

SEVP Spotlight

July 2014
Volume 4, Issue 2

1
Director's Corner

2
SEVIS Help Desk
Field Representatives
CTCEU Update

3
DSO Fact Sheet
FMJ Fee
Study in the States Update

4
Draft Guidance
Contact Us

DIRECTOR'S CORNER

SEVIS Release 6.17



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

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to improving the performance of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). On behalf of SEVP, I would like to thank you for your support and patience as we work collectively to improve the user experience and close the national security vulnerabilities that have been identified.

Our most recent release, SEVIS Release 6.17 (deploying on August 1) continues to enhance system performance while addressing items included in the recent U.S. Government Accountability Office audit on SEVP's oversight of optional practical training (OPT).

SEVIS Release 6.17 changes the way dates are reported for nonimmigrant students engaged in OPT and provides government and public users with more accurate data on nonimmigrant students engaged in OPT. Prior to this release, when recommending a nonimmigrant student for OPT, DSOs provided the employment start and end date, which were then overridden by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)-approved dates. These conflicting dates often led to confusion and made life difficult for nonimmigrant students and DSOs. SEVIS Release 6.17 corrects this issue and provides more specific fields, including:

- Recommended start and end date (provided by the DSO);
- USCIS-approved start and end date (provided by USCIS); and

- The actual start and end date (pre-populated with approved USCIS dates) Note: the actual end date can be edited to reflect the student's actual end of OPT if there were changes to education level, transfer, etc., that resulted in earlier completion of the USCIS approved OPT period.

In addition, SEVIS will now provide an indicator for all nonimmigrant students engaged in OPT, making it easier for our government partners to understand nonimmigrant student status. The indicator will simplify reporting for our government stakeholders who are interested in OPT-related information.

SEVIS Release 6.17 also includes the following enhancements:

- View draft changes to the Form I-17 petition prior to submitting a petition update
- Streamlined validation alerts and include physical and mailing addresses for J exchange visitors
- Increased password security rules, most notably, a user's past eight passwords are ineligible for reuse, as opposed to the past six.
- New administrative panel for immigration system support users

Our SEVIS team is working diligently to develop future enhancements. Some of the goals for these enhancements include:

- Verification of School/Sponsor Officials — A periodic verification of all school/sponsor official's affiliation with the institution;
- U.S. Address and Email Address Validation — All U.S. addresses and email addresses will be validated by the system; addresses will be entered in a standard way to improve deliverability; and
- DS-7002 Training Plan — This training plan will be added to SEVIS for program sponsor users to complete to comply with Department of State reporting requirements.

SEVP has received questions asking whether the costs to schools for deployment of the upcoming SEVIS enhancements will require as much funding from schools as originally envisioned for SEVIS II, as some schools may have set aside funds for this deployment. We reviewed all of the planned releases over the next 18 months, giving us 35 new functionalities within the current system closing many of the remaining national security vulnerabilities. We are confident that the cost to schools to implement those releases will be far less than that of the full SEVIS II deployment – in fact, we feel these enhancements will cost about half. However, even after deployment of the 35 functionalities, some important vulnerabilities will remain which cannot be closed within the current system without a major overhaul of SEVIS at great cost. Over the next year, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is conducting an independent Analysis of Alternatives (AOA) to evaluate the options and costs to close remaining vulnerabilities. Depending on which alternative ICE chooses will determine if additional costs will be incurred by the schools.

The bottom line, based on all of this, is that we recommend that schools hold on to all of their planned SEVIS II funding for at least the next year until ICE has made a final decision regarding the alternatives to close the remaining vulnerabilities.

We understand that implementing these upcoming releases will be a time-intensive process, but we are confident that SEVIS enhancements will help your daily work while fulfilling our national security mission.

As always, I greatly appreciate all that you do for us in ICE, for international students, for the world's finest academic system, and for the nation.

Take care,
Lou



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

Consolidation of the SEVIS Help Desk Email & Fax Number

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has changed the way stakeholders communicate with the program to resolve Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) data fixes and correction requests. As of July 1, schools should only submit documentation to the SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov email address.

Stakeholders could previously submit documentation in support of a SEVIS correction request or help desk ticket via email and fax. However, effective July 1, 2014, the SEVIS Help Desk fax number (202-414-8299) and HP email address (SEVIShelpdesk@hp.com) are no longer active. The need to fax documentation is being eliminated to consolidate requests and create a more efficient way for stakeholders to provide information to SEVP.

The process for data fixes remains the same with a four-day period to submit documentation to the SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov email address to process data fixes and correction requests. The SEVIS Help Desk still receives and processes requests. SEVP assures its stakeholders that our internal network for email submissions is secure, including all personally identifiable information (PII) that may need transmitting.

