

SEVP Spotlight

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Looking Back at 2016



*A message from
Louis M. Farrell,
Director of the
Student and Exchange
Visitor Program*

As 2016 ends, I want to take a few moments to reflect on the progress the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) made in the last 12 months. I am proud of how our program balances promoting national security with supporting a diverse group of stakeholders. Of course, SEVP's achievements are directly related to the monumental support and feedback we collect from the academic community. To help illustrate my point, here is a reminder of key milestones we achieved in 2016.

CLOSED NATIONAL SECURITY VULNERABILITIES

The SEVP Analysis and Operations Center (SAOC) implemented new procedures and initiatives to improve compliance oversight. This year, the SAOC began sending "[Intent to Terminate](#)" notices to all F and M international students and J exchange visitors who have not complied with their [Form I-515A, "Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor,"](#) within the allotted 30 days.

To assist with compliance-related actions in the field, SAOC welcomed Homeland Security Investigations special agents to its team to help U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement work more cohesively to close national security vulnerabilities.

INCREASED STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH

In 2016, SEVP representatives participated in nearly 200 events, a 15 percent increase from last year, with stakeholders from academic associations, state associations, English as a Second Language organizations, community colleges, religious school associations, international student groups, and traditional colleges and universities. Through these events, SEVP had the privilege to connect with more than 17,000 stakeholders nationwide.

This was also the first year in which all four classes of SEVP field representatives were deployed. For those who may be unfamiliar, field representatives serve as direct day-to-day liaisons between SEVP and SEVP-certified schools. They are integral to fostering better outreach with stakeholders and attend many regional events on behalf of SEVP.

In March 2016, SEVP amended guidance for field representatives based on feedback received from school officials. The amended guidance gives field representatives the ability to more frequently visit schools that require additional assistance and guidance.

Insight from our stakeholders helps SEVP leadership make decisions about how to implement meaningful improvements

throughout the program. Feedback is integral to our success as a program. In fact, this year, we launched the [Trends and Improvements](#) section on Study in the States to make it easier for stakeholders to track and monitor the government's progress on some of the most pressing concerns we hear from the academic community.

CHANGED DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY REGULATIONS

On March 11, 2016, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [published](#) its final rule on [the science, technology, engineering and mathematics \(STEM\) optional practical training \(OPT\) extension](#). This final rule went into effect on May 10, 2016, replacing the [previous 17-month STEM OPT extension](#). DHS received more than 50,000 comments from stakeholders when it proposed the rule in October 2015, and SEVP addressed each comment in the final rule.

In coordination with the final rule, Study in the States launched the [STEM OPT Hub](#) and hosted two [stakeholder webinars](#) to specifically address issues and concerns from the academic and business communities.

RELEASED ANTICIPATED SEVP POLICY GUIDANCE

SEVP released several pieces of final and interim final guidance to clarify trending issues for stakeholders. SEVP released the following final policy guidance



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

documents to assist SEVP adjudicators in 2016:

- [SEVP Policy Guidance S13.1: Conditional Admission.](#)
- [SEVP Policy Guidance S13.2: The Form I-20 and the English Proficiency Field.](#)
- [SEVP Policy Guidance S7.2: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency.](#)

Additionally, the program also released two interim final policy guidance documents:

- [SEVP Policy Guidance S13: Form I-20 — Student and Dependent Personal Information Fields in SEVIS.](#)
- [SEVP Policy Guidance S1.2: Evidentiary Requirements for Schools Not Meeting Eligibility Criteria in 8 CFR 214.3\(b\) and \(c\).](#)

As a reminder, SEVP policy guidance in final or interim final status establishes standards or requirements used in SEVP adjudication decisions. Guidance is intended to clarify laws or regulations related to SEVP adjudications and does not replace or supersede those laws or regulations.

IMPROVED THE SEVP CERTIFICATION LIFE CYCLE

This fall, the SEVP School Certification Unit, in conjunction with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) team, revamped the Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student,” workflow in SEVIS and streamlined its evidence filing process. These changes helped increase efficiencies in the SEVP adjudication process.

CONTINUED SEVIS MODERNIZATION

From February to December, SEVP deployed eight SEVIS releases. Each release provided system enhancements that made it easier for

school officials to report important information to SEVP, which in turn strengthened data integrity to protect national security. Each release was accompanied by a planning guide, educational webinars and visual aids on the [SEVIS Help Hub](#) to help school officials navigate and understand the changes. Key SEVIS upgrades include improvements in:

- Workflows for creating and updating school and student records.
- Reporting of student registration.
- Alerts and student lists.
- Correction requests.
- Broadcast Messages.
- Employment authorization pages.
- Business rules in response to regulatory changes.

These 2016 enhancements also included the addition of new business rules and data validation to SEVIS fields with known data-entry problems.

