

# SEVP Spotlight

January 2014  
Volume 4, Issue 1

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER

# SEVIS Enhancements



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

At the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a critical tool in our mission to protect national security while supporting the legal entry of the more than one million F, M and J nonimmigrant students to the United States who participate in a variety of programs at your fine schools.

We recognize the frustrations users experienced with SEVIS performance late last summer 2013. I want to take a moment to reaffirm our commitment to providing and maintaining an effective and efficient system. As key stakeholders in our mission and users of SEVIS, I want to provide you, the academic community, with an update on our efforts to improve and modernize SEVIS.

Based on the expanded list of requirements we developed, subsequent revised cost estimates and technological advances, we have altered our approach to improving and modernizing SEVIS. We identified 35 functionalities that are now possible to deploy within the current system as a part of our normal operations and maintenance upgrades. These functionalities will close most of the national security vulnerabilities identified in the system and provide many of the additional capabilities we had slated for SEVIS II. This new approach will have a significantly reduced cost.

To implement these functionalities, we will use an Agile development process. This process is more streamlined and requires far less bureaucratic paperwork, resulting in fewer delays and approval. SEVP and our colleagues at Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of the Chief Information Officer are working side-by-side to deploy these functionalities. We will provide more information in the near future.

These initial functionalities will:

- Improve system performance to increase system responsiveness during peak times
- Standardize information requirements to enhance searching, reporting and data matching, allowing users to get reports from SEVIS on their F, M and J nonimmigrant students and print the information as a PDF or export it to an Excel file
- Create an alert list where users can click on a nonimmigrant student name, take action on a record (e.g., registration), then go back to the alert list directly without having to retrace their navigation to the student record
- Validate U.S. addresses to provide consistency and accuracy and to ensure addresses are complete and real (allowing school officials to override any addresses that do not match the postal service validation system)
- Improve data accuracy by indentifying incorrect data in SEVIS, allow users to correct or delete data and eliminate duplicate records
- Enable school users to provide detailed information about all of the following:

- Accreditations
- Federal Aviation Administration certifications
- Other requested forms of recognition and licenses

Our efforts are underway, and we anticipate release of the first round of enhancements in early 2014. We also have preliminary plans to provide up to four additional rounds of enhancement releases throughout 2014.

As we transition to a more efficient and effective SEVIS, I am committed to keep you updated on our progress, plans and release dates through *Study in the States*. We also plan to have pre-release and post-release webinars to discuss the specific functionality in each release and highlight how to use new features. Finally, we will update the SEVIS Help and User Manuals to reflect future releases and will post additional training materials on *Study in the States*.

In the meantime, we welcome your continued feedback. E-mail any questions and comments to [SEVP@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:SEVP@ice.dhs.gov).

You are critical to the national security mission of U.S. ICE, as well as to the success of our F and M students and J exchange visitors. On behalf of all of us at SEVP, we greatly admire and respect the important work that you do, and we are most grateful to be working with you.

Take Care,  
Lou



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

# Conference Circuit: Stakeholder Questions Blog Series Shares Information

To supplement the Student and Exchange Visitor Program's (SEVP) [conference materials](#) on *Study in the States*, a new blog series, [Conference Circuit: Stakeholder Questions](#), has been launched to provide answers to commonly asked questions from our stakeholders at this season's conference events.

To date, we have published two blog posts in the series:

- [What is evidence of financial support?](#) This blog post is aimed at designated school officials and explains the requirement for F and M students to give evidence for financial support when accepted to an SEVP-certified school. While federal regulations do not cite specific requirements, examples of acceptable evidence include bank statements, letters from a sponsor or a scholarship letter.
- [Do You Know the Difference Between Accreditation and Certification?](#) This blog post explained the difference between SEVP-certification and accreditation from U.S. Department of Education recognized accrediting bodies. It also explains how these credentials relate to the regulations in which certified schools must comply. Any school that enrolls F or M nonimmigrant students must be certified by SEVP. However, schools are not required to obtain accreditation. SEVP-certification allows schools to enroll nonimmigrant students and issue Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status." Whereas, accrediting bodies grant accreditation to show that schools are providing a higher standard of education.

