase II (program database).

Motion to approve the FY 2018 operations budget was made by Peter Smith, seconded by McPherson, and passed unanimously.

After significant discussion, Barbara Ballard made a motion to approve the proposed budget for Phase I and defer action on the Phase II budget pending additional information and discussion. Seconded by Michael Thomas; all approved.

Agenda Item IX: Information Items - Marshall A. Hill

- a) Report on establishing SARA as an independent entity
- b) USED rules on state authorization of distance education
- c) Status of current year work
- d) Executive Director presentations, October 2016 – May 2017

Agenda Item X: Executive Session

- a) During the executive session the Council discussed personnel issues.

Agenda Item XI: Questions, comments, reflections from council members

Adjourn at 12:30 Central