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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Proactively Work with Your Students to Help Them Avoid SEVIS Record Terminations



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

As many of you know, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) manages certified schools, F and M students, and their dependents on behalf of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. As

a part of this national security responsibility, SEVP has the regulatory authority to terminate a student or dependent record in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) for noncompliance.

If SEVP terminates a student or dependent record for noncompliance, that individual will need to leave the United States and may have difficulty returning to the country in the future. Therefore, it is important that we work with you, the members of the academic community, to help your F and M students, as well as their dependents, understand what they need to do to remain compliant and avoid the risk of termination.

There are several reasons a SEVIS record may be terminated; however, the two most common instances in which SEVP will exercise its termination authority are:

- Nonpayment of the [I-901 SEVIS Fee](#).
- Failing to comply and properly respond to the [Form I-515A, "Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor."](#)

Here are a few reasons why termination may happen and what you can do, as a designated school official (DSO), to help your students remain compliant.

Nonpayment of the I-901 SEVIS Fee

Regulation requires that all prospective F and M students pay the I-901 SEVIS Fee before being issued a U.S. visa by the Department of State. A student's failure to pay the fee on their current SEVIS record puts them at risk for termination.

It is important to note that SEVP relies on the fees collected from program participants, and not U.S. tax payer dollars, to keep the program running. Payments received from I-901 SEVIS Fees directly support SEVP's ability to manage our part of the international student process.

As a DSO, you can tell if a student has paid the I-901 SEVIS Fee by looking in the bottom, right-hand corner of the student's current SEVIS record. If you see that a student's record reflects nonpayment, ask the student for their I-901 SEVIS Fee receipt. If the

student has indeed paid their I-901 SEVIS Fee, an SEVP analyst will be able to determine if the payment can be transferred or if the student must repay the fee.

Remember, the SEVIS ID located near the bottom of the receipt must match the SEVIS ID on the student's most recent [Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status."](#) If the two SEVIS IDs do not match, instruct the student to email fmjee.sevis@ice.dhs.gov and include a record of both SEVIS IDs. Students with multiple SEVIS IDs may run the risk of termination without realizing it, which is why it is crucial for DSOs to be proactive and check students' records for accuracy.

To help address this issue, SEVP is sending nonpayment notices via email to DSOs whose students have nonpayment reflected in their most current

SEVIS record. In the email, we specify the student who owes the fee, the date by which the fee should be paid and the amount due. After you receive this email from SEVP, the student in question should also receive a written notice from SEVP via the U.S. Postal Service.

SEVP is well underway with this notification process and we hope that most of you are now familiar with the nonpayment notices. Please inform your students of this process as well, so they can rectify any nonpayment issues. Remember, SEVP will not call or contact students via social media to collect the I-901 SEVIS Fee or any other forms of payment.

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U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

Failing to Comply with the Form I-515A

If one of your students or exchange visitors arrives at a U.S. port of entry and does not have all the signed required documents, has not paid the I-901 SEVIS Fee or has a SEVIS status issue, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) may either deny them entry into the United States or issue admittance with a Form I-515A.

The Form I-515A allows your student or exchange visitor to have admission into the United States for 30 days. To maintain their nonimmigrant status, the student or exchange visitor must work with you to address this form, correct any entry deficiencies, and submit the appropriate documents to SEVP within 30 days of entry date. Failure to comply with the Form I-515A instructions may result in the termination of the student's SEVIS status.

If your student receives a Form I-515A when entering the country, please help them comply with the form instructions within 30 days. I encourage you to visit [Study in the States](#) to learn more about the Form I-515A. All students who receive a Form I-515A must comply.

Remember, only original, signed, Forms I-20 are acceptable for submission in response to a Form I-515A. Travel signatures must be within the past 12 months for F-1 students, and the past 6 months for M-1 students. Original documents sent to SEVP are promptly returned to the school or program sponsor once the Form I-515A is adjudicated. School or program sponsors should then return all original documents to the student or exchange visitor post-adjudication.

SEVP will also deny duration of stay if the student enters the country on a Form I-20 with a different SEVIS ID from their active SEVIS record.

Once you work with your student or exchange visitor to correct any problems and submit the accurate and required paperwork, SEVP will update the student's status in the Form I-94, "Arrival/Departure Record," government database. This record shows the student's lawful admission into the United States and will help the student avoid potential issues when applying for benefits, such as a driver's license or future employment authorization.

I am highlighting the issue related to the Form I-515A process because in the past, SEVP has had limited resources, and ability to fully monitor and act on non-compliance. However, we now have the resources and the capability to do so and we anticipate taking actions on non-compliant students in the coming weeks. I am asking for your assistance in getting the word out to your students, and ensuring they understand and comply with the Form I-515A requirements.

As always, we greatly appreciate your help in reaching out to your students and exchange visitors to notify them proactively of these potential issues. Your diligent assistance helps them remain compliant and avoid the risk of termination.

Respectfully,
Lou

CTCEU UPDATE

HSI's Dual Support for the Student Visa Program

Part of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)'s Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) directorate are two important programs that support the student visa system in the United States.