Follow the [Study in the States blog](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for future posts in the series.

## SEVP 101

SEVP recently launched a new video, "[SEVP 101](#)," on *Study in the States*. This video can also be found on the [Immigration and Customs Enforcement YouTube Channel](#). "SEVP 101" provides an overview of our mission to protect national security while supporting international student exchange for more than one million F, M and J nonimmigrant students in the United States. This video covers the following topics:

- SEVP's role in protecting national security and the F and M student process;
- Overview of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System;
- Why the SEVP certification process and designated school officials are important; and
- The differences between the Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," and the Form DS-2019, "Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status."

Watch the video to learn about the program or as a refresher on SEVP's mission. Share this video on Facebook and Twitter to help your colleagues, friends and students learn about SEVP.



## Travel Tuesday Prepares Students for Return from Holiday Season

During the holiday season, many F and M students choose to travel internationally. Whenever a nonimmigrant student leaves the United States and intends to return to school for the next school term, they must go through the same inspection process with U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers as when they initially arrived. This process can sometimes be confusing for students. To help students understand this process, SEVP published a new travel-themed blog series on *Study in the States*. These weekly *Travel Tuesday* posts provide more information on [secondary inspection](#), [the Form I-515A- "Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor,"](#) [what to expect at the port of entry](#), and [general holiday travel tips](#). These posts were promoted on social media with shareable images to reach as many students as possible and to help simplify their trip back to the United States.

# The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System Fee

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is an important tool in ensuring that international students attend Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certified schools and programs and safeguards the integrity of student and exchange visitor programs. Enforcing participation in SEVIS is the responsibility of several federal agencies and ultimately, the school's designated school official (DSO).

On Oct. 27, 2008, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented the I-901 SEVIS fee to support SEVP and its automated system, SEVIS. Students applying for F, M and J visas must show proof of fee payment along with their school's Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," prior to being issued a visa by the U.S. Department of State at the U.S. embassy/consular office. Failure to pay the fee could result in the denial of a visa.

Upon entry into the U.S., all nonimmigrant students are inspected by U.S. Customs and Border Protection

(CBP) officers to determine if they have the appropriate documentation to attend school in the U.S. Students who fail to pay their I-901 SEVIS fee prior to reaching a U.S. port of entry may be denied entry and returned back to their home country.

If a student has arrived in the U.S. without paying the fee, or changed non-immigrant status to student status without paying the fee, they can be terminated in SEVIS and fall out of status. DSOs can report any issues concerning non-payment or payment fraud to SEVP for further investigation.

If SEVP determines that a student is out of status, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit (CTCEU) will review all terminated records to determine the need for further investigation, which could result in the arrest and detention of a terminated student and ultimately, removal from the U.S.

For more information, please read the I-901 SEVIS fee *Study in the States* tutorial article of this newsletter.

## I-901 Fee Tutorial

Payment of the I-901 Student and Exchange Visitor Information System fee is required for all prospective F and M students and most J exchange visitors before they apply for a visa to enter the U.S. To facilitate the payment process, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program developed a [video tutorial](#) to help students and exchange visitors through each step of paying the fee. The tutorial also provides stakeholders with important information about their application status and how to print their payment receipt. The tutorial was launched the tutorial on October 31, 2013, on *Study in the States*.

Be sure to share this tutorial to help prospective nonimmigrant F or M students and J exchange visitors navigate the process.

## SEVP's Conference Season

Due to Federal budget restrictions on travel, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) developed a recorded [webinar](#) of our entire Fall/Winter 2013 Conference Presentation and posted it on *Study in the States*. In this webinar, the program's latest initiatives and upcoming changes are discussed, including:

- Efforts to increase engagement with the academic community
- Updates and insights about the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System and from SEVP certification, compliance and field representative units
- Recent coordination campaigns with government partners
- Highlights of the many resources that are offered to our stakeholders

Conference attendees were encouraged to view this webinar before each conference where SEVP virtually attended. SEVP subject matter experts also participated to answer stakeholder questions.

