



# Protecting Students & Demanding Quality

How the NC-SARA mission and policies support consumer protections in distance education

The National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) was established to help **expand students' access to educational opportunities** and ensure more **efficient, consistent, and effective** regulation of distance education programs. NC-SARA recognizes that, as more students take advantage of interstate distance education programs in higher education, quality assurance and oversight must remain a central area of focus.

Two critical components of our mission are (1) to **assure students are well-served in a rapidly changing education landscape**, and (2) to **increase the quality and value of higher education credentials earned through distance education programs**. To do so, SARA participating institutions and member states must meet certain requirements – many of which are focused on ensuring appropriate consumer protections for students.

## NC-SARA IMPROVES STUDENT CONSUMER PROTECTION

Variable state regulation results in about half without any distance education regulation and one-third without accreditation requirements. When states join SARA, they agree to follow uniform processes for approving their eligible institutions' participation. SARA's policies help protect students and provide benefits to both states and institutions carrying out distance education in multiple states.

### Accredited

All SARA institutions must be accredited. Accreditation provides an important layer of accountability and quality assurance.

### Healthy Finances

States accept an institutional federal Financial Responsibility Composite Score of 1.5 as indicative of sufficient minimum financial stability.

### Standards

To participate in SARA, colleges and universities must adhere to high standards and abide by the policies in the [SARA Policy Manual](#).

### Requirements

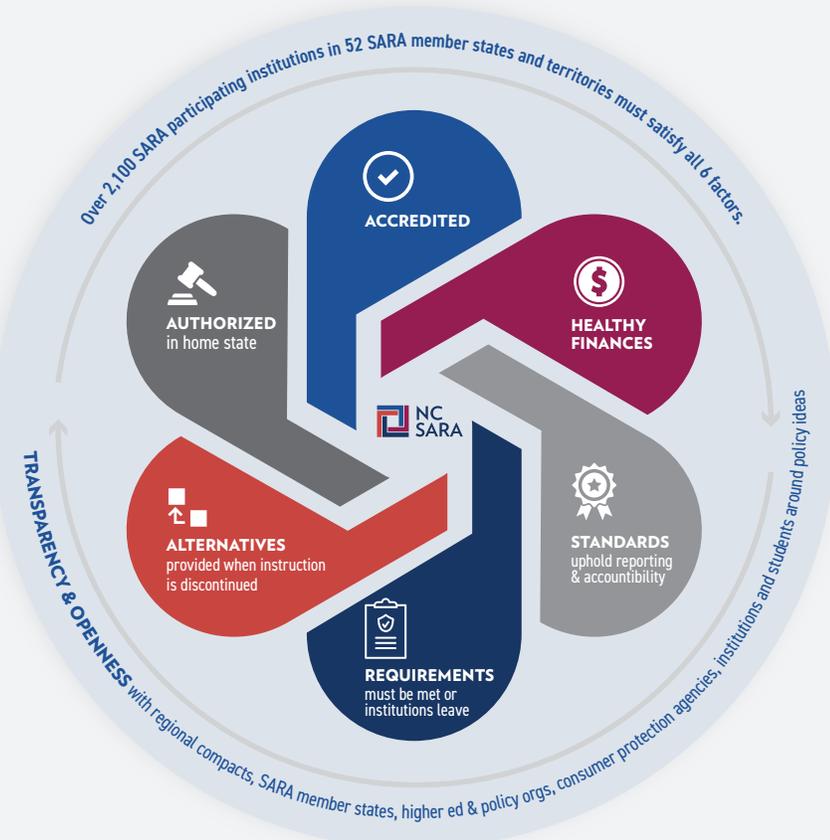
SARA member states are expected, per NC-SARA policy, to investigate a variety of consumer protection issues, including truthfulness in advertising and accuracy of data related to course offerings, job placements, tuition, fees, and financial aid, among other items.

### Alternatives

If a SARA institution decides to close a distance education program, the institution must either provide a reasonable alternative or offer financial compensation.

### Authorized

SARA institutions must be chartered or licensed by, and physically located in, a U.S state or territory. This ensures that genuine evaluation and oversight by a U.S. entity can take place.



## Student complaints are taken seriously.

To promote transparency and accountability, SARA helps elevate students' concerns when complaints are not sufficiently resolved through the traditional institutional channels.

- Students must first try to resolve complaints using their institution's processes, but if the concerns cannot be satisfactorily addressed, students may file SARA-related complaints in the institution's home state.
- Complaints that arise from any stakeholder are reviewed by State Portal Entities as part of the state member agreements with SARA.
- NC-SARA publishes a list of SARA-related complaints filed against its participating institutions and how they were resolved on its website.

## Compliance is non-negotiable.

When participating in SARA, institutions agree to abide by SARA policy. This means if they do not adhere to policies, they will lose the opportunity to participate in SARA.

### Looking Forward: Maintaining NC-SARA's Commitment to Students

Since its inception, NC-SARA is, at its core, an entity designed to serve students by ensuring access to quality distance education opportunities across state lines. As the postsecondary distance education landscape continues to evolve, NC-SARA will seek opportunities to enhance our consumer protections and related policies to better support students and quality assurance.

To learn more about our student consumer protection efforts, visit [www.nc-sara.org](http://www.nc-sara.org).



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