

**State of Wisconsin  
Distance Learning Authorization Board (DLAB)**

**May 24, 2021  
Virtual Meeting**

**Minutes**

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Members present:

Dr. Anny Morrobel-Sosa, Chair, University of Wisconsin System (UW System)  
Secretary Dawn Crim, Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS)  
Dr. Morna Foy, Vice Chair Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)  
Dr. Rolf Wegenke, Secretary, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)

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Members absent:     Dr. Russell Swagger, Wisconsin Tribal Colleges and Universities

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Others present:

Ms. Monique Currie, WTCS  
Ms. Joan Gage, DSPS  
Dr. Connie Hutchison, State of Wisconsin Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB)  
Ms. Paige Smith, UW System  
Ms. Rebecca Larson, WAICU  
Dr. Carleen Vande Zande, UW System  
Aaron Seligman, UW System

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**Call to Order and Open Meeting Statement – Dr. Rolf Wegenke, DLAB Chair**

Dr. Anny Morrobel-Sosa, DLAB Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. and stated a quorum was present.

**Action: Approval of December 1, 2020 DLAB meeting minutes – Dr. Wegenke**

The minutes of the December 1, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously (Crim/Wegenke motion). The minutes will be posted to the DLAB website.

## **Report of the Chair – Dr. Morrobel-Sosa**

### NC-SARA Guidelines:

Dr. Morrobel-Sosa asked Dr. Foy to share information about new NC-SARA guidelines. Dr. Foy reported that the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) adopted guidelines allowing each accreditor to determine how to use. The new guidance is more prescriptive than in the past and includes directives. NC-SARA had planned to adopt guidelines to incorporate into the SARA Manual, but the timeframe for input by state members and institutions was too short (two weeks for feedback).

M-SARA submitted a letter to NC-SARA in regard to the proposed guidelines that was supported and signed by all thirteen M-SARA state members. Dr. Wegenke stated these guidelines may conflict with Wisconsin law and DLAB's authority. Dr. Foy agreed and noted that as a result of a similar issue regarding changing requirements in the NC-SARA state application form, Iowa had temporarily withdrawn its NC-SARA renewal applications. She stated a broader concern about conflicts between accreditor requirements and SARA, and a perception the guidelines attempt to make NC-SARA the defacto accreditor of distance education.

Dr. Foy then reported that NC-SARA reviewed the letter and tabled the adoption of new guidelines until after a longer comment period. Dr. Morrobel-Sosa noted that other regional compacts and organizations, such as Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) have been vocal about this topic.

Dr. Morrobel-Sosa suggested consideration of actions the DLAB might take if the proposed guidelines are adopted by NC-SARA and incorporated into the SARA Manual. Dr. Foy stated that if NC-SARA does not loosen up the mandatory language, the DLAB may have to reconsider participation given potential legal and policy issues.

Dr. Morrobel-Sosa asked whether DLAB should do anything further in regard to NC-SARA's recent actions. Dr. Foy agreed it was appropriate to express concerns to NC-SARA as a group. She noted the letter could address consequences or actions members may take. She suggested that if DLAB considered non-participation or other action, that should be expressed in writing. Dr. Foy stated that she does not believe DLAB should act at this time, but that Dr. Morrobel-Sosa, as chair, could consider sending a letter to NC-SARA. Dr. Wegenke stated the purpose of NC-SARA was to reduce fees. Dr. Foy noted that costs are not the only factor, especially if there are legal barriers to participation. Dr. Morrobel-Sosa stated it is important to consider the potential financial and staffing impacts on our institutions if we were to withdraw as a state member. She asked representatives to report within 30 days to allow for submission of a letter to NC-SARA during the comment period.

### Member Applications:

Ms. Larson reported there are currently no new member applications for private, nonprofit institutions, but WAICU will have some in the fall. She noted applicants need a minimum financial

responsibility score, which can be a lagging indicator and distorted by a large expenditure and does not follow Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAPP). She noted NC-SARA does not allow alternative measures of financial health as does the U.S. Department of Education and the goal is for NC-SARA to also consider additional measures of financial health. Currently, Nashotah House did receive a score below the NC SARA established threshold.

Dr. Foy stated that this had been an issue in the first year, and that DLAB had communicated with NC-SARA regarding the scoring challenges for small private colleges, citing a report from the National Association of College Business Officers (NACUBO). Dr. Morrobel-Sosa noted that if the score is a lagging indicator, states will be in very different stages post COVID and may impact how NC-SARA conducts evaluations.

Ms. Currie reported that four technical colleges were approved for annual NC-SARA renewal, and Ms. Smith reported that UW System institutions have begun the renewal process and will have more to report in September.

#### Mini-Grant Application:

The Midwest Higher Education Compact (MHEC) is offering mini grants due to leftover funds in the absence of in-person meetings. The grant provides up to \$4,500 to support M-SARA work. Ms. Smith stated that portal representatives have talked and suggest it may not be worth submitting given the June 11 deadline and a requirement to immediately identify how the funds would be used. Dr. Wegenke and Ms. Foy agreed, but suggest it may be of interest to the tribal colleges.

#### **ACTION: Approval of authority for Dr. Morrobel-Sosa to submit MHEC grant.**

A motion was made to grant Dr. Morrobel-Sosa the authority to submit a MHEC mini-grant application on behalf of the tribal colleges if they are interested (Foy/Wegenke motion). The motion carried unanimously.

#### Savings Estimate:

Ms. Currie reported that NC-SARA has issued a report, “Game Changer: The Value of SARA Participation”. Using research conducted by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, the report estimates that NC-SARA participation has saved Wisconsin colleges and universities \$5.5 million in initial fees and \$1.9 million in renewal fees as compared to what these institutions would have paid to become individually authorized in each state for distance education. However, the report was not conducted independently as it was commissioned by NC-SARA nor has it been peer reviewed.

#### Complaints Report:

Ms. Gage reported no complaints in Quarter 1, and one complaint in Quarter 2 from UW that was forwarded back to the institution and resolved.

Ms. Larson reported a branch campus update. There was an issue when a campus has a home state but a branch in other states. That would counter the purpose of SARA, and a working group is discussing. Initially NC-SARA proposed institutions having more than one home state for oversight of branch campus locations. This would run contrary to the purpose of SARA, and a working group is discussing.

Ms. Smith reported that in addition to tabling a discussion of new guidelines, the NC-SARA Board also tabled a discussion as to the process for receiving input and feedback from stakeholders on major or minor proposed changes to the SARA Manual. In response to Ms. Foy's question, Ms. Smith stated NC-SARA has not offering guidance as to what would constitute as a major or minor change.

Ms. Smith reported that additional updates include changes to the investigation and application process. There will be additional clarifying language, and screenshots added to the NC-SARA manual.

### **Discussion: Other Items**

Dr. Morrobel-Sosa noted the next DLAB board meeting is scheduled for September 17, 2021.

### **Adjournment**

There was no further discussion and the meeting adjourned by unanimous consent at 12:14 p.m. (Wegenke/Foy motion).