Any school concerned about emailing documentation (e.g., due to PII) should email SEVISTechnicalFeedback@ice.dhs.gov for further guidance. Additionally, if you emailed the SEVISHelpDesk@hp.com email address prior to July 1, 2014, and have not heard back, please resend your email inquiry to the SEVISTechnicalFeedback@ice.dhs.gov email address. If you have additional questions, please contact the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400 for assistance.

Success of the SEVP Field Representatives

On April 21, the first class of 15 Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) field representatives deployed to their respective territories. Since then, these official federal government employees have conducted numerous school visits and enhanced relationships with designated school officials (DSO) within their respective territories.

Each territory has between 100-150 “active” SEVP-certified schools with enrolled nonimmigrant students in their approved courses of study. Each territory also contains between 20-50 “inactive” SEVP-certified schools that do not currently enroll nonimmigrant students.

As a result of frequent interaction with the field representatives, DSOs are learning what to expect during a school visit and how their field representative can help navigate the many rules, regulations and guidance directives related to SEVP certification.

Field representatives provide school officials with an electronic feedback form after each meeting, thereby providing SEVP with real-time feedback so we can continuously improve the role of field representatives. SEVP is very pleased with the success of the field representatives thus far and appreciates the candid feedback received from stakeholders.

Additional classes of field representatives are being added to serve more schools. The job announcement for the second class of 15 field representatives was listed on USAjobs.gov. SEVP received more than 3,000 applications for the 15 positions and expects to have the second class of representatives selected and hired by September 2014. Once selected, each field representative will undergo an eight-week training program at SEVP's headquarters prior to being deployed to their respective territory. Positions for the third class of field representatives will be announced at the end of 2014, with positions for the fourth and final class announced by mid-2015.

SEVP looks forward to working with the academic community, as partners, to continuously enhance the relationship between SEVP's field representatives and school officials.

CTCEU UPDATE

Protecting your SEVIS Login

It is important for authorized Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) users to be diligent about securing their SEVIS login information just as they would be with the personal identification number (PIN) for their banking institution.

As a designated school official (DSO), it is your privilege to have SEVIS access. You should not share your personal user name and password with anyone, including other DSOs at your school. Each authorized SEVIS user should have their own login information. Sharing user names and passwords is a security risk and compromises the integrity of SEVIS. Giving your login credentials to someone else, or allowing another person to log in with your credentials, is a

violation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Sensitive Systems Policy Directive. Individuals who fail to comply with the policies of this directive could have their access to DHS systems terminated and can even face criminal or civil penalties.

Sharing SEVIS passwords puts your students at risk, as well as your entire academic institution. Always safeguard your SEVIS information and if you believe your password has been compromised, change it immediately and contact the SEVIS Help Desk at 1-800-892-829 for assistance.

Use SEVP's Fact Sheet for DSO Updates

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) recently revamped the process SEVP-certified schools use to update their primary designated school officials' (PDSOs) and designated school officials' (DSOs) information. PDSOs and DSOs play an important role in the national security process. They enter data into the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) on behalf of their schools and ensure their schools comply with rules and regulations governing international students studying in the United States. Thus, SEVP must ensure PDSOs and DSOs meet the approved qualifications. Schools must initially put information on each PDSO and DSO candidate on their Form I-17, "Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student," and then make updates as information changes.

SEVP published a fact sheet, [DSO Update Process](#), to guide schools through the DSO update process. The fact sheet also includes background information on a variety of scenarios United States schools may encounter when updating their PDSOs or DSOs. It also provides instructions for how to make updates within those scenarios. Following the processes outlined in the fact sheet may lead to faster processing and adjudication, with fewer requests for evidence. View the [DSO Update Process fact sheet](#) on ICE.gov.

SEVP Launches Mobile-Friendly FMJfee.com Website

All F and M nonimmigrant students and J-1 exchange visitors must pay the [I-901 SEVIS fee](#) on [FMJfee.com](#) prior to applying for a visa to study in the United States. Throughout the last year, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has streamlined the I-901 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee payment process. As part of these efforts, SEVP recently automated the processing of Western Union I-901 SEVIS fee payments, and developed an I-901 SEVIS fee payment [tutorial](#) on *Study in the States* informing stakeholders about the payment process.

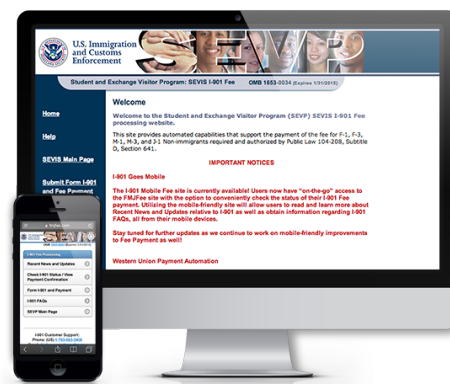
In addition, SEVP launched a mobile-friendly [FMJfee.com](#). Users can now log in to the site on any mobile device to:

- Find recent news and updates related to the I-901 SEVIS fee;
- Check an I-901 SEVIS fee payment status;
- View; save and print an I-901 payment confirmation;
- Read answers to frequently asked questions; and

- Visit [Study in the States](#) and associated social media platforms.

