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State cuts red tape to offer college students more quality distance learning options

INDIANAPOLIS, IND. – Indiana is the first state in the country to join an interstate initiative designed to ensure academic quality and increase affordability for Hoosier students who complete online courses offered by colleges in other states.

Launched by the National Council for State Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), the initiative will streamline the regulatory process required for colleges to enroll college students across state lines. More than twenty states are expected to be signed on by the end of 2014.

“Indiana is embracing new pathways that offer Hoosier college students more options and greater flexibility in completing education beyond high school,” said Teresa Lubbers, Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education. “It is imperative that these options are aligned with our state’s quality standards, and NC-SARA promotes consumer protection and reduces regulatory burdens and costs.”

Lubbers noted that Indiana is well-positioned as a leader in NC-SARA since the Indiana Commission for Higher Education now oversees both in-state and out-of-state for-profit colleges through the newly created Indiana Board for Proprietary Education. In a related move, the Commission has also been granted oversight responsibilities for both out-of-state public and not-for-profit colleges offering instruction in Indiana.

Other states that wish to join NC-SARA must demonstrate that they have an effective process in place for authorizing participating higher education institutions. The process must include:

- Acceptance of national or regional accreditation as evidence of academic quality for approving institutions to participate in reciprocity
- Acceptance of an adequate federal financial responsibility score for participation and an effective state process for consumer protection and ongoing oversight
- State authority to enter into the reciprocity agreement

In the coming weeks, Indiana colleges and universities will be invited to apply for institutional membership in SARA.

Implementing instructional models that provide Indiana students with greater flexibility and accelerated degree completion without sacrificing academic quality is a key strategy in the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s “Reaching Higher, Achieving More” strategic plan.

Learn about the Commission and its strategic priorities to increase college completion at www.che.in.gov.

Learn about the National Council for State Reciprocity Agreements at www.wiche.edu/sara.