

SEVP Conference Overview: SPRING/SUMMER 2014



Introduction

In the Spring/Summer 2014 Conference Season, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is presenting upcoming program changes at numerous events around the country. These changes highlight SEVP's efforts to increase efficiency and stakeholder engagement. This summary outlines the presentation that SEVP is providing during the Spring/Summer 2014 Conference Season.

Policy Unit

ICE is drafting regulatory updates related to designated school official (DSO) limitations and F-2/M-2 part-time study programs. DHS published a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) in November 2013, proposing regulation changes which would allow schools to increase DSOs allowed at a school site and permit F-2/M-2 dependents to study in the United States. ICE is currently reviewing the comments stakeholders provided.

SEVP posts Draft Guidance to *Study in the States* for a 45 day comment period. For more information, visit the Draft Guidance page on *Study in the States*: StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/draft-guidance.

SEVP requests stakeholder feedback on draft policy guidance for its adjudicators before it is finalized, ensuring consistent interpretation among all SEVP adjudicators. The following guidance will be available for comment on *Study in the States*:

- Student employment (on/off campus employment, Optional Practical Training (OPT), emergent circumstances and internships),
- Changes of ownership,
- Bridge programs and conditional admission, and
- Annual vacation, student absence and timely filing.

SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment and Chargeback

SEVP is committed to improving the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) I-901 fee payment process. Beginning in early summer 2014, students will have access to new payment and mobile features. Students paying the I-901 fee through Western Union will have their payment automatically transferred and viewable on FMJFee.com, eliminating a prior waiting period. Upon implementation of these process changes, the following resources will be updated to reflect these changes:

- ICE.gov payment instructions at ICE.gov/SEVIS/i901
- I-901 payment tutorial on *Study in the States* at StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/2013/i-901-sevis-fee-payment-tutorial

Additionally, to enhance the SEVIS I-901 fee payment process, beginning this summer, students can check their fee status from their mobile devices.

I-901 CHARGEBACK ISSUES

There has been a rise in fraudulent activity as it relates to the SEVIS I-901 fee, particularly with "credit card chargebacks." Oftentimes, a chargeback happens when students turn to third party "agents" to pay their SEVIS I-901 fee because they do not have access to a credit card, Western Union, or bank to pay the fee themselves. Some of these agents will use stolen credit card information to pay for the student's SEVIS I-901 fee, which results in the payment being disputed by the credit card holder citing fraud.

Students should notify their schools/DSOs if they suspect they are victims of fraud so the schools can report the details on FMJFee.com. SEVP is finalizing changes to our processes to address, reduce and eventually eliminate these chargeback issues.

Compliance

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) ACCREDITATION ACT UPDATE

SEVP enforces the Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act to ensure all SEVP-certified ESL programs that enroll F students comply with the Accreditation Act. If you are an ESL school official, or your school offers an ESL program of study, you should be familiar with the Accreditation Act. ESL programs that did not receive their accreditation by the required December 14, 2013 date, as mandated by the Accreditation Act, will receive a Notice of Intent to Withdraw (NOIW) from SEVP.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING (OPT) UPDATE

At the request of Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) audited SEVP's oversight of OPT. SEVP's efforts to address the GAO recommendations are underway. SEVP is developing policy guidance regarding OPT, as well as comprehensive guidance to help school officials understand their roles and obligations for ensuring that OPT is related to a student's field of study.

To report programs and schools that are noncompliant or have lost accreditation, please contact SEVP@ice.dhs.gov.

Field Representative Unit

SEVP is excited to announce the first class of field representatives will deploy in spring 2014. These field representatives participated in an eight-week training course earlier this year including classroom instruction on legislative and regulatory training, School Certification Unit processes, frequently asked questions, and trips to other DHS offices and government agencies. Once a field representative is deployed to their territory, they will contact all DSOs in their territory within a month, to provide their contact information and schedule an appointment to meet.