While the fall and winter conference season is complete, we want to encourage stakeholders to provide feedback on future outreach events by completing the stakeholder survey form. [Your feedback](#) helps us to continuously improve and provide our stakeholders with the most useful and relevant information, both in person and on *Study in the States*.

Additionally, in 2013 the "SEVP Conference Bulletin" was launched. This monthly, one-page bulletin informs stakeholders on the latest SEVP news regarding outreach, programmatic and interagency coordination

efforts. Each month, conference stakeholders receive the latest news on SEVP outreach efforts and a list of notable future events, including a schedule of webinars available on *Study in the States*.

To be added to the distribution list for the "SEVP Conference Bulletin," e-mail us at [SEVPCommunications@ice.dhs.gov](mailto:SEVPCommunications@ice.dhs.gov).

# SEVP's Draft Policy Guidance Campaign

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) continues to develop draft policy guidance documents to provide insight into how SEVP adjudicators interpret regulations. This draft guidance is posted on *Study in the States* to give our stakeholders the opportunity to provide comments. We then review all feedback and revise the draft policy guidance (when necessary) before releasing the final version.

SEVP published the following guidance on October 2, 2013, for public comment:

- **Timely Filing:** This guidance explains changes in how much time school officials have to respond to notices from SEVP. These changes are a result of the move to paperless administrative processes.
- **Temporary Absence:** This guidance clarifies regulations 8 CFR 214.2(f)(4) and 8 CFR 214.2(m)(4). These regulations explain the process for how an F-1 or M-1 student leaving the United States should apply for a temporary absence and how they return afterward.
- **Annual Vacation:** This guidance provides clarification on regulation 8 CFR 214.2(f)(5) (iii). This regulation defines vacation and explains when and under what conditions, an F-1 student may take an annual vacation.

SEVP received more than 200 stakeholder comments on these draft policy guidance

documents. In response to this feedback, the public comment period was extended for the above guidance – and all future draft guidance – from two weeks to 45 calendar days.

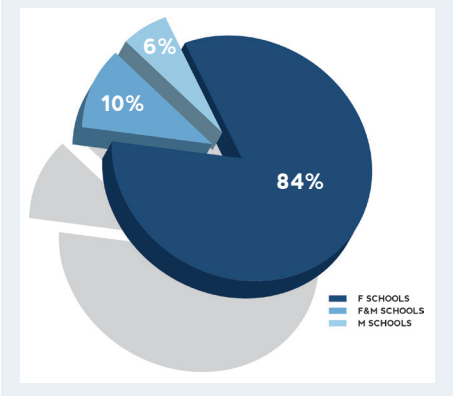
In the near future, we expect to publish final guidance on Timely Filing and plan to ask for public comment on the following draft guidance documents:

- **Bridge Programs and Conditional Admission:** This guidance addresses programs designed to “bridge” the gap between a student’s missing proficiencies and enrollment in a full degree program. It also will address the practice of conditional admission, where a student is admitted to a degree program, contingent upon successful completion of courses in areas that the student lacks proficiency.
- **New Designated School Official (DSO) Updates Process:** This guidance describes procedures related to streamlining SEVP’s adjudication of updates to add, delete or edit a DSO listing.
- **DSO Limits:** This guidance provides clarification of regulation 8 CFR 214.3(l)(1)(iii), which dictates the number of DSOs a school can have at each instructional site.

# SEVIS by the Numbers

In late January, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) launched an enhanced Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) by the Numbers report on [ICE.gov](http://ice.gov) to highlight exciting trends and changes in the F and M student population in the United States. This newly designed report interprets data from SEVIS to illustrate correlations between nonimmigrant students and the SEVP-certified programs where they participate.

To find previous SEVIS by the Numbers reports, [visit SEVP's section](#) in the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Freedom of Information Act Reading Room.



## 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](mailto:SEVP@ice.dhs.gov)

Find us on the Web:

[www.ice.gov/sevis](http://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@hp.com](mailto:SEVIShelpdesk@hp.com)

*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](mailto: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](http://www.ice.gov)