U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

SEVIS Annual Verification of School and Sponsor Users FAQ

Updated: January 26, 2015 – Added questions from original FAQ to FAQ from Pre-Release Webinar

Verification Period

Q: **What is the verification period?**
A: The annual verification period is December 2nd through March 3rd.

Q: **Will this period be the same every year?**
A: Yes. The verification period will be the same every year.

Annual Verification Process – General Questions

Q: **Why do schools and sponsors have to verify their official each year?**
A: As a federal database, SEVIS is subject to the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). FISMA requires the annual verification that all users who access federal systems have both the business need and the authorization to access the system. To comply with FISMA, PDSOs and ROs must annually verify that every Primary Designated School Official (PDSO), Designated School Official (DSO), Responsible Officer (RO), and Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) who has access to SEVIS:

- Is still regularly employed by the organization and continues to be the designated PDSO, DSO, RO, or ARO.
- Requires continued access to SEVIS.

Q: **What's happened on October 31st [2014]?**

A. The verification functionality was released into SEVIS production on October 31st of 2014; however, you didn't actually see anything related to the annual verification until December 2nd, when the verification period began.

Q: **What is SEVP's definition of a DSO "requiring continued access" to SEVIS? Should all DSOs have a regular need to access SEVIS, or is it all right to have DSOs who are in place for periods of time when the PDSO/DSOs are unavailable?**

A: The verification confirms that an individual is still employed at the school **and** has a business need to be able to access SEVIS. It is perfectly acceptable to have DSOs designated for back-up purposes that are not necessarily making frequent updates. However, anyone who is employed at the school but no longer has a business need to access SEVIS (i.e., no longer serves in that capacity, backup or otherwise) should be designated as "No."

Q: **Can we update a DSO's email and phone information while we are on the verification page?**

A. You cannot update the DSOs email address on the verification page, but you can do it on "Update Officials" page in the Form I-17, if necessary.

Q: **If we opt against verifying a DSO, are they automatically removed from our I-17? If a DSO is removed through this process, do we still have to file an I-17 update?**

A: A decision must be made for every DSO listed for the school. Every DSO must be verified with either a "Yes" or "No" designation. If you select "No," that DSO is automatically removed from the Form I-17. There is no need to file a supplementary petition update to remove officials.

Q: **Our school has multiple campuses, each with a PDSO. If one PDSO fails to complete the verification process, will all the campuses be affected?**

A. Yes, if even one campus remains unverified, the entire school and all officials will be locked out of SEVIS; therefore, any PDSO may verify all of the campuses. If your school has multiple PDSOs, you may want to assign verification to one particular PDSO for all campuses, or you may assign each PDSO responsibility for his/ her own campus.

Q: **I work at a community college that has more than one campus. Do we need verification for each campus?**

A: Yes, every campus has a PDSO assigned to it – as listed on the Form I-17. Campuses may also have DSOs.

Q: **I'm a PDSO at seven different schools. How do I verify these?**

A. Different schools must be verified individually. If you are a PDSO at multiple schools, when you log in and access the verification page, you will see on the list all your schools and all your campuses. It will be easy for you to tell when you have verified all of your officials, as the schools/campuses are removed from the list as you verify them.

Q: **Does the PDSO need to confirm DSO U.S. national or permanent residency credentials?**

A. No, the PDSO does not need to confirm the DSO's citizenship or residency to complete the annual verification.

Q: **What if a school added a campus during the previous year?**

A. If the campus is already officially added to the Form I-17, it will appear on the verification screen. If the campus addition has not yet been approved, then it and the associated officials will appear for verification the following year.

Q: **We have a new head of school. Should I add him before removing our old head of school from the petition?**

A: Yes, especially if your head of school is listed as the PDSO. If the head of school is not the PDSO, the verification process is not affected. Do not delay verification if the head of school is not a PDSO.