Field representatives will meet twice annually with each certified school in their assigned region with active F and M students. Each field representative will work with schools in the field four days a week; they will have a standard day stationed in their "home office." Field representatives will reach out to certified schools without active F and M students via an annual visit, phone call or email.

School Recertification

The SEVP school recertification process continues and petitions are still being processed. One hundred percent of all schools eligible for recertification have been notified and have either been approved, or are currently in the review and adjudication process. Recertification is required by law every two years and is conducted on a rolling basis. Please be aware, if you have been recertified, you may receive another SEVP recertification notice in the coming months for your next required recertification.

FORM I-17 TUTORIAL

This year, SEVP launched the Form I-17 tutorial to provide step-by-step guidance for school officials who are petitioning for SEVP certification to enroll F and/or M students. School officials from already certified schools can use the tutorial when updating their school's information. The tutorial is organized by chapters, allowing you to go quickly to the information you need. The tutorial is available on *Study in the States* at StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/i-17-tutorial. A helpful fact sheet with complete information for every school type petitioning for SEVP certification is also available for download.



SEVP Response Center/SEVIS Help Desk Merger

In mid- to late-2014, SEVP will merge the SEVIS Help Desk and the Washington, D.C.-based SEVP Response Center. This transition will allow SEVP to better serve our customers by placing all support functions in a single location. For now, business will continue as usual.

For policy and regulation related questions, contact the SEVP Response Center by phone at 703-603-3400, or by email at SEVP@dhs.gov. If you need assistance with passwords for SEVIS technical help, call the SEVIS Help Desk at 1-800-892-4892 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. ET.

SEVIS Enhancements

The first round of SEVIS enhancements will be released in spring 2014, with the next release scheduled for summer 2014. SEVP is taking user feedback into consideration to improve SEVIS' ability to safeguard information related to national security and improve the user experience.

In the coming months, users can look forward to the following SEVIS enhancements:

- **Form I-17 Accreditations and School Recognitions Conversion Project:** A one-time conversion project to migrate existing schools' accreditations and state recognitions information into redesigned SEVIS files. This change will allow users to enter accreditations more accurately by selecting from a series of drop-down lists arranged by the type of accrediting agency and then entering the expiration dates.

Please note—changes in SEVIS related to the State Accreditation Conversion Release will not generate an immediate review and adjudication of information. Changes will not lock a petition, but system acceptance does not mean the information has been reviewed, adjudicated or accepted as valid.
- **Improved list functionality:** This includes alert lists and flags to indicate when students have active OPT and/or cap-gap.
- **Performance enhancements:** This includes improved system performance and peak time responsiveness for school and program users.
- **New data input standards:** New fields enable school users to provide accurate, standardized and detailed information about accreditations like Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) certifications and other forms of recognition and licenses; a standard for nonimmigrant names and elimination of users' ability to input "Unknown" or "N/A" as a name; and address validation that will provide consistency and accuracy, and ensure U.S. addresses are complete.

Upcoming SEVP webinars will clearly explain these new SEVIS features and provide information on upcoming changes. These webinars, a video message from the Director of SEVP, and more information about SEVIS enhancements can be found on *Study in the States* at StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/SEVIS.

STUDY in the STATES

In addition to gathering your feedback on draft guidance, *Study in the States* offers information for school officials regarding SEVP certification, recertification, making updates to the Form I-17 and more through the Schools Portal (StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/schools). *Study in the States* also offers webinars and live question and answer sessions throughout the year. These events provide stakeholders another avenue to receive real-time answers from our experts.

DSOs should direct their prospective and current students to the Students Portal (StudyintheStates.dhs.gov/students) on *Study in the States* for information on the entire F and M student process. The website can be translated into 64 different languages and contains helpful videos and tutorials. Visit our blog to watch our new SEVP 101 video, which explains SEVP's role in the international student process and how the program supports ICE's mission to protect national security.



Be sure to follow *Study in the States* on Twitter (@StudyinStates) and Facebook (Facebook.com/StudyintheStates) for the latest information.