The first is Project Campus Sentinel (PCS), which is managed by HSI's Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit (CTCEU). PCS protects schools from being vulnerable to criminal exploitation. School officials, department heads and campus police may be visited by HSI special agents as part of PCS. These agents are deployed to give school officials a point of contact to share information about suspected school fraud, unscrupulous visa brokers, criminal activity, or other individuals and organizations that may be abusing the student visa process.

HSI/CTCEU wants to ensure that schools do not fall prey to abuse and welcomes interaction with school officials to prevent legitimate schools from being victimized and used as a gateway for fraud. School officials should also contact their local HSI office to report national security concerns, human trafficking issues or organized criminal activity. HSI special agents can provide training and tips to school officials to identify student visa fraud and other related crimes. HSI also has resources overseas and maintains a presence at several U.S. embassies and consulates to tackle student visa fraud before it even arrives in the United States.

The second is the Student and Exchange Visitor Program's (SEVP) Field Representative Unit (FRU), which provides administrative support directly to school officials in charge of overseeing international students. The FRU provides assistance and guidance to school officials to navigate SEVP regulations. Field representatives can also help school officials with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System and other record keeping issues to ensure compliance. While they do not investigate criminal activity or student visa fraud, field representatives can put schools in touch with their local HSI office.

Remember, school officials can always report information directly to ICE by calling the ICE Tip Line at 1-866-DHS-2ICE.





Three SEVIS Reporting Tips from an SEVP Field Representative

With more than 17 years of experience as a principal designated school official (PDSO), Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) field representative, Krista Gard, has a wealth of knowledge to share with the schools she serves. In addition to her time as a PDSO, Ms. Gard holds a Masters of Education in student development practice in higher education from St. John's University in New York.

Today, Ms. Gard finds meeting with school officials in her territory one to two times a year is the best way to share important program information and answer their questions about some of the lesser known and more complicated SEVP reporting requirements. Since she cannot visit every SEVP-certified school, we asked her to share her three most useful Student and Exchange Visitor Information System reporting reminders:

1. The Form I-17, "Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student," is a living document and must be kept current. All material changes must be reported within 21 days of the change.
2. Enrollment and registration reporting must be done no later than 30 days after the program or session start date. Set calendar reminders so you do not forget!
3. Schools often have trouble remembering certain changes to a student record must be reported within 21 days of the occurrence. Specific occurrences include when:
 - A student fails to maintain status or complete the program of study because they stopped pursuing a full course of study, did not complete their program by the program end date, did not file for program extension, did not complete a school transfer/change of education level, or did not follow employment rules.
 - A student's or dependent's name or U.S. address changes.
 - A student graduates early (i.e., prior to the program end date listed on the student's Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status").
 - Disciplinary action is taken as a result of a student's criminal conviction.

Do you have a question about reporting requirements? Reach out to an SEVP field representative if your school has one. If your school does not, please contact SEVP.

SEVIS

Two Important SEVIS Events in December

SEVIS Release 6.23 Deployed

On Dec. 7, 2015, Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Release 6.23 deployed and included the following system enhancements:

- The ability to add information for multiple employers for a student participating in optional practical training.
- An improved event history page that specifies changes made to a student's SEVIS record, including what was listed both before and after the update, which makes it easier to see what student information has changed.

Read the [SEVIS Release 6.23 Planning Guide](#) and the [Changes to Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," Fact Sheet](#) for additional details.

SEVIS Annual Verification Opened

From Dec. 2, 2015 to March 2, 2016, all principal designated school officials (PDSO) must take action and complete the PDSO/designated school official (DSO) annual verification in SEVIS.

To comply with the Federal Information System Management Act and ensure system security, all PDSOs must annually verify that every user has both the need and authorization to access SEVIS. Specifically, PDSOs must verify that all PDSOs/DSOs with SEVIS IDs from their schools are still employed by the institution and have responsibilities that require system access.

Please keep in mind, DSOs who are not verified by March 2, 2016 will lose SEVIS access. Take a look at the [PDSO/DSO Annual Verification FAQs on the SEVIS Help Hub](#) for more information.



Q&A: Meet the SEVP School Certification Unit

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) School Certification Unit (SCU) oversees the [SEVP School Certification Life Cycle](#). When a school petitions for SEVP-certification, recertification or needs to update its existing petition, SEVP's SCU works to adjudicate these requests. In this issue of SEVP Spotlight, SCU sat down and answered a few questions to help SEVP stakeholders better understand its role.

How many employees support SCU and what is the unit's average workload in a given month?

SCU has 14 federal adjudicators, which include two acting federal team leads and one acting federal unit chief. Additionally, a number of contractors support the federal adjudicators. The entire SCU staff works together to ensure compliance with regulations in regard to initial certification petitions, recertification petitions and any updates that need to be made; however, it is important to note – adjudication decisions are made only by federal employees.

