

## **South Carolina State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SC SARA)**

On March 14, 2016, Governor Nikki Haley signed into law H. 4639 ([Statutory Authority: 1976 Code Section 59-103-17](#)) allowing South Carolina to enter into an interstate reciprocity agreement. On June 9, 2016, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) approved South Carolina as a member state to participate in the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA).

The State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) is a voluntary, interstate reciprocity agreement that establishes comparable standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education. Institutional participation is voluntary and limited to accredited degree-granting institutions.

The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE) is designated as the state portal entity for SARA and is responsible for the coordination of all SARA activities for the state.

As a member state of SARA, eligible South Carolina colleges and universities can seek authorization from CHE to participate in SARA and offer distance education programs and courses to residents of member states without seeking state-by-state approval. Additionally, the agreement provides enhanced quality assurance and consumer protection to South Carolina residents enrolled in distance education programs from other SARA participating institutions.

*For more information please visit [NC-SARA](#) and [SREB](#).*

### **Institution Eligibility**

South Carolina institutions seeking approval to participate in SARA must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Main campus or central administrative unit is located in South Carolina and is authorized to operate;
- Accredited as a degree-granting institution of higher education by an accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USED);
- For non-public institutions, the most recent financial responsibility index score from USDE (i.e. composite score) is at least 1.5 out of 3.0 on the financial stability scale.

## **Approval Process**

1. The institution must submit to CHE the [Application and Approval form for Institutional Participation](#) in SARA and its related attachments, signed [Memorandum of Understanding](#), and [SC SARA fee](#).
2. CHE reviews the application, and if approved, notifies NC-SARA. A payment link is sent to the institution for the NC-SARA fee.
3. The institution accesses the link and sends payment to NC-SARA.
4. NC-SARA confirms payment, sends welcome materials to the institution and lists institution on NC-SARA website.
5. Institution must renew annually to maintain participation status.

## **Requirements for Participation**

- Have its principal campus or central administrative unit domiciled in South Carolina;
- Comply with the *Inter-regional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education*, released by the [Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions \(C-RAC\)](#);
- Complete the [NC-SARA Application and Approval form](#) for Institutional Participation in SARA and abide by all representations and understandings required on the application;
- Maintain sufficient financial health to support distance education programs, especially any programs that will expect to expand enrollment through SARA. A private non-profit or for-profit institution is deemed to have sufficient financial strength if its most recently published U.S. Department of Education financial responsibility composite score is 1.5 or above; institutions with a financial stability ratio of 1.0-1.49 may be deemed to have sufficient financial strength upon review of additional justification, and such institutions may be required to post a surety.
- Maintain internal grievance and/or complaint procedures distributed in its publications and posted on its web site with a reference and link to CHE's [Student Complaint Procedures](#) and form. Complaints regarding student grades or conduct violations are governed entirely by institutional policy and will not be considered by CHE.
- Have in place catastrophic event policies and procedures including disaster recovery plans, particularly with respect to the protection of student records, consistent with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) best practices for closure, or those of other [U.S. Department of Education-recognized accreditors](#);
- Complete and submit the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) for participation in SC-SARA as a part of the institution's application. The Memorandum of Understanding is only submitted as a part of the institution's initial application.
- Pay fees to both CHE and NC-SARA.

## **Supporting Documentation**

All institutions submit the following supporting documentation along with the application for participation in SARA:

- Documentation of legal domicile in South Carolina.
- Most current accreditation letter from an accrediting body recognized by the U. S. Secretary of Education.
- Signed original [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (once signed by CHE leadership, a copy will be provided to the institution).
- Evidence of a student complaint procedure distributed in its publications and posted on its website with a reference and link to CHE's [Student Complaint and Procedures form](#).
- Catastrophic events policy.
- South Carolina SARA participation fee.
- **Independent and nonpublic institutions** must submit their most recently published U.S. Department of Education financial responsibility composite score. Institutions with a financial stability ratio of 1.0-1.49 may be deemed to have sufficient financial strength upon review of additional justification, and such institutions may be required to post a surety.

## **SC SARA Appeals Policy and Procedure**

### **Appeals Policy**

An application for initial or renewal participation in SARA may be denied when the institution fails to meet or comply with any eligibility criteria in section 3.1 of the SARA Manual. The institution will be notified within five (5) days of the denial of the application for initial or renewal participation in SARA. The institution may appeal the denial of their application in accordance with the SC SARA Appeals procedures. During any such appeal, the institution's status as a SARA participating (or non-participating) institution will remain unchanged.

### **Procedures for Appeals**

- Institutions must submit their appeal to CHE within 30 days of receiving the denial decision.
- The appeal must include the following:
  - 1) A letter of request for appeal, written and signed by the institution's President; and
  - 2) Supporting documentation.
- The appeal must be mailed to:

SC Commission on Higher Education  
SC SARA Appeals  
1122 Lady Street, Suite 400  
Columbia, SC 29201

- The President and Executive Director of CHE will review the institution's appeal and make a decision based on the evidence presented.
- The President and Executive Director will render a decision on the appeal within 30 days of receipt.

- The President and Executive Director’s decision is final.
- CHE will provide the final decision in writing to the institution, SREB, and NC-SARA.

### **State Fee and Fee Schedule**

CHE fee schedule for institutions applying to participate in SARA will follow that of NC-SARA, with the annual fee to participate varying by enrolled full-time equivalent (FTE) students:

\$2,000 for institutions with fewer than 2,500 FTE students

\$4,000 for institutions with 2,500-9,999 FTE students

\$6,000 for institutions with 10,000 or more FTE students

Note: Institutions approved to participate in SARA must renew applications annually and pay both SC SARA and [NC-SARA fees](#). The check for the SC SARA fee shall be made payable to the SC Commission on Higher Education, with a memo to SC SARA.

Mail the application, supporting documentation, and SC SARA fee to:

SC Commission on Higher Education  
Attn: SC SARA  
1122 Lady Street, Suite 400  
Columbia, SC 29201

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

CHE serves as the state’s portal agency for SARA and is the final authority for SARA-related complaints. If an out-of-state student enrolled in an SC institution via distance education wishes to file a complaint, he or she may complete and submit the [CHE Student Complaint and Procedures form](#).

### **Resources**

[Statutory Authority: 1976 Code Section 59-103-17](#)

[National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements \(NC-SARA\)](#)

[NC-SARA Application and Approval Form](#)

[C-RAC Inter-regional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education](#)

[SACSCOC Best Practices for Closure](#)

[US Department of Education-recognized accreditors](#)

[CHE Student Complaint and Procedures Form](#)

[SC SARA Schedule of Fees](#)

[Memorandum of Understanding](#)

### **Contact Information**

For more information regarding SC SARA please contact, Dr. Argentini, Assistant Director, Academic Affairs and Licensing, [aanderson@che.sc.gov](mailto:aanderson@che.sc.gov), (803) 856-0511.