Q: **I'm a DSO. Our PDSO is in the process of resigning. Can I complete the verification process for our school?**

A: No. Before the PDSO resigns, have the outgoing PDSO log into SEVIS and assign you, or another DSO listed on the Form I-17, as the PDSO. The outgoing PDSO can reassign the role, so you will have the ability to complete the verification.

Q: **I do not see the link to the verification process. What do I do?**

A: There are a few possible reasons that you are not seeing the link to access the verification page. First, if you are a DSO or an ARO, you will not be able to access that page. Only users assigned the PDSO or RO role in SEVIS will be able to complete the verification. If you are a PDSO or RO and you are not prompted to complete the verification, go to your School or Program Information page and locate the Next Verification Date to determine if your school has already completed the verification. All PDSOs at your institution can complete the verification for all campuses. If the Next Verification Date is 3/2/2016, your entire institution has already been verified. However, if the date is 3/2/2015, then your school remains unverified, and you need to contact the SEVIS Help Desk as soon as possible.

Q: **I was asked for a "yes" or "no" answer but was not given that option to reply.**

A: Most likely, your institution only has a PDSO for that campus. In this case, there will just be a radio button next to the PDSO. We do want you to verify positively that this person (PDSO) is still there. Click the button for the PDSO and click **Submit**. If you need to replace your PDSO, you need to do that separately.

Q: **Does SEVIS send us an email confirming we have completed the validation?**

A: No. You will get an acknowledgement that you have finished a particular campus and then that campus name will be removed from the list. When the verification is completed, users will no longer be prompted to complete the verification when they login. The Next

Verification Date will be set to March 2016, and is located on the School or Program Information page.

Q: **For multiple campus schools with different PDSOs at different campuses, can we choose to allow each PDSO to do their own verification for their campus?**

A: Yes. You can choose whichever method works best for you to get all the campuses verified. Remember, if one campus remains unverified by March 3, the entire school will be unable to access SEVIS until the verification is completed.

Annual Verification and Form I-17 Petition Updates

Q: **What if we already submitted an I-17 update, our I-17 is locked and we are waiting for a response and/or a site visit from SEVIS?**

A. If the Form I-17 update involves changes to P/DSOs, School Certification will devote more resources to adjudicate those before or soon after the start of the verification period. Otherwise, if you are already an approved school, the annual verification is a completely independent function of SEVIS from the petition update process, and can be completed while the Form I-17 is locked.

Q: **Can names be changed during this period?**

A: You must file an update to the Form I-17 petition to change names of your officials. This can be done independently of the verification process.

Q: **Should updates to the I-17, for example – a name change, be done before or after verification?**

A. The verification process and Form I-17 updates are completely different processes. However, if possible, we recommend you do the verification process first.

Q: **May we complete the verification process if we are currently waiting to hear about approval for a new DSO?**

A: Yes. If the new DSO is approved after the verification has been completed, they will appear on the list during the following verification period.

Q: **What if you know you will have a change of PDSO around the time of the verification period?**

A. If possible, the current PDSO should verify their school officials before leaving. If the PDSO change is pending, ensure your request has all the required documentation, in order to reduce adjudication time.

Q: **If a PDSO is going on leave during the verification period, should we take her off the I-17 during that time?**

A. No. However, if she cannot complete the verification before she leaves, she needs to reassign the PDSO role to another existing DSO on the Form I-17, who can complete the verification in her absence.

Q: **We began an official change of PDSO a few months ago and have not heard if it has been completed. We have also made a few personnel changes. What do we do in terms of verification?**

A: If you do not have an approved PDSO to complete the verification, email DSOPDSO@ice.dhs.gov notifying them you have a pending request and need to verify your users. SCU will make sure to put your request in queue, so it can be expedited, and you can complete the verification.

Q: **If one of our DSOs is currently locked out of SEVIS because she has not accessed SEVIS for 90 days, can we still go ahead and complete the verification for her?**

A: Yes.

