



Florida Department of Education
Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council
ANNUAL REPORT
- Fiscal Year 2020-2021 -

Table of Contents

Overview	1
Council Structure.....	1
Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council.....	1
Institutional Sector Participation	2
2020-2021 FL-SARA Approved Institutions	3
Justification of Staff	4
Fiscal Analysis	5
2020-2021 SARA Appropriations and Expenses	5
2020-2021 SARA Annual Fee Revenue.....	6
Projected Revenue and Expenses for Fiscal Year 2021-2022.....	6
Institutional Data Reporting	7
Distance Education Enrollment.....	7
Out-of-State Learning Placements (OOSLP)	7
2020-2021 FL-SARA Complaint Reporting	8

Overview

The Florida Department of Education, Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council (Council) presents its 2020-2021 Annual Report. This report provides information about Florida institutions participating in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA).

Florida became a member of SARA in 2017 after legislation was enacted authorizing Florida to join with other states for the delivery of postsecondary distance education. The legislation also created the Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council. The Council provides oversight and guidance to postsecondary degree-granting institutions located in Florida that elect to follow the national standards located in the SARA agreement for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education programs. *See* section 1000.35, F.S.

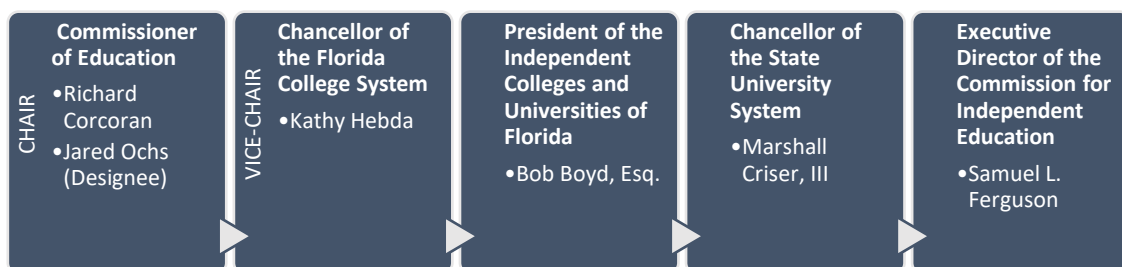
The Council works closely with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), one of four (4) regional compacts that administer SARA, as well as the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA) which provides national leadership over the reciprocity agreement and helps ensure alignment on the core elements and requirements of SARA.

Council Structure

The Council is comprised of the following five council members as authorized by section 1000.35, Florida Statutes:

- Commissioner of Education
- Chancellor of the Florida College System (FCS)
- Chancellor of the State University System (SUS)
- Executive Director of the Commission for Independent Education (CIE)
- President of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF)

Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council

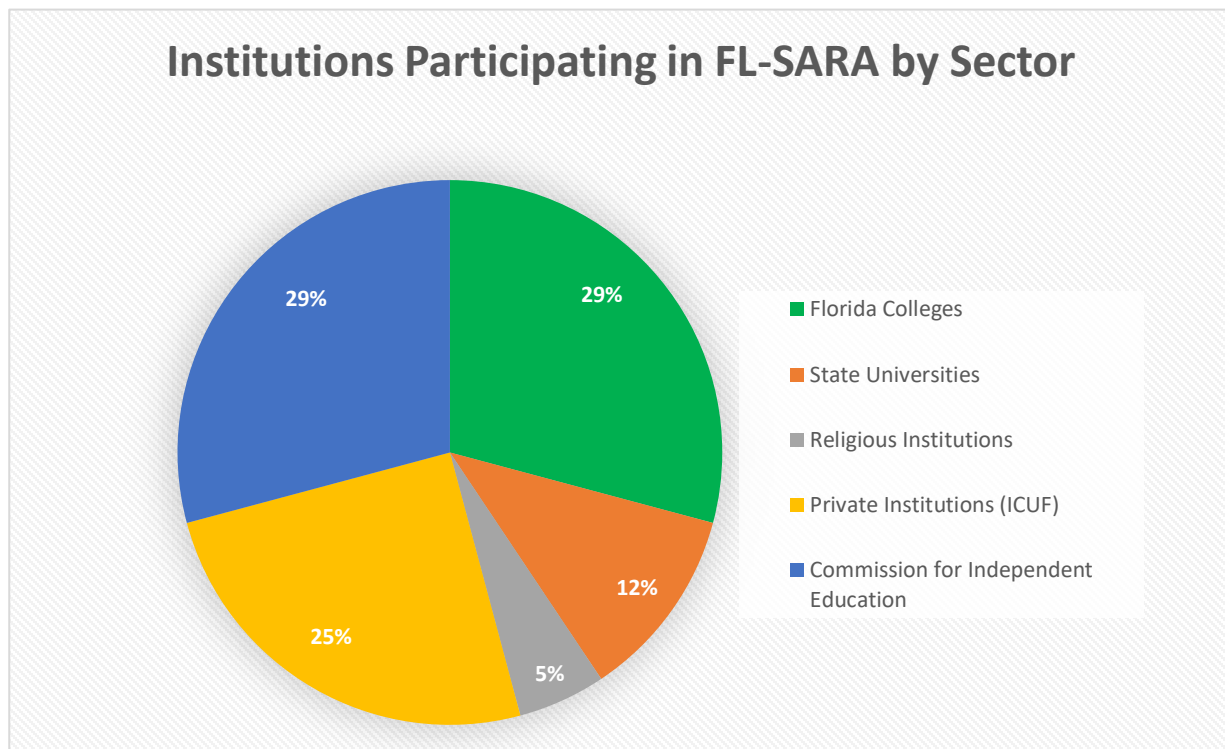


Institutional Sector Participation

During fiscal year 2020-2021, the Council held four (4) meetings which occurred on August 25, 2020, November 20, 2020, February 23, 2021 and June 29, 2021. Thirteen (13) new institutions were approved and ninety-six (96) institutions were renewed for SARA participation.

Sector	Number of Institutions Participating in FL-SARA for FY 2020-21
Commission for Independent Education (CIE)	28
Florida College System (FCS)	28
Independent Colleges and Universities (ICUF)	24
State University System (SUS)	11
Other Florida Institutions ¹	5
Total participating institutions	96

1. This sector includes institutions under s. 1005.06(1)(f), F.S.



2020-2021 FL-SARA Approved Institutions

CIE

- Academy for Nursing and Health Occupations
- Altierus Career College
- Ana G. Mendez University
- Atlantis University
- The Baptist College of Florida
- Cambridge College of Healthcare & Technology
- Cambridge Institute of Allied Health and Technology
- Chi University
- City College – Ft Lauderdale
- College of Business & Tech
- Daytona College
- Doral College
- Florida National University
- Full Sail University
- International College of Health Sciences
- Jose Maria Vargas Univ
- Marconi International Univ
- Miami Media School
- Naaleh College
- San Ignacio University
- St. John Vianney College Seminary
- Schiller International University
- Southeastern College
- South Florida Bible College
- Suncoast College of Health
- Trinity Baptist College
- Trinity College of Florida
- University of Ft. Lauderdale

Florida College System

- Broward College
- Chipola College
- College of Central Florida
- Daytona State College
- Eastern Florida State College
- Florida Gateway College
- The College of the Florida Keys
- Florida Southwestern State College
- Florida State College at Jacksonville
- Gulf Coast State College
- Hillsborough Community College
- Indian River State College
- Lake-Sumter State College
- Miami Dade College
- North Florida College
- Northwest Florida State College
- Palm Beach State College
- Pasco-Hernando State College
- Pensacola State College
- Polk State College
- Santa Fe College
- Seminole State College of Florida
- South Florida State College
- St. Johns River State College
- St. Petersburg College
- State College of Florida Manatee-Sarasota
- Tallahassee Community College
- Valencia College

ICUF

- Advent Health
- Ave Maria University
- Barry University
- Bethune-Cookman Univ
- Edward Waters College
- Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University – Daytona Beach
- Everglades University
- Flagler College
- Florida College
- Florida Institute of Technology
- Florida Southern College
- Hodges University
- Jacksonville University
- Keiser University
- Lynn University
- Nova Southeastern Univ
- Palm Beach Atlantic Univ – West Palm Beach
- Saint Leo University
- Southeastern University
- St. Thomas University
- Stetson University
- University of Miami
- The University of Tampa
- Webber International University

State University System

- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University
- Florida Atlantic University
- Florida Gulf Coast University
- Florida International University
- Florida State University
- New College of Florida
- University of Central Florida
- University of Florida
- University of North Florida
- University of South Florida
- University of West Florida

Exempt Religious Institutions

- Genesis University
- Knox Theological Seminary
- The Robert E. Webber Institute of Worship Studies
- St. Vincent De Paul Regional Seminary

Exempt – other

- Pensacola Christian College

(96)

Justification of Staff

By statute, the annual report is due to the Legislature and the Governor's Office by February 15 of each year and must include justification of staff needed for the Council. Administrative duties related to the Council are delegated to the staff of the Commission for Independent Education within the Florida Department of Education. *See* s. 1000.35(3), F.S. Primary responsibilities of Council staff are:

- to support Council members in their statutory mission to operate as the state portal entity for administration of the reciprocity agreement;
- to review all new and renewal SARA applications, assist institutions with resolving deficiencies and prepare staff recommendations for Council consideration;
- to ensure compliance with the SARA agreement relating to accreditation and institutional quality, consumer information and protection, disclosure and reporting requirements, complaint mechanisms and financial responsibility; and
- to recommend rules necessary to administer the agreement and work with legal counsel to prepare rules for consideration by the Council members and the State Board of Education.

Council staff performed the following duties during fiscal year 2020-2021:

- Prepared agenda materials, including one hundred twenty-nine (129) application packets, meeting minutes and director's reports for four meetings;
- Reviewed three hundred sixty-nine (369) complaints received in the Commission office to determine if they required Council resolution;
- Served as a liaison to the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) of which Florida is a member and participated as a voting member on the SARA Regional Steering Committee;
- Prepared the bi-yearly Florida renewal application and presented it to the SREB SARA Regional Steering Committee on October 20, 2021 for approval;
- Responded to approximately fifty (50) inquiries from students, institutions, state agencies and the general public relating to SARA. All states, except for California and a few U.S. territories, have now joined SARA and the number of inquiries requiring response has increased significantly; and
- Participated in NC-SARA meetings and webinars about national and state SARA issues, most significantly, proposed changes to the NC-SARA policy manual, provided input on those changes and monitored them in order to keep Council members informed.

During fiscal year 2020-2021, Council staff consisted of:

- Two managerial staff members who shared the functions of the Council Director position while continuing to perform other duties;
- Two administrative assistants who performed support functions relating to the duties and responsibilities set forth above; and
- One OPS Program Specialist who monitored activity by NC-SARA, SREB, accrediting agencies and the U.S. Department of Education, reviewed all complaints received in the Commission office, and responded to inquiries about state authorization and SARA participation.

Fiscal Analysis

Florida statutes require the Council to collect an annual fee from each Florida institution participating in the reciprocity agreement and establish caps based on an institution's enrollment. Fees collected from SARA participating institutions are statutorily required to be set at an amount that will generate no more than the total revenue necessary for the Council's operation. If revenue necessary for operations exceeds expenses, the fees shall be lowered. *See* s. 1000.35(5), F.S.

In August 2017, the Council voted to set the SARA fees at the following limits established by the Legislature:

- for institutions with fewer than 2,500 total FTE enrollment, \$1,500.00;
- for institutions with at least 2,500 students but not more than 9,999 total FTE enrollment, \$3,000.00; and
- for institutions with 10,000 or more total FTE enrollment, \$4,500.00.

During fiscal year 2019-2020, a surplus in revenue occurred, primarily due to increasing numbers of Florida institutions joining SARA, and the Council reduced fees. The fee change received final approval by the State Board of Education on June 10, 2021. *See* Rule 6N-1.005, F.A.C. The new fee structure is:

- for institutions with fewer than 2,500 total FTE enrollment, \$1,250.00;
- for institutions with at least 2,500 students but not more than 9,999 total FTE enrollment, \$2,750.00; and
- for institutions with 10,000 or more total FTE enrollment, \$4,250.00.

The reduced fee structure was not applied until the Council meeting on October 26, 2021. Any reduction of revenue due to the reduced fees will not occur until fiscal year 2021-2022.

If the reduced fees had been applied to the new and renewing institutions during fiscal year 2020-2021, total revenue would have decreased by \$31,250.00. In addition, since several institutions were required to renew twice during this fiscal year due to the changing of renewal cycles, Council staff collected one-time additional renewal fees of \$82,500.00. Moving forward, institutions will be appearing at one of three Council meetings held yearly and renewing only once per fiscal year.

2020-2021 SARA Appropriations and Expenses

Categories	2020-2021 Annual Appropriation	2020-2021 Annual Expenses
Salaries and Benefits	\$ 152,248.00	\$ 138,749.10
Expenses	\$ 44,996.00	\$ 8,000.86
Operating Capital Outlay	\$ 2,245.00	\$ 0.00
Contracted Services	\$ 10,000.00	\$ 3,024.99
Risk Management Insurance	\$ 194.66	\$ 209.58
Statewide Contract (TR/DMS/HR Services)	\$ 439.80	\$ 408.84
Education Technical and Information Services	\$ 24,130.00	\$ 13,561.78
FL-SARA Total	\$ 234,253.46	\$ 163,955.15

2020-2021 SARA Annual Fee Revenue

In 2020-2021, the Postsecondary Reciprocal Distance Education Coordinating Council's revenue totaled \$351,000.00
A revenue to expenses comparison is as follows:

Total Revenue	\$351,000.00
Actual Expenses	\$163,955.15
Difference	\$187,044.85

Projected Revenue and Expenses for Fiscal Year 2021-2022

Revenue

Revenue is difficult to project due to the unknown number of institutions that will be applying for initial participation and the impacts of the reduced fee structure on prospective and currently approved SARA participating institutions.

- SARA participation in Florida is growing. Seventy-five (75) Florida institutions joined SARA in 2017, its first year of operation. As of fiscal year 2020-2021, the number of SARA-participating institutions has increased to ninety-six (96).
- While nearly all public state universities and colleges have been approved for participation in SARA, an estimated one hundred fifty (150) CIE-licensed institutions and six (6) ICUF colleges and universities appear to be eligible for SARA participation but have not applied to participate.

Expenses

Expenses are not expected to increase significantly in the next fiscal year. The following additional expenses are projected:

- Salary/benefits for a full-time Council Director to replace the two managers who are sharing the Director's functions. This expense will be partially offset by the removal of salary and benefits attributable to the managers and is estimated at approximately \$12,000.00.
- Equipment replacement consisting of laptops, docking stations and other office supplies, estimated at approximately \$3,700.00.
- Travel expenses for out-of-state conferences and seminars, estimated at approximately \$3,000.00. Fluctuating expenses due to COVID have made it difficult to establish a baseline for travel expenses. For example, Council staff were unable to use funds typically reserved for travel due to the pandemic last year. Travel expenses to regional and national conferences and seminars during fiscal year 2020-2021 were estimated to have been approximately \$6,000.00 (based on travel by co-directors); however, those events were held online. Face-to-face conferences and seminars are projected to resume in 2022.

Institutional Data Reporting

SARA requires all educational institutions participating in the reciprocity agreement to report annually distance education enrollment and out-of-state learning placements. Eighty-five (85) Florida SARA institutions participated in data reporting of distance education enrollment and out-of-state- learning placements during the May 21, 2021-June 11, 2021 reporting window. Data collected reflects fall 2020 distance education enrollment and calendar year 2020 out-of-state-learning placements.

Distance Education Enrollment

Participating institutions are required to report the number of exclusively distance education students enrolled in institutions engaged in distance education (both SARA and non-SARA institutions), disaggregated by state, territory or district in which the students are located, including the home state.

Number of FL-SARA institutions reporting during fall 2020 enrollment window	85
Number of out-of-state students enrolled in FL-SARA institutions	56,860
Number of students in non-SARA states/territories enrolled in FL-SARA institutions	5,099
Total number of out-of-state students enrolled in FL-SARA institutions	61,959
Total number of Florida students enrolled in distance education programs at institutions (other SARA states)	123,918

**Data above does not include in-state distance education enrollment of in-state students.*

Out-of-State Learning Placements (OOSLP)

Participating institutions are required to report the number of students engaged in certain experiential learning placements (e.g., rotations, internships, student teaching), disaggregated by state and two-digit Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes as assigned by the U.S. Department of Education. Out-of-state learning placements are considered distance education for purposes of SARA. Data is collected on a calendar year basis for the OOSLP. The data below reflects the 2020 calendar year.

Reported OOSLP sent FROM participating institutions in Florida 6,435

Reported OOSLP sent TO Florida from participating institutions in other SARA states 16,839

- Source: [NC-SARA Annual Data Report: Technical Report for Fall 2020 Exclusively Distance Education Enrollments & 2020 Out-of-Sate Learning Placements](#) (October 2021).

2020-2021 FL-SARA Complaint Reporting

SARA consumer protection provisions require the home state, through its SARA portal entity, to investigate and resolve allegations of dishonest or fraudulent activity by the state's SARA-participating institutions, including the provision of false or misleading information.

Member states are required to report the following information to NC-SARA on a quarterly basis:

- Number of complaints by out-of-state students, appealed to the state's SARA portal entity after the complaint has been heard, but not resolved, at the institutional and state agency/governing board level; and
- Resolution/outcome of those complaints.

Council staff work in conjunction with the Commission for Independent Education staff to identify complaints relating to distance education and involving SARA institutions. While the vast majority of complaints received by the Commission are not SARA-related, Council staff are involved in the review process in order to make that determination. Last year, Council staff reviewed three-hundred sixty-nine (369) complaints. None of the complaints required portal entity resolution.

Florida State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement

325 W. Gaines St., Suite 1414

Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400 Phone: 850-245-3200

<http://www.fldoe.org/sara/>