Each month the staff receives hundreds of requests, which are organized into three areas of adjudication: initials, updates and recertifications. The unit measures its average monthly workload (i.e., the number of submissions received and the number of submissions that pass through the adjudication process) on a three-month rolling basis, to stay aligned with yearly fluctuations. Below is a table that outlines SCU's average monthly workload based on the data collected from Aug. to Oct. 2015:

Adjudication area	Average number of submissions received per month	Average number of submissions processed per month
Initials	62	36
Updates	560	600
Recertifications	615	304

Additionally, the unit works on special projects including developing policies and practices to help make SEVP processes more efficient.

On a high level, can you explain what the SEVP's process is for adjudicating a school?

In general, once a school submits or files a petition, the case analyst conducts an initial review. The case is then forwarded to the adjudicator for a final review and decision. Schools with multiple programs—those who have undergone a change of location or ownership, or have other unique circumstances—tend to take longer to review. In some instances, federal adjudicators may consult with other units in SEVP (e.g., field representatives) prior to adjudication to learn more about the case and the school's situation.

What is the typical educational and professional background of an SEVP adjudicator?

Each SEVP adjudicator comes to the program with different experiences and backgrounds, which provides SEVP a more diverse perspective of the international student process. All adjudicators hold at least a bachelor's degree and most have graduate-level degrees.

While in school, SEVP's federal adjudicators studied a variety of subjects, including international relations, public administration, law enforcement and public policy. Interestingly, many of our federal adjudicators participated in study abroad opportunities while they were students. Professionally speaking, some adjudicators

worked for recruiting agencies prior to joining SEVP, while others have direct experience working as a designated school official at SEVP-certified schools.

This incredibly diverse staff works diligently on each stakeholder petition while ensuring federal regulations are upheld. Currently, all of our federal adjudicators have been with SEVP for four years or more, so they have a wealth of invaluable institutional knowledge.

What advice does SCU have for SEVP-certified school officials?

Our advice for school officials is to:

- Treat your school's Form I-17, "Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by a Nonimmigrant Student," as a living document. This means, you must update your petition when your school implements a new program of study, for which it wants to issue [Forms I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,"](#) to F-1 or M-1 students, or acquires a new instructional site where the school intends to have F-1 or M-1 students pursuing a full course of study.
- Since this is a living document, do not wait until your school is eligible for recertification to begin to make changes on your school's petition; update the Form I-17 within the timeframes mandated in [8 CFR 214.3 \(g\)\(2\)](#).
- Read all documentation that SEVP sends, and visit sites like [Study in the States](#) and [SEVP's Web pages on ICE.gov](#) if you have questions. [Follow Study in the States](#) on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and find [SEVP on LinkedIn](#). If you do not find the answers you are looking for, do not hesitate to [contact SEVP directly](#).

SCU serves more than 8,800 schools, so we cannot stress enough the importance of getting us your updates as they occur. We will continue to work hard to get Forms I-17 adjudicated quickly, and look forward to working with the academic community to make this process more efficient.

Does your school have a question about initial school certification, recertification or making updates to your school's Form I-17? Send an [email](mailto:schoolcert.sevis@ice.dhs.gov) to schoolcert.sevis@ice.dhs.gov.



Secretary Johnson Appoints Six New Members to the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council

The Secretary of Homeland Security, Jeh Johnson, announced the appointment of six new members to the Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC) in October. “The Department is focused on engaging with colleges and universities across the nation, and the Council is a key asset in this effort,” said Secretary Johnson. “We are happy to welcome six new members and look forward to continuing the progress the Council has made over the past three years.”

New members to the Council include: Florida Memorial University President Dr. Roslyn Clark Artis, Arizona State University President Dr. Michael M. Crow, Tougaloo College President Dr. Beverly Wade Hogan, University of Alaska System President Dr. Jim Johnsen, Anne Arundel Community College President Dr. Dawn

Lindsay and U.S. Coast Guard Academy Superintendent Rear Admiral James Rendon.

Managed by the Office of Academic Engagement, the HSAAC is comprised of college and university presidents, association leaders, and interagency partners who advise the Secretary of Homeland Security and Department of Homeland Security leadership on topics related to national security and the academic community, including: academic research and faculty exchange, campus resilience, cybersecurity, homeland security academic programs, international students and student and recent graduate recruitment.

Learn more about the new HSAAC members in this [press release](#).

SEVP Hosts First InFocus Webinar

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) hosted its first SEVP InFocus Webinar on Nov. 10. For those who were unable to view the live broadcast, a recording of the webinar is available on the [Study in the States’ Stakeholder webinars page](#). There, you can also access the webinar’s [transcript](#) and [presentation](#), as well as download the [Executive Summary](#), which provides an overview of the topics discussed.

The [new SEVP webinar series](#) includes both SEVP InFocus webinars, which focus on program updates, as well as Ask the Experts webinars, which focus on specific topics of interest to our stakeholders. Each Ask the Expert presentation is followed by a live question and answer portion with SEVP subject matter experts.

For more information about SEVP’s outreach to the academic community, visit the recently updated [Conferences page on Study in the States](#).



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, 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time, except holidays

Phone: 703-603-3400

E-mail: SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

Find us on the Web:

www.ice.gov/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 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Eastern Time 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** or call 1-866-DHS-2ICE (1-866-347-2423) or visit www.ice.gov