Students and exchange visitors must still print a copy of the I-901 SEVIS fee payment confirmation to take with them when applying for a visa to enter the United States. It is not acceptable to show a copy of it from a mobile device.

Stay tuned for additional updates and enhancements to the mobile site, including the ability to pay the I-901 SEVIS fee through a mobile device.



Study in the States Launches New Features

In early July, [Study in the States](#) debuted a new look and added several new features to further help students and schools throughout the international student process. To make it easier to find information, the navigation on *Study in the States* focuses on two key audiences: current and prospective F and M students and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified schools that enroll them. This change helps site visitors easily find information that best relates to them and their needs.

Some of the new features on *Study in the States* include:

- A [glossary](#) of key terms to provide definitions of the most commonly used words in the international student process. Visitors can choose to view the entire glossary or terms relevant to a

specific audience. They can also hover over green terms on pages throughout the site to instantly find definitions.

- An [Ask a Question](#) feature where site visitors can find answers to the most commonly asked questions by students and schools.
- An enhanced [school search page](#) that students can use to find an SEVP certified school in the United States. This updated page allows students to search across an interactive map of the United States and learn more about schools and international students in each state.
- Mobile accessibility on smartphones and tablets.

Study in the States launched in 2011 to serve as an information hub on the international student process. This enhanced version of *Study in the States* furthers that mission by helping students and schools to better find relevant information and understand DHS rules and federal regulations.

If you have not yet visited the enhanced site, be sure to check out the new features and share with your colleagues as well as current and prospective students.

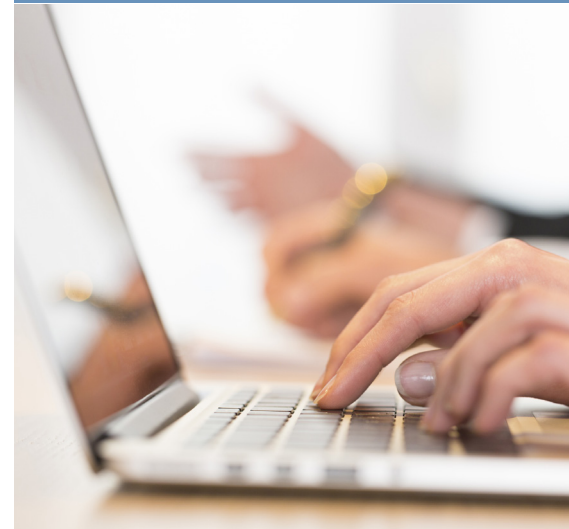
Upcoming Draft Guidance

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) periodically requests comments from the public on draft and interim final guidance. Guidance is SEVP's interpretation of federal laws and regulations that guide SEVP adjudicators in their decision-making. Guidance is not the same as governing regulations.

In the coming months, SEVP expects to release interim final guidance documents on the following topics, which were previously posted for stakeholder comment and were revised to incorporate applicable feedback. Interim final guidance is official SEVP policy that SEVP adjudicators use, but also request public comment.

- **Student Absence for F-1 Students:** This guidance clarifies regulation 8 CFR 214.2(f)(4) explaining the process for how an F-1 student leaving the United States during school should apply for a temporary absence and how they will be readmitted afterwards.
- **Student Absence for M-1 Students:** This guidance clarifies regulation 8 CFR 214.2(m)(4) explaining the process for how an M-1 student leaving the United States during school should apply for a temporary absence and how they will be readmitted afterwards.
- **Annual Vacation:** This guidance provides clarification on regulation 8 CFR 214.2(f)(5)(iii) defining vacation and explains when and under what conditions an F-1 student may take an annual vacation.
- **Timely Filing:** This guidance adjusts the allowable time for school officials to respond to SEVP notices, reflecting increased efficiencies brought about by SEVP's continued implementation of electronic reporting.
- **Bridge Programs and Conditional Admission:** This guidance describes how SEVP will adjudicate bridge programs and explains that issuance of a Form I 20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status for Academic and Language Student," on basis of conditional admission is inconsistent with SEVP's regulations.

Be sure to visit SEVP's [guidance page](#) on *Study in the States* to sign up to receive notifications about new draft guidance and the latest information about the guidance process.



CONTACT US

SEVP Contacts

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to maintaining open communication with international students and academic officials to provide the necessary support while studying in the United States. SEVP has multiple contact options:

Our offices are open Monday through Friday, 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time, except holidays

Phone: 703-603-3400

E-mail: SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

Find us on the Web:

www.ice.gov/sevis

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov>

Follow us on Twitter @StudyinStates

Like *Study in the States* on Facebook

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 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time or e-mail 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** or call 1-866-DHS-2ICE (1-866-347-2423) or visit www.ice.gov