Annual Verification and School Recertification

Q: **What if you are going through recertification during the 90 days and your I-17 is locked pending recertification adjudication?**

A: The processes have no relationship to each other. You can complete the verification while your Form I-17 is locked for recertification.

Q: **If we remove a DSO during verification, will it affect our pending recertification?**

A. No.

Q: **If we have a change that would require adjudication after our recertification petition is completed, should we go forward with the DSO verification?**

A: Yes. Move forward with the DSO verification. Follow the *DSO Update Process Fact Sheet* that can be found in the following location: http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/dsoUpdateProcessFactsheet.pdf.

Q: **As a part of our recertification petition, we are removing one of our officials; do we still need to verify that user during the verification period?**

A: Go ahead and complete the verification. It will not negatively affect your recertification. If you have a DSO who has left the institution, remove them as a part of the verification. If the official is still employed and needs to access SEVIS in the meantime, it is advisable to verify them.

Adding and Removing Officials during the Verification Period

Q: **Can we add a DSO during the verification period?**

A: Yes. You can add a DSO during the verification period. We highly recommend that you complete the verification process first and then file an update to your petition.

Q: **If we have a DSO leaving the institution within the next few months, it is advised to click "Yes" for them?**

A: Yes. The verification is a snapshot of the school's P/DSOs at that point in time. Remember, any official designated as "No" will have their SEVIS access revoked upon

completing the verification. When your officials leave your institution, put in an update to your Form I-17 petition to remove them.

Q: **On the verification screen, it just mentions DSO verification and not just the PDSO, so should I just click on the PDSO myself or also the DSOs on the list?**

A: You are expected to click on the PDSO and answer "**Yes**" or "**No**" for each of the DSOs. Click on **yourself** as the PDSO; answer "**Yes**" or "**No**" for each of the DSOs, as appropriate, and then click **Submit**.

Q: **My school is in the process of moving the PDSO responsibility to someone who is currently a DSO. Our current PDSO does not see the link. The process of moving the role has not been completed, so no one can complete the verification process.**

A: If the current PDSO is not seeing the link, then have that person call in a Help Desk ticket so that we can figure out what has happened. If their role is still listed as PDSO, they should see the link.

Q: **If we select "No" for a DSO, will the change apply only to that campus? Will whatever privileges the person has for other campuses remain?**

A: Yes. If a person is a DSO at ten campuses, the DSO's name will appear on the list for each of the ten campuses. Each campus' PDSOs/DSOs are verified separately, so when you select "No" for a selected campus, you only affect the privileges at that campus for which you are doing the verification.

Q: **If we get a new DSO after we verify, but still during the verification period, is that new DSO automatically verified? Do we have to re-verify?**

A: If a DSO addition is approved after the school has completed their verification, the new DSO will be validated during the next verification period. Schools will not need to re-verify if there is a new DSO added.

Q: **What should we do if the PDSO will retire during the verification period?**

A: The verification period begins December 2nd. If possible, the current PDSO should complete the verification before leaving. If the PDSO is unable to verify before leaving, your institution should request the approval of a new PDSO from the School Certification Unit.

Q: **We currently do not have international students enrolled at school, but hope to enroll more in the future. Should we just continue to log in every 3 months?**

A: Yes.

Q: **How do we remove a PDSO?**

A. Every school campus must have a PDSO. The *DSO Update Process Fact Sheet* explains how to do this. If you do not have the fact sheet, it can be found in the following location: http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/dsoUpdateProcessFactsheet.pdf.

Q: **Is there a simple way to re-add an official who was removed during the verification?**

A.   No, it will require a Form I-17 petition update to add an official who was removed during the verification.

Q: If after we complete the verification, one of the DSOs no longer needs SEVIS access, will we be able to edit the verification.

A: No, you cannot edit once you click Submit. If a DSO no longer needs SEVIS access, remove them from your Form I-17.

Q: If we are currently under adjudication to remove a DSO, should we cancel that update and just remove the DSO using verification?

