SARA
STATE AUTHORIZATION RECIPROCITY AGREEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXISTING REQUIREMENT

Per federal regulations, institutions are responsible for complying with all state laws related to distance education. Institutions must meet the requirements of each state, which may include registering as a provider of distance education. These requirements or lack thereof, vary from state to state. In some cases, institutions must deal with multiple regulatory agencies within a specified state. Depending on the state, the process can be lengthy and costly, both financially and in terms of staff time.

SARA

To simplify this, the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (SARA) establishes a state-level reciprocity process that sets forth a national standard and provides a common regulatory framework to which participating states adhere. SARA is overseen by a National Council and administered by four regional education compacts.

Membership, which began in 2014, is voluntary and open only to degree-granting postsecondary institutions from all sectors (public colleges and universities; independent institutions; both non-profit and for-profit) accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education.

Currently, 36 states and 674 member institutions (634 of which are public/independent not-for-profit institutions) are participating in SARA.

NEW YORK STATE and SARA

NYS passed legislation on August 13, 2015 that provides the New York State Education Department (NYSED) with the authority to enter into a regional compact for the purposes of participating in State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA).

On Thursday, March 31, 2016, the New York State 2016-2017 Budget was enacted and provided for a $550,000 appropriation that would allow the State Education Department to move ahead with such activities as affiliating with a regional compact for the purposes of SARA, charging a fee to participating institutions, and hiring the necessary staff to implement this program.

Next steps (some already noted above) for New York State are as follows:

1. HIRE STAFF
2. JOIN REGIONAL COMPACT: most likely the New England Board of Higher Education.
3. SUBMIT APPLICATION FOR SARA.
4. PROMULGATE REGULATIONS related to the administration of SARA at the state level.
5. EXECUTE ROLLOUT so that institutions have the information they need to apply to the state for membership in SARA.
Student Financial Services

Ideally these activities will be completed in time so that the selected regional compact can approve individual institution participation by the end of calendar year 2016 to enable campuses to enter 2017 without having to seek as many individual state authorizations.

COLUMBIA and SARA

Columbia needs to wait for NYSED to execute rollout (step #5 above) in order to officially join SARA.

The required fees for Columbia related to joining SARA will be as follows:

- An annual fee paid to the National Council for SARA in the amount of $6,000.
- Any additional fee that NYSED charges to in-state institutions that want to participate in SARA.

Until this occurs, the Columbia must ensure registration, as applicable, directly with each state in which we do or will offer online/distance education.

DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE BENEFITS FOR NEW YORK STATE

Many public and private non-profit colleges and universities in New York have been and continue to be vocal in support of New York joining SARA. However, recently published articles also indicate that a coalition of advocacy groups in New York is voicing opposition to the state joining SARA.

Please see articles:


SARA’s response: [http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-response-new-york-times](http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-response-new-york-times)

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

SARA Official Website: [http://nc-sara.org/](http://nc-sara.org/)
Status by state: [http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-state-status](http://nc-sara.org/content/sara-state-status)
SARA FAQs: [http://nc-sara.org/content/faqs](http://nc-sara.org/content/faqs)


IMPORTANT NOTE: Until SARA is fully implemented, schools should continue to reach out to the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Programs regarding individual state registration.

Questions regarding this document should be sent to the Lichinia N. Beltré, Executive Director of Compliance for Student Financial Services, at lb216@columbia.edu.