LOOKING AHEAD

Of course, these highlights are only the tip of the iceberg, as it would be impossible to fit an entire year’s worth of work into one article. However, as we look forward to 2017, I am filled with gratitude and excitement about how we can build on our existing achievements. I look forward to fostering new avenues of exchange with our stakeholders to help us continue to implement creative solutions that address SEVP programmatic needs and uphold our national security.

Have a happy and safe new year,
Lou



Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit Update

The Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit (CTCEU) is part of Homeland Security Investigations' (HSI) National Security Investigations Division and is the law enforcement arm of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP).

In September 2014, CTCEU established a web analytics team to leverage open source and social media information. This team analyzes an ever-growing number of open source websites, including blogs, academic sites and social media, as well as government and law enforcement databases to investigate national security and public safety concerns that exploit vulnerabilities in the U.S. immigration system. This information assists CTCEU and SEVP in identifying schools suspected of fraud and/or nonimmigrant student violators.

To assist in this effort, CTCEU has established open communication channels to promote information sharing. For example, CTCEU's Project Campus Sentinel is a link between designated school officials (DSOs) and HSI special agents for collaboration and communication to help detect and prevent school fraud and visa exploitation. Project Campus Sentinel provides DSOs with:

- A tool to help identify possible threats to national security within their F and/or M student population.
- The proper outlet to report this information.

Email CTCEU at CTCEU@dhs.gov to share information on potentially fraudulent schools or individuals who violate their immigration status.

Field Representative Unit Update

Recently, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Field Representative Unit (FRU) welcomed Mr. Josh Schrier as the newest member of its leadership team. Mr. Schrier will serve as the FRU's eastern region section chief.

Mr. Schrier received a Bachelor of Arts degree from George Washington University and a Master of Science degree from the London School of Economics. He joined SEVP in 2009 and spent most of his time with the program as an adjudicator for the School Certification Unit (SCU). While working in SCU, he oversaw the growth of the recertification process, helped craft policy guidance and worked at the U.S. Department of State as part of an interagency detail.

He is excited to join the FRU and contribute his knowledge and experience to the unit's mission. Mr. Schrier hopes to help the

SEVP field representatives continue their stellar record of service to schools and other stakeholders. His goal is to encourage greater collaboration between the FRU and other government partners, while also helping to foster the ongoing relationships the SEVP field representatives have with members of the academic community.

Mr. Schrier believes the SEVP field representatives are a tremendous resource and encourages school officials to take full advantage of their expertise and experience. As the academic landscape changes, new questions will continue to arise, and he hopes schools will not hesitate to reach out to their local SEVP field representative to help them navigate the international student life cycle.

What's New on Study in the States

CHECK OUT THE NEW STUDY IN THE STATES HOME PAGE

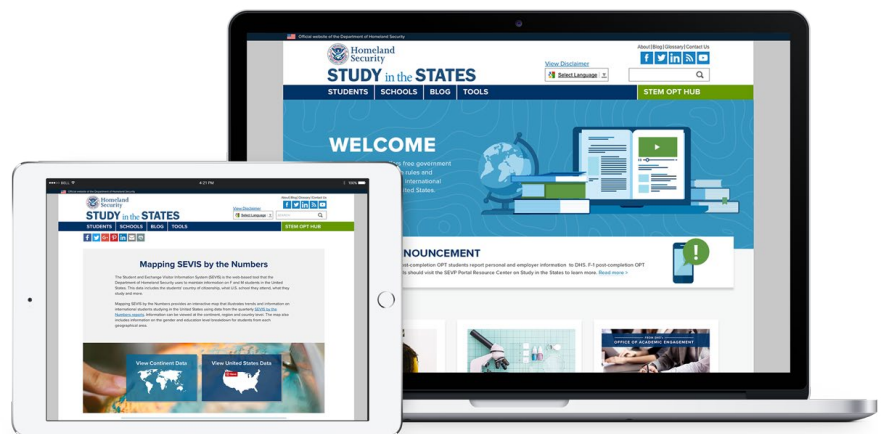
Study in the States launched its redesigned home page on Dec. 6. The design emphasizes resources Study in the States offers to international students and the academic community. The new layout includes a Featured Announcements portion that will regularly feature timely content and important program news, the most recently published blog posts and highlighted tools.

Visit Study in the States and tell us what you think!

EXPLORE MAPPING SEVIS BY THE NUMBERS

On Dec. 8, SEVP's quarterly SEVIS by the Numbers report indicated there are 1.23 million F and M students currently studying in the United States. Take a deeper dive into the data by visiting the interactive map on Study in the States.

Mapping SEVIS by the Numbers lets you drill down by continent, region and country. It also allows you to explore how the data breaks down per U.S. state. You can find [Mapping SEVIS by the Numbers](#) in the [Tools section](#) of the website.