A.   If your Form I-17 is pending for adjudication of a DSO removal and/or any other reason, the School Certification Unit will handle the DSO removal and/or any other request with the Form I-17 adjudication.

Q: What happens if a PDSO or RO selects "No" next to a DSO's or ARO's name?

A: A "No" selection will display an on-screen message informing the PDSO or RO that the user will no longer be able to access SEVIS, as an official of that particular school or program. DSOs and AROs for whom "No" is selected will lose SEVIS access when the PDSO or RO submits the verification.

Q: How soon after submission will the DSO or ARO lose access to SEVIS, if the PDSO or RO selected "No?"

A: Immediately upon submission, the DSO or ARO will lose the ability to log in to SEVIS. If the official has an active SEVIS session at the time of submission, the official can finish the session, but will not be able to log back in to SEVIS after the active session ends.

Q: Are DSOs and AROs notified when the PDSO or RO submits the verification?

A: DSOs and AROs do **not** receive an email message when their school or program's verification is submitted. Submission of the verification can be confirmed by:

- The absence of the verification notice on the Message Board.
- For schools, the *School Information* page reflects that all campuses of the school have been verified and reflects a Next User Verification Date that is a year into the future.

Q: Will DSOs and AROS with "No" validations be notified that their access has been revoked?

A: No. They will not be notified of the revoked access. The "No" designation means the individual no longer holds the role of DSO or ARO and no longer requires SEVIS access.

Communication to and from SEVP

Q: **What is the best SEVP/SEVIS email to communicate changes to PDSO and/or DSO?**

A: You can contact the School Certification Unit at DSOPDSO@ice.dhs.gov.

Q: **Will messages that go to PDSOs go to all DSOs as well?**

A: Yes. All officials at an institution will be notified during the verification period.

Q: **What should we do if we are not receiving emails from SEVIS?**

A. First, check to see if your email addresses are correct on the Form I-17. Then check with your IT department to see if they are being blocked or are going into your spam or junk folders. If you can get into SEVIS, you should be receiving emails from us.

Q: **What if we have not received the alert by March 2 to verify?**

A. Please do not wait until the end of the verification period to tell us that you have not received the verification alert. If you do not see the verification alert on your school's SEVIS message board page and have not received any email verification alerts by December 3rd, you need to let us know immediately.

Q: **Who do we contact if a DSO name is missing from the school page?**

A. First, confirm that you are looking at the right campus. If something still looks wrong, contact SEVIShelpdesk@ice.dhs.gov.

Q: **If the school roles/titles change for the PDSO and/or DSO, can we change that as part of the verification or do we need to change that on the I-17?**

A: That information must be changed by filing a Form I-17 petition update.

Department of State

Q: **What does RO and ARO stand for? These are new acronyms for me.**

A: RO stands for Responsible Officer and ARO stands for Alternate Responsible Officer. These are officials for J-1 programs and are equivalent to school PDSOs and DSOs.

Q: **How do we add an ARO to our J-1 program, who is not an employee at our institution?**

A. An official RO or ARO for your program would have to print a new DS-3037 and complete the information for the new individual and mail it in to Department of State. If you have more questions about this, please contact your current program official.

Q: **If an RO fails to verify all AROs, will the EV program lose all access to SEVIS?**

A. Yes, the RO and all AROs will be locked out of that particular EV Program.

Q: **Is it correct that only one RO or ARO needs to be verified, or should all be verified?**

A: The RO and all of the AROs associated with the program must be verified. However, only an RO can complete the verification.

Q: **When I verify our AROs, it was indicated that we only had the Research Scholar category when, in fact, we have the Research Scholar and the Short Term Scholar categories. Will this cause a problem?**

A: No, this will not be a problem. Look on your Program Information page to check if both categories are listed. If you see both categories listed, open a Help Desk ticket; so we can look at the issue, see what is happening, and fix it.

