



# Midwifery Education Accreditation Council

*Setting the Standards for Midwifery Education*

## **MEAC MEMBER SCHOOLS LETTER #6 Update on State Authorization for Distance Education**

April 30, 2013

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Sandra Bitonti Stewart

Dear MEAC Member Schools:

As you know, in 2010 the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) released a new regulation focused on the need for institutions offering distance or correspondence education to acquire authorization from any state in which it "operates." MEAC has informed member schools that institutions have until July 1, 2014, to have obtained the appropriate approvals. Meanwhile, institutions are required to demonstrate a 'good faith' effort to comply in each state in which it serves students. Last year, MEAC asked each member school to provide details about their efforts to come into compliance with this new regulation.

You may have heard that this regulation is currently being reviewed in the federal courts, but it is expected that the Department of Education will make every effort to see that it is kept in place.

Before this federal regulation was issued, most states already regulated the offering of postsecondary education. Unfortunately, states have been doing this regulation in vastly different ways, with widely varying standards, policies, practices, and "triggers" for application and enforcement.

At this time, there is no alternative to each institution separately pursuing state authorization (or assurance that authorization is not required) in each state in which it serves students. As a result, institutions must seek approval/authorization in as many as 54 states and territories. We have heard from many of you that this approach is daunting and possibly even stifling to your future growth and success.

### **There is some good news on the horizon that we would like to share with you.**

The Lumina Foundation has provided funding to the Presidents' Forum, working with the Council of State Governments, to develop a 'model state reciprocity agreement' based on nonpartisan research and analyses that states could adopt to acknowledge other states' work and decisions in regard to institutional authorization. SARA (State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement) is the current product of that effort.

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SARA offers a process that could make state authorization more efficient, more uniform in regard to necessary and reasonable standards of practice that could span states, and more effective in dealing with quality and integrity issues that have arisen in some online/distance education offerings. It could also be less costly for states, accredited institutions, and the students they serve.

In its recommendations, the Commission on the Regulation of Postsecondary Education places value on accreditation:

“A core principle of the interstate reciprocity agreement is that it does not create redundant requirements when well-established structures and requirements that ensure institutional quality already exist. **Accreditation by a federally-recognized accreditation agency can provide sufficient evidence of institutional quality for purposes of interstate reciprocity**, give students a clear indicator of quality when selecting an institution, and help to eliminate low-quality institutions from the institutional marketplace as states increase the rigor of the authorization process. Correspondingly, the accrediting agencies and institutions must provide the necessary transparency in process and rigor that preserves the confidence of the higher education community at large and of the broader public even in a rapidly changing postsecondary landscape.” (emphasis added)

It is our understanding that if the Commission’s recommendations are adopted by the parties working toward a reciprocity agreement, MEAC schools would not be required to seek state authorization in most states.

You may read the Commission’s full report on SARA, including its proposed lists of triggering actions at: <http://tinyurl.com/afph4qe>

At this time, it is unknown when the reciprocity agreements will be formalized. MEAC is working hard to stay informed about all updates to the status on the USDE’s regulation as well as the state reciprocity efforts. We will in turn, work to keep all member schools informed.

Feel free to contact me or Jessica Kelly-Shaieb, MEAC’s Training and Accreditation Coordinator at (360) 466-2080 if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Sandra Bitonti Stewart