SEVIS Annual Verification

Principal designated school officials (PDSOs) have until March 2, 2017, to complete their annual Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) verification. Failure to comply by March 2 means that unverified designated school officials (DSO) will lose their SEVIS access on March 3.

As a reminder, SEVIS annual verification is a federal mandate that requires PDSOs to ensure all system users are still employed by their school and require access to the system. The SEVIS Help Hub's [PDSO/DSO Annual Verification User Guide](#) and [Demonstration: Annual Verification](#) provide detailed instructions on how to fulfill this requirement.

Q&A with DHS's Blue Campaign

As millions of international students come to the United States to study and participate in cultural exchange, it is important that schools and students understand how to mitigate the risks that may accompany their time here as visitors in a new place who may be more dependent on others for basic life needs.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has special programs and campaigns to help educate and protect those most vulnerable to these risks. We sat down with one such program, the DHS Blue Campaign, to get a better understanding of how their work helps make the United States safer and more secure for everyone.

WHAT IS THE BLUE CAMPAIGN ALL ABOUT? HOW DID THE INITIATIVE BEGIN?

DHS established the Blue Campaign in 2010 on a simple premise: that if everyone in the United States knew how to recognize and report human trafficking, together we could end human trafficking in this country.

For that reason, former DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano created the Blue Campaign to serve as the department's unified voice to combat human trafficking. Today, the Blue Campaign:

- Coordinates the department's anti-human trafficking policy and operational efforts, ensuring the department is unified and victim-centered in our approach to combating human trafficking.
- Is a national leader on human trafficking training that creates and delivers high quality training products to law enforcement, the private sector and communities.
- Oversees a public campaign to raise awareness of human trafficking across the country.

HOW IS DHS INVOLVED IN THE ISSUE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

Because of our department's size, our mission and our robust presence around the country, DHS employees are uniquely positioned to recognize and report human trafficking in the course of their daily responsibilities. Nearly every DHS component has a role to play in combating human trafficking:

- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducts domestic and international human trafficking investigations, and supports victims through a victim assistance program. ICE also offers a [24-hour tip line](#) for the public to report suspicious activity.
- U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provides T and U visas to eligible non-citizen victims of trafficking.

- Transportation Security Administration trains personnel to recognize and report indicators of trafficking at airports.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection trains frontline personnel to recognize and report indicators of trafficking along borders, and partners with the Department of Transportation through the Blue Lightning Initiative to train the airline industry on human trafficking.
- The U.S. Coast Guard trains personnel to recognize and report trafficking on fishing vessels.
- The Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers develop, deliver and disseminate human trafficking training for federal, state, local, tribal and territorial law enforcement.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR SCHOOL OFFICIALS WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO BE AWARE OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

While there is a pervasive belief that human trafficking in the United States happens only to undocumented individuals, the truth is that traffickers prey upon anyone who is vulnerable. In 2014, the Urban Institute issued a report stating that 71 percent of labor trafficking victims entered the United States on lawful visas.

When a person is disconnected from friends and family, does not speak the language or is dependent upon another person for basic life needs, especially when that person is a minor, he or she may become vulnerable to human trafficking.

WHAT ADVICE FOR PREVENTION OR AWARENESS WOULD YOU GIVE TO THOSE ENTRUSTED WITH THE CARE OF MINORS IN THE UNITED STATES?

Human trafficking is about exploitation, not movement. A person does not need to be moved from one place to another to be a victim of trafficking. Human trafficking is also not just sex trafficking, but also includes labor trafficking and domestic servitude. Additionally, victims may not seek help on their own because they fear their trafficker.

There is an inherent vulnerability to being a minor, let alone a minor who is away from his or her home country. When you learn the indicators of human trafficking, you empower yourself to recognize and report this heinous crime. When you share that information with your family and your community, you serve as a force multiplier. Visit the Blue Campaign website (www.dhs.gov/bluecampaign) to learn how to recognize and report human trafficking.

CONTACT US

SEVP Contacts

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to maintaining open communication with international students and academic officials. SEVP has multiple contact options:

Our offices are open Monday through Friday,
8 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST, except holidays

Phone: 703-603-3400

Email: SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

Find us on the web:

www.ice.gov/sevp

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov>

Follow us on Twitter [@StudyinStates](https://twitter.com/StudyinStates)

Like Study in the States on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/studyinthestates)

If you need assistance with passwords or Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) technical help, call the SEVIS Help Desk at 800-892-4829 between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. EST or email SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov

Disclaimer: The information presented in the SEVP Spotlight is provided for informational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice.

ICE Contacts

To report national vulnerabilities or national security concerns:

Contact ICE's
**Counterterrorism and
Criminal Exploitation Unit** at
CTCEU@dhs.gov

To report exploitation of
student visa programs:

Contact your local **HSI special
agent**, call 1-877-4-HSI-TIP
or visit www.ice.gov