Q: **The names of two of my officers are missing. Do I need to open a ticket?**

A: Look at your Program Information page and if the two AROs are listed on that page, then definitely call in a Help Deck ticket. The same goes for DSOs. If they are NOT listed on the School Information page and they have been able to get access before, we encourage you to call in a ticket.

Q: **If our current RO wants to become the ARO and the ARO wants to become the RO, should we do this now or wait until after the verification period?**

A: We suggest you go ahead and complete the verification now, because these are their current roles. Then go ahead and request the changes – we will process the changes for you to see on next year's verification.

Q: **Regarding changes of ROs/AROs that were in progress before the verification started – is there something that has to be done before those are approved?**

A: Go ahead and approve the officials that are on the verification page. The new ARO, if they are approved, will be on the next year's verification.

Consequences of NOT Verifying School/Sponsor Officials

Q: **What if the PDSO or RO does not verify the DSOs and ROs at the institution by March 2nd?**

A: If a PDSO or an RO does not verify their organization's officials, the following happens on March 3rd:

- DSOs and AROs are locked out of SEVIS. They cannot edit or update any nonimmigrant records.
- PDSOs and ROs can log in to SEVIS, but they can only complete the validation process. They cannot edit or update any nonimmigrant records.
- The organization will not be able to upload any updates via batch.
- The F/M school is deemed out of compliance with recordkeeping and reporting regulations; and may be withdrawn from participation in the Student and Exchange Visitor Program.

Q: **What happens if a PDSO at a multi-campus school fails to verify one of the campuses?**

A: A school is considered verified only when ALL the campuses at the school are verified. If a school does not complete the verification process for ALL the campuses on their school

list by March 2nd, EVERY SEVIS official for that school on EVERY campus will be locked out on March 3rd.

Even DSOs at campuses that had previously been verified will be locked out of SEVIS. Their access to SEVIS will be restored only after a PDSO verifies all SEVIS officials.

Q: **Are school and sponsor officials notified if a PDSO or an RO misses the validation deadline?**

A: Yes. On March 3rd DSOs and AROs at unverified schools or programs receive an email informing them of their loss of access to SEVIS. The email also advises them to contact their PDSO or RO.

Miscellaneous

Q: **How many PDSOs are allowed?**
A: One PDSO per campus is allowed.

Q: **If there is only one DSO, are they automatically the PDSO?**
A: Check the Form I-17 to verify whether or not an individual is designated as a DSO or a PDSO. Being the sole DSO at an institution does not automatically mean an individual has been approved as the PDSO. If there is only a DSO approved for an institution, they will **not** have the authority to complete the verification process. The institution should start the process immediately to request the approval of an individual to act in the capacity of a PDSO. A *DSO Update Process Fact Sheet* was sent via broadcast message detailing this process. If you do not have the fact sheet, it can be found on SitS at http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/dsoUpdateProcessFactsheet.pdf.

Q: **Did you state that a school does not have to have a DSO? During our last recertification, we were told we had to have a DSO at each campus. What about our campuses that have no international students at all?**
A.   You must have at least one PDSO for every campus on your Form I-17; but it is not necessary to have a PDSO and an additional DSO at a campus where there were no international students. However, if you have plans to enroll international students at these campuses, School Certification recommends you keep the campuses on the Form I-17 and maintain at least one backup DSO, in addition to the PDSO, for any of these campuses.

Q: **Is there any batch schema change in the 6.18 release?**
A.   No.

Q: **Our ESL teacher is not a United States citizen. Can she become a PDSO or a DSO?**
A: If your teacher is either an American citizen or a Legal Permanent Resident she can, by regulation, become a PDSO or a DSO.

Available Handouts

The webinar was recorded and is currently posted on Study in the States. You can also find all the handouts that supported the webinar in the same location:

- Webinar Slides
- PDSO/DSO Annual Verification User Guide
- RO/ARO Annual Verification User Guide
- DSO Update Process Fact Sheet (SEVP School Certification instructions on how to add P/DSOs to your institution)