



# DLAB

Distance Learning Authorization Board

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**September 20, 2024  
Virtual Meeting**

## **Minutes**

### Members present

Dr. Eric Fulcomer, Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)  
Jay Rothman, Universities of Wisconsin (UW)  
Layla Merrifield, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS)  
Secretary Dan Hereth, Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS)

### Members absent

Dr. Russell Swagger, Wisconsin Tribal Colleges

### Others present

Tammie DeVooght, Higher Educational Aids Board  
Joan Gage, DSPS  
Megan Stritchko, WTCS  
Paige Smith, UW  
Rebecca Larson, WAICU  
Sonja Umberger, WAICU

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## **Call to Order and Open Meeting Statement – Dr. Eric Fulcomer, DLAB Chair**

Dr. Fulcomer, DLAB Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Sonja Umberger called roll and a quorum was present. She read the following Open Meeting Statement: “The September 20, 2024 meeting of the Wisconsin Distance Learning Authorization Board and all other meetings of this board are open to the public in compliance with State Statute. Notice of the meeting has been sent to the press in an attempt to make the general public of Wisconsin aware of the time, place, and agenda of the meeting.”

## **Action: Approval of May 17, 2024 DLAB meeting minutes – Dr. Eric Fulcomer**

The minutes of the May 17, 2024 meeting were approved unanimously (Hereth/Rothman motion). The minutes will be posted to the DLAB website.

## **Report of the Chair – Dr. Eric Fulcomer**

Dr. Fulcomer welcomed the board and introduced the newest board member, Layla Merrifield, who succeeded Dr. Morna Foy as the president of WTCS.

President Merrifield shared a brief history of her work, including the Legislative Fiscal Bureau and WTCS. She is excited to continue the good work that Dr. Foy carried forward for WTCS. She looks forward to expanding educational access to and for students across the state.

Dr. Fulcomer said he and the board were very glad to have her on DLAB. He then welcomed guest Tammie DeVooght, the newly appointed executive secretary of the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB). Although she is not a voting member of the board, DLAB could not do what they do without HEAB's administrative support.

Executive Secretary DeVooght shared a brief history of her work in the office of Governor Tony Evers and the Department of Public Instruction, grants, pre-college and college access programs, and college financial aid. She anticipates the next phase of the information technology modernization project to roll out in six months.

Dr. Fulcomer said that on behalf of himself and the portal entity staff, they are happy to support President Merrifield and Executive Secretary DeVooght in any way needed to get up to speed on NC-SARA and the work of DLAB.

The collaborative nature of the portal entity is what has made DLAB successful in its unique approach to NC-SARA participation.

In a general sense, our sectors continue to experience challenges due to the unprecedented and complex Department of Education (USDE) regulations now in place and additional regulations that are forthcoming. These are turbulent times in education. We will continue our focus on students.

Dr. Fulcomer then reviewed the agenda.

### **Report: Review and Approval of Institutional Renewal Applications**

#### **Universities of Wisconsin – Paige Smith**

Paige Smith provided an update on the renewals in the Universities of Wisconsin (UW). The renewal process for UW occurred over the summer. All 13 UW institutions submitted their renewals and have been approved. There is one institution yet to submit payment, but no issues are expected.

#### **Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities – Rebecca Larson**

Rebecca Larson provided an update on the renewals of the private sector. The renewal process for the private sector began over the summer. Eight colleges: Bellin College, Carroll University, Concordia University Wisconsin, Herzing University, Maranatha Baptist University, Marquette University, Medical College of Wisconsin, and Milwaukee School of Engineering have submitted their renewals and have been approved.

In August, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) notified Alverno College of its financial distress designation based on the institution having declared financial exigency. As part of the NC-SARA renewal process, institutions are required to notify the board of changes in accreditation. Alverno College declared financial exigency to align college expenses with enrollment. In their continuous commitment to financial responsibility, Alverno College has received a \$10 million grant and a \$1.5 million matching gift. They feel that they are on a good track and trajectory for the future.

Dr. Fulcomer added that the financial responsibility composite score is only applicable to the private colleges and universities. Alverno College continues to be eligible for NC-SARA with their composite score.

#### Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services – Joan Gage

Joan Gage reported there were no renewals in the DSPS Educational Approval Program at this time.

#### Wisconsin Technical College System – Megan Stritchko

Megan Stritchko provided an update of the renewals in the Wisconsin technical colleges sector. Renewals come in on a rolling basis. Six colleges: Northcentral Technical College, Chippewa Valley Technical College, Nicolet Area Technical College, Western Technical College, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College have submitted their renewals and have been approved.

The technical colleges sector also approves tribal college renewals. Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe University has submitted their renewal and been approved.

### **Report: Staff Updates**

#### NC-SARA and Federal Regulations

Paige Smith reminded the board that it is the ten-year anniversary of NC-SARA. She and Rebecca Larson attended the NC-SARA State Portal Entity annual meeting September 10-12, 2024, in Indiana, the first state to join SARA.

NC-SARA continues its focus and work on the 2024 SARA Policy Modification Process. Last year sixty-six policy proposals were proposed and six adopted. This year fifty new policies were proposed and ten have been approved for adoption. As a reminder, the NC-SARA board no longer takes action on substantive policy changes but rather all four compacts must vote to approve them. This places all authority to revise SARA at the regional compacts level, i.e. authority is back with the states.

Paige Smith serves on the Regional Steering Committee (RSC) for MHEC on behalf of NC-SARA. The RSC has already begun to meet to review next year's policy proposals, and review of the other thirty proposals that were not adopted during the current year. One of the discussion points is whether to limit the number of policies that can be considered each year to improve time commitment challenges and overlapping issues. Paige observed that the current approach from external federal and state stakeholders and interest groups is to improve student consumer protection and federal loan discharges.

Dr. Fulcomer inquired about a timeline for proposals.

Based on the current NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rulemaking) status for federal regulations that would impact SARA, the most likely implementation of any proposals that are published would be no sooner than July 2, 2026. Paige Smith predicts that we will continue to see increased movement for more oversight and/or restrictions on distance education through federal regulations or SARA policies.

Dr. Fulcomer thanked Paige Smith for representing DLAB at the national level. The board continues to be concerned about various regulation proposals.

#### Complaints Report – Joan Gage

Joan Gage reported no complaints.

#### NC-SARA State and Territory Grant Update – Megan Stritchko

Megan Stritchko reviewed that the NC-SARA inaugural State and Territory grant of \$7,500 that was awarded to DLAB in January 2024 was used to join the State Authorization Network (SAN). DLAB has been a member since July 1, 2024, and this is a beneficial membership for all portal staff. In other good news, portal staff applied for a new grant for the upcoming fiscal year and \$7,500 was awarded to DLAB for FY2025. The funds should be available within the next month. Portal staff would like to renew the SAN membership and research other professional development and networking opportunities as well as resources. She thanked HEAB for their management of those funds.

#### Renewal of DLAB of NC-SARA

Rebecca Larson reported that since the last DLAB meeting, Wisconsin's renewal application to NC-SARA had been submitted and approved. The board was notified by email after the Regional Steering Committee voted to approve DLAB's renewal application. It was a unanimous decision with no questions.

Paige Smith thanked Rebecca Larson and the team at WAICU for this huge lift.

**Discussion: Other Items**

Dr. Fulcomer thanked the portal staff for everything that they do for DLAB and thanked HEAB for their commitment and administrative support for DLAB.

**Adjournment**

There was no further discussion, and a motion was made to adjourn the meeting (Rothman/Merrifield motion). The motion carried unanimously, and the meeting adjourned at 11:33 a.m.