

For Release Tuesday, June 30, 2015

Atlanta — This week, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Tennessee were approved by the Southern Regional Education Board to join the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). These states bring the number of participating states to 27, with over half the states participating in SARA.

SARA is a nationwide initiative of states that will make distance education courses more accessible to students across state lines and make it easier for states to regulate and institutions to participate in interstate distance education. The effort is funded by a \$3 million grant from Lumina Foundation, \$200,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and fees paid by institutions.

“Providing our students with access to high-quality educational offerings has always been a top priority for Oklahoma’s system of higher education,” said Chancellor Glen D. Johnson, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. “Joining the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement will allow our colleges and universities to deliver innovative distance education opportunities to current and future students residing in SARA member states, regardless of their geographic location.”

SARA makes it easier for states to regulate interstate distance education, and it eliminates approval costs for colleges and universities that are often passed to students. Institutions in the three SREB states may now join the clearinghouse through the reciprocity agreements.

Dr. Brett Powell, director, Arkansas Department of Higher Education, said, “Online learning is a significant and important component of the higher education landscape. I am pleased that Arkansas will be part of this effort to coordinate the regulation of online programs for the benefit of both Arkansas institutions and Arkansas students. Our institutions will be relieved of a significant administrative burden and our students will have greater assurance of educational quality as a result of our relationship with SARA.”

“We look forward to the variety of opportunities SARA will bring to Tennessee institutions offering distance education programs and Tennessee students enrolling in such programs. By expanding the education options available to Tennesseans, the SARA partnership will play an integral role in Tennessee’s effort to meet the Drive to 55, the push for 55 percent of Tennesseans to be equipped with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2025.” – Dr. Russ Deaton, Interim Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

“Education remains critical to state goals to increase college completion rates and build a better educated workforce,” says SREB President Dave Spence. “SARA increases access to education especially for adult students who juggle other responsibilities when they return to complete degrees.”

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The **National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA)** is a voluntary, regional approach to state oversight of postsecondary distance education. The initiative is administered by the country’s four regional higher education compacts (MHEC, NEBHE, SREB and WICHE) and overseen by NC-SARA. Participating states and institutions operate under common standards and procedures, providing a uniform and less costly regulatory environment for institutions, more focused oversight responsibilities for states and better resolution of student complaints. <http://www.nc-sara.org>

The **Midwestern Higher Education Compact** is a nonprofit regional organization assisting Midwestern states in advancing higher education through interstate cooperation and resource sharing. MHEC seeks to fulfill its interstate mission through programs that expand postsecondary opportunity and success; promote innovative approaches to improving institutional and system productivity; improve affordability to students and states; and enhance connectivity between higher education and the workplace. Member states include: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin. www.mhec.org

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The **New England Board of Higher Education** promotes greater educational opportunities and services for New England residents. It works across the six New England states to engage and assist leaders in the assessment, development and implementation of sound education practices and policies of regional significance; promote policies, programs and best practices to assist the states in implementing important regional higher education policies; promote regional cooperation and programs that encourage the efficient use and sharing of educational resources; and provide leadership to strengthen the relationship between higher education and the economic wellbeing of New England. www.nebhe.org

The **Southern Regional Education Board** works with 16 member states to improve public education at every level, from pre-K through Ph.D. SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Atlanta. SREB states participate in SREB's Electronic Campus Regional Reciprocity Agreement, and SREB is working closely with SARA to expand reciprocity nationwide. Member states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia. www.sreb.org

The **Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education** and its 16 members work collaboratively to expand educational access and excellence for all citizens of the West. By promoting innovation, cooperation, resource sharing and sound public policy among states and institutions, WICHE strengthens higher education's contributions to the region's social, economic and civic life. WICHE's members include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (the first of the U.S. Pacific territories and freely associated states to participate). www.wiche.edu

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with high-quality degrees, certificates and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025. www.luminafoundation.org