



STATE OF TENNESSEE
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION
STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORPORATION
312 ROSA L. PARKS AVENUE, 9TH FLOOR
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243
(615) 741-3605

2025 TN-SARA Home State Institution Meeting
Wednesday, March 26, 2025
Tennessee Tower, Nashville
10:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. CDT
Agenda

- I. 10:00-10:15 | Welcome and Introductions
 - **Steven Gentile, Ed.D.**, *Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission*
- II. 10:15-10:45 | Update from the Southern Region Educational Board ("SREB")
 - **Elisa Jaden, Ed.S.**, *Regional SARA Director, SREB*
- III. 10:45-11:45 | Update from the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements ("NC-SARA")
 - **Jared Abdirkin**, *Director, Institutional Engagement & Initiatives, NC-SARA*
 - **Terri Taylor-Straut**, *Senior Director, Educational Programs, NC-SARA*

11:45-12:45 | Lunch
- IV. 12:45-1:15 | The SARA Policy Modification Process
 - **Elisa Jaden**
 - **Jared Abdirkin**
 - **Julie Woodruff**, *Senior Compliance Counsel, Office of General Counsel, THEC*
 - **Cheryl Dowd**, *Senior Director, State Authorization Network & WCET Policy Innovations*
- V. 1:15-1:45 | Federal Updates
 - **Cheryl Dowd**

1:45-2:00 | Break
- VI. 2:00-3:15 | Introduction to the State Authorization Network and Responsibilities for Professional Licensure Programs
 - **Cheryl Dowd**
- VII. 3:15-3:30 | Closing Remarks
 - **Julie Woodruff**

DR. STEVEN GENTILE
Executive Director



BILL LEE
Governor

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Speaker Bios

Jared Abdirkin, *Director, Institutional Engagement & Initiatives, NC-SARA*

Jared earned his BS degree in Human Development and MS degree in College Student Personnel from the University of Rhode Island. He has worked at American River College (Sacramento, CA), Iona College, and the University of Rhode Island, focused on academic affairs, program and college leadership, and admission and retention efforts. Highlights of his work include strengthened CCRI-URI engineering partnership, adapted URI engineering classes to hybrid/remote formats, reorganized Student Life at American River College and Academic & Student Affairs at URI's College of Engineering. Jared started at the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) in August 2021, primarily focused on SARA as well as serving with a team of Senior Directors to help manage and guide NEBHE internal processes and policies. Jared's professional passions are in team development and mentorship, process improvement, and intraorganizational communication.

Cheryl Dowd, *Senior Director, State Authorization Network & WCET Policy Innovations*

Cheryl joined WCET in August of 2015 as the director of the State Authorization Network. She currently serves as the senior director, policy innovations. She directs the overall activities of WCET's State Authorization Network (SAN), including coordination of staff addressing interstate policy and compliance, along with other ancillary compliance issues. As senior director, Cheryl also serves the overall WCET membership in addressing emerging and special regulatory issues related to digital learning in postsecondary education. She brings extensive experience in education and compliance to the WCET team and is a contributing author for State Authorization of Colleges and Universities, a guidebook for understanding the legal basis for State and Federal compliance for activities of postsecondary institutions. Cheryl holds a Juris Doctorate from the University of Richmond, a master's degree in criminal justice from Bowling Green State University, and a bachelor's degree in political science from James Madison University.

Steven Gentile, Ed.D., *Executive Director, Tennessee Higher Education Commission*

Dr. Steven Gentile serves as the Executive Director at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), where he has had a transformative journey from his initial role as Assistant Director of Fiscal Policy to his prior role as Chief Policy and Strategy Officer. Before joining THEC, Steven served as the Assistant Dean of Admission and Financial Aid at his alma mater, Davidson College, in North Carolina. Steven received his Doctor of Education in Higher Education Leadership and Policy from Vanderbilt University (2019), a Master of Education from Vanderbilt (2014), and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from

Davidson College (2006). He is also an alumnus of Leadership Tennessee NEXT, Nashville Emerging Leaders, and the Tennessee Higher Education Innovation and Leadership Fellows program.

Elisa Jaden, Ed.S., *Regional SARA Director, Southern Regional Education Board*

Elisa Jaden leads SREB's regional tuition reciprocity programs – the Academic Common Market and the Regional Contract Program, as well as SREB's HBCU-MSI Course-Sharing Consortium. She also serves as Director for the SREB region to the National Council for State Authorization Reciprocity Agreements (NC-SARA), for which she follows state and federal higher education regulations and policy related to state authorization and program approval. Elisa works with the SREB SARA Regional Steering Committee to inform and clarify policy changes made at the national level. Elisa joined SREB in 2017, bringing more than 15 years of experience in student affairs for multiple sectors of postsecondary education, including at Lincoln College of Technology and the Technical College System of Georgia. Elisa holds a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from The University of Alabama, a Master of Science in Management and Leadership from Western Governors University, and an Education Specialist degree in Higher Education Administration with a concentration in Student Affairs from Liberty University.

Terri Taylor-Straut, *Senior Director, Educational Programs, NC-SARA*

Terri Taylor-Straut serves as Senior Director, Educational Programs at NC-SARA where she designs and develops educational programs for participating institutions of higher education, State Portal Entity staff, and others interested in SARA. Terri is also a key member of the NC-SARA Data Team, analyzing reported distance education enrollment and out-of-state learning placement data annually. Terri's affiliation with NC-SARA dates to 2017, the first year that the NC-SARA Data Report was produced; she has remained the primary analyst of NC-SARA data since that time. Prior to joining NC-SARA, Terri served as an independent consultant to multiple organizations, with a focus on strategic planning, leadership development, workforce training, state authorization, and higher education administration. Experienced as an administrator for distance education initiatives starting in 1996, Terri was the founding Director of CU Online for the University of Colorado system as well as a member of the initial leadership team for the Western Governors University (WGU). Her operational experience includes implementing distance education programs and projects in numerous environments including higher education, corporations, and non-profits. Terri holds a Master of Business Administration from Northeastern University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Delaware.

Julie Woodruff, *Senior Compliance Counsel, Office of General Counsel, THEC*

Julie M. Woodruff is the Senior Compliance Counsel at the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. In this role, she provides legal, policy, and administrative guidance and advice on state and federal postsecondary education regulation, including state authorization and consumer protection. Mrs. Woodruff is a licensed attorney who has worked in regulation for twenty-five years; with most of that time spent in higher education. Mrs. Woodruff also serves as the Vice-Chair of the S-SARA Regional Steering Committee, and she previously served on the Board of Directors of the National Association of State Administrators and Supervisors of Private Schools. Mrs. Woodruff is a graduate of Vanderbilt University and Nova Southeastern University.