U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

SEVIS Student And Exchange Visitor Information System Newsletter

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A Message From Susan Geary, *Acting Director*

Greetings from the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)

Fiscal Year 2004 brought us many opportunities to attend and participate in fall conferences. We value these opportunities to meet with the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) user community and receive the feedback we need to maintain our focus on the important things—striking a balance between strengthening homeland security and ensuring students and exchange visitors are given the opportunity to study in the United States.

We're working to strike that balance daily. The SEVP enjoys strong support from within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), from our counterparts at the Department of State—both at the Office of Exchange Coordination and Designation and in the Office of Consular Affairs—and from the Department of Education. Admittedly, some changes take time to happen, but be assured that the SEVP's leaders hear your concerns and continue to work toward balanced solutions.

I encourage everyone to continue monitoring our Web site (**www.ice.gov/SEVIS**). Our last quarter of 2004 was busy and productive. We successfully implemented a fourth fee payment option with the help of Western Union. We added a new "Frequently Asked Question" specifically related to travel, and we'll update this section in the coming year. Within the first few weeks of February, we added our "SEVIS By the Numbers" feature, which provides a helpful breakdown of SEVIS statistics about the number of students, schools, exchange visitors and program sponsors in the system. Please bookmark our Web site and review it regularly, since it's our primary method of reaching all of our major stakeholders and the SEVIS user community.

Fiscal Year 2005 is also bringing a few major initiatives that will help improve the program and SEVIS. These initiatives include working toward establishment of a Federal Advisory Committee (a formal working group comprised of system users), hiring a SEVIS Liaison Branch Manager (our first step in establishing a liaison position in the field offices to work with the local educational community), and reviewing the feasibility of granting data correction capabilities to Principal/Designated School Officials. We look forward to continuing to work with our stakeholder communities to ensure that we're always focused on striking a positive balance.

Susan Geary,
Acting Director

SEVIS By The Numbers As Of April 30, 2005

Total approved schools	8,014
Total approved sponsors	1,463
Active students and exchange visitors	724,981
Active dependents of students and exchange visitors	120,579

Upcoming Events

Policy

- Frequently Asked Questions on E-Filing for Reinstatement
- Frequently Asked Questions on Employment for F-1 and M-1 Visa Holders
- Interim Rule on Recertification
- System of Records Notice
- Privacy Impact Assessment

Information Technology

- Release 4.14/School Recertification Functionality
- Federal Advisory Council

SEVIS Data Fixes

An Interview With Denise Mackie-Smith

Denise Mackie-Smith

Given the number of questions we've received about data fixes in the SEVIS system, we're devoting this issue to a fuller exploration of the topic. We asked Denise Mackie-Smith, SEVP's Branch Chief for Information Technology (IT), to respond to a few of the most commonly asked questions.

QUESTION: ***For those who may not be familiar with data fixes, Denise, could you define that term for our readers?***

ANSWER: A data fix is a request by a Principal/Designated School Official (P/DSO) or Responsible Officer/Alternate Responsible Officer (RO/ARO) to change data in SEVIS. For example, a user may request to change the education level of a student (F/M visa), or SEVIS may not have received an update from another interface. Thus, a student's record must be corrected to reflect a pending or approved change of status. There are several instances where a user will request a data fix, but ultimately, the request is to perform a data change within SEVIS that the user is unable to do.

QUESTION: ***There recently seems to be an increasing number of data fixes. What has caused this increase?***

ANSWER: To begin with, let's note that data fixes have been around since the start of the SEVIS program. In September 2004, after extensive outreach to the education community, SEVP began to run automatic maintenance jobs in SEVIS to terminate/cancel records that did not receive required updates by school officials for over 60 days. These automatic jobs are not unique to SEVIS—most IT systems have an automated mechanism to maintain up-to-date information in the system.

The automatic jobs provided the first opportunity for SEVP to examine across the board whether schools were updating their students' records in SEVIS. The automatic maintenance jobs ran from September to December 2004 and resulted in the termination of 65,000 student records. At the same time, SEVP experienced an increase in the number of requests from SEVIS users for data fixes.

Recently, SEVP has engaged in targeted outreach to the SEVIS user community to determine the root cause of the high number of terminated records and data fix requests. What we learned is that there is no simple answer. For the most part, the schools believe that the 65,000 terminated student records were terminated appropriately as duplicate records or as non-registered records of students who never arrived at the campus to begin school. The schools also pointed to various problems they experience when using SEVIS that challenge their ability to comply with SEVP requirements, such as a lack of adequate training on how to use SEVIS; duplicate records of their students in SEVIS; and problems with the interfaces between SEVIS and other IT systems.

SEVP is in the process of developing a data integrity strategy to examine the causes of the high number of data fixes.

QUESTION: ***Why does it take so long to get a data fix done?***

ANSWER: Data fixes take time to resolve. One data fix may include numerous student/exchange visitor records. Plus, some data fixes require additional research and/or additional documents are necessary to complete the fix. To date, there have been approximately 15,000 data fix tickets opened, and we have resolved all but about 6,600.

QUESTION: ***How are data fixes processed?***

ANSWER: Data fix requests are generally processed in the order received, with older requests being given highest priority. Not all data fix requests are honored. However, due to the impact that an erroneous record status can have on a student or exchange visitor, emergency escalations are handled on a case-by-case basis to ensure students and exchange visitors with the most urgent situations are given top priority. These scenarios may include travel outside the United States within 30 days.

QUESTION: ***Can holders of J visas file for reinstatement?***

ANSWER: The J-1 exchange visitor does not have an established reinstatement process. Therefore, responsible officials have no choice but to request a data fix to correct an erroneous record status. As a result, J data fix requests are rarely denied, as no alternative means of correction exists (e.g., reinstatement).

QUESTION: ***What has happened to those J-2 records caught in the "transfer" glitch?***

ANSWER: As of January 28, 2005, a global data fix was completed that corrected the J-2 records continued

caught in the "transferred" status. Sponsors should now be able to generate Form DS-2019 permitting dependents to apply for EAD or to travel.

QUESTION: ***Can the Help Desk process an extension for a J-1 student when the Responsible Official does not have the capability to do so in SEVIS?***

ANSWER: The response to this question depends on the nature and merit of the data fix itself. The status of a SEVIS record is changed to "Inactive" upon the expiration of the program, which is determined by the program end date in SEVIS. However, (1) if the record is inactive, and (2) the maximum duration of participation for the category has not yet been exceeded, and (3) the program end date is not 120 days in the past, then the RO/ARO could complete a "correction of a minor or technical infraction" that is currently available in SEVIS and extend the program end date. This would permit the exchange visitor to participate in their program while a data fix is pending (e.g., to correct the program begin date).

QUESTION: ***What can users do to possibly prevent the need for a data fix?***

ANSWER: SEVP asks that P/DSOs and RO/AROs monitor the Alert Lists in SEVIS and ensure that students and exchange visitors are registered in a timely manner.

Sponsors should also routinely monitor the "Initial Status Exchange Visitor and Dependents" link located on the "Exchange Visitors and Dependent's Menu" for their program. This link provides the RO/ARO with a list of all the EVs (and any dependents) who have a SEVIS record created and submitted to SEVIS but have NOT been validated. The RO/ARO can monitor the SEVIS records to determine if the status of an exchange visitor's record is about to be changed to "Invalid" by one of the SEVIS maintenance jobs.

