



NC-SARA plays an important role in ensuring consumer protections for students who take advantage of interstate distance education programs. Not only do we work directly with states to help assure the quality of the programs offered, but we also help support students in instances in which they may want information or have questions about professional licensure or concerns about institutional accountability or educational experience.

What is a SARA-Participating Institution?



A college or university that has been approved to participate in SARA may offer distance education programs to students in other SARA member states (<https://nc-sara.org/directory>). Importantly, these institutions have met several requirements that help ensure their quality and student consumer protections, including:

- The institution is a degree-granting institution, appropriately authorized (by Congress, a U.S. state, territory or district, or a federally recognized Indian tribe) to award associate degrees or higher.
- The institution is institutionally accredited by an accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and whose scope of recognition, as specified by the U.S. Department of Education, includes distance education.
- The institution agrees that, in cases where the institution cannot fully deliver the instruction for which a student has contracted, it will provide a reasonable alternative for delivering the instruction or reasonable financial compensation for the education the student did not receive.

Student Resources

NC-SARA has developed a variety of resources specifically designed for students. Click the links below to learn more :

- **[Student Consumer Protections \(/student-consumer-protections-page\)](#)**: Learn about the policies that NC-SARA has established for member institutions and states to help strengthen protections for students and assure program quality.
- **[Student Complaints \(/student-complaints\)](#)**: If you are a student - or another member of a college or university community - and you are interested in filing a complaint about your college or university, please view this information to learn more about the process.
- **[Professional Licensure Information \(/resources/professional-licensure\)](#)**: NC-SARA has a variety of resources regarding professional licensure, including a directory that provides contact information for five programs (counseling, nursing, psychology, social work, and teacher education) that lead to a professional license.
- **[Institution Directory \(https://nc-sara.org/directory\)](#)**: Find institutions' and State Portal Entity contact information in this directory. Select a state from the drop-down list to view participating SARA institutions in that state.
- **[SARA Source: \(https://nc-sara.org/which-program-is-right-for-me\) \(/node/4419\)Which Program is Right for Me?](https://nc-sara.org/which-program-is-right-for-me)** (<https://nc-sara.org/which-program-is-right-for-me>) If you are a student considering a distance education program, the resources on this page will help you in your research.

About Accreditation

Students often have questions about accreditation in addition to state authorization. We recommended visiting the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (**[CHEA \(https://www.chea.org/\)](https://www.chea.org/)**) resource on **[About Accreditation \(https://www.chea.org/about-accreditation\)](https://www.chea.org/about-accreditation)** for more information. All SARA participating institutions must be accredited by an accreditor recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and whose scope of recognition, as specified by the U.S. Department of Education, includes Distance Education.

NC-SARA curates a directory of **[Other Licensure and Accrediting Agencies \(/other-licensure-and-accrediting-agencies\)](#)** for quick reference.

Student Complaints

Student Complaint Process

Every student deserves a positive educational experience. Sometimes a student's experience may not be what they anticipate, and the student may have a concern or a complaint.

SARA consumer protection provisions require the institution's home state, through its SARA State 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.

A student has the right to lodge a complaint or grievance. The institution should ensure that all concerns and complaints of students are addressed fairly and are resolved promptly. Student complaints relating to consumer protection laws offered under the terms and conditions of the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), must first be filed with the institution to seek resolution.

The student should begin the complaint process with the institution and if resolution is not found, the student would contact the institution's home state SARA Portal Entity. NC-SARA maintains a directory of SARA [State Portal Entities \(/state-portal-entity-contacts\)](/state-portal-entity-contacts).

HOW TO FILE A SARA STUDENT COMPLAINT

KEY

SPE = State Portal Entity

SARA = State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements

I HAVE A COMPLAINT ABOUT VIOLATIONS OF SARA POLICY. WHAT SHOULD I DO?



First, file a complaint
with your institution



WAS YOUR COMPLAINT RESOLVED?

NO



I WANT TO FILE A COMPLAINT WITH THE STATE

You may now file a complaint with the
institution's SARA SPE.

Contact the SPE of your institution's
home state

Start with the NC-SARA Institution Directory
on the NC-SARA website

Select the home state of your institution

The SPE contact will be on the right side
of this webpage



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The institution's home state SARA SPE has
final authority in SARA complaints

Institution's home state SARA SPE notifies
your location's SARA SPE.



Process ends

HOW DO I CHECK FOR SARA COMPLAINTS?

Quarterly, SARA SPEs report the status of complaints to NC-SARA.
Complaint reports are listed on NC-SARA website by state.



**National Council for
State Authorization
Reciprocity Agreements**

A Resource for Students: Frequently Asked Questions about Filing a SARA Complaint

SARA offers many benefits for students of participating institutions, including expanding access to educational opportunities and better resolution of complaints. Below are frequently asked questions from students about the SARA student complaint process.

- **Where can I find my institution's complaint policy and process?**
 - **Answer:** First, try searching in your institution's website search box for "Complaint Policy." The policy should be readily available, and may be located within the Student Handbook or the Catalog. If you still are not able to locate the complaint policy and process, contact a representative of the institution and ask them to share it with you directly.

- **What *is* a State Portal Entity?**
 - **Answer:** A State Portal Entity, or "SPE," is the designated entity that performs the SARA work of the state, with all the necessary legal authority to do that work on behalf of the state. For SARA-related concerns, this is the primary state-level contact.

- **How do I locate the right State Portal Entity for my institution?**
 - **Answer:** NC-SARA has a directory! Find your institution in our [directory](#), and when it opens up, the SPE contact will be on the right side of the page.

- **Which State Portal Entity do I contact? (The state my institution is located in, or the state where I live?)**
 - **Answer:** Contact the State Portal Entity for the state in which your institution is located. That State Portal Entity will notify the state in which you live, but the institution's State Portal Entity has final authority on SARA complaints.

- **How do I find out where to file a complaint or an appeal with the State Portal Entity?**
 - **Answer:** There are two ways. First, you can go to [The State Authorization Guide](#) and identify the state and then select the topic of "Consumer Protection and Student Complaints." Alternatively, go to that same Guide and identify the topic of "Consumer Protection and Student Complaints" and that will bring up the list of states, and you can select the relevant state.

- **What does a complaint or an appeal to a State Portal Entity typically involve?**
 - **Answer:** Each state outlines its specific policy and processes on its website. For example, Alaska Commission on Postsecondary Education, which is the website you will land on if you select Alaska from The State Authorization Guide, [has an entire section](#) with relevant contact information for requesting the forms. Other states may have the forms that you can download directly from the website.

- **What kinds of issues can I ask the State Portal Entity to resolve?**
 - **Answer:** In general, States will address violations of state institutional authorization law relative to postsecondary institutions or programs. As most states will direct you, you should always begin a complaint resolution process with your college or university directly. For the purposes of SARA, a State Portal Entity will address concerns related to distance education activities (online learning, sufficiency of support for distance education students, and related activities) from out-of-state students attending a participating SARA institution.

- **I am afraid of retribution. Can I file an appeal with the state anonymously?**
 - **Answer:** Some complaints may be filed anonymously, but an institution may require that certain complaints from students not be anonymous.

- **How long does a typical state complaint appeal process take?**
 - **Answer:** Time will vary depending on the type of complaint and the agencies involved.

- **What kinds of documentation do I need to provide to the State Portal Entity in my appeal?**
 - **Answer:** Typically, there will be a form you will need to complete and submit. The form will likely ask you about the nature of your complaint, attempts you've made to resolve the complaint with the institution or other entities (such as its accreditor), and any documentation related to the complaint.

- **Who will be notified that I filed a complaint or an appeal?**
 - **Answer:** The home state portal entity and the state portal entity where you are located.

- **What recourse do I have if the state doesn't resolve my issue?**
 - **Answer:** The State Portal Entity has final authority on SARA complaints.

- **What role does NC-SARA play in the complaint process? What will NC- SARA do?**
 - NC-SARA does not resolve complaints, but at NC-SARA, we recognize that we play an important oversight role to ensure institutions and states are taking appropriate steps to protect students and assure program quality. To that

end, NC-SARA takes students' complaints seriously. Unlike other higher education membership organizations, NC-SARA publishes a list of complaints filed against its participating institutions on its website in an effort to encourage enhanced transparency and accountability. Click [here](#) to learn more about student complaints.

- **Can I contact NC-SARA directly about my complaint?**
 - **Answer:** [This infographic](#) details the complaint process. While you may contact NC-SARA with an inquiry about the complaint process, NC-SARA does not directly address individual student complaints against institutions.

- **Are there any other agencies to whom I can direct a complaint?**
 - **Answer:** Other agencies that attend to student complaints about an institution or a program are the institution's accreditor or, if the program is accredited, the programmatic accreditor. The contact information of these entities should be readily available on your institution's website. (TIP: Search "Accreditation" if you aren't easily locating the information.) Additionally, the institution's home state authorizing agency (independent of the State Portal Entity) may also review complaints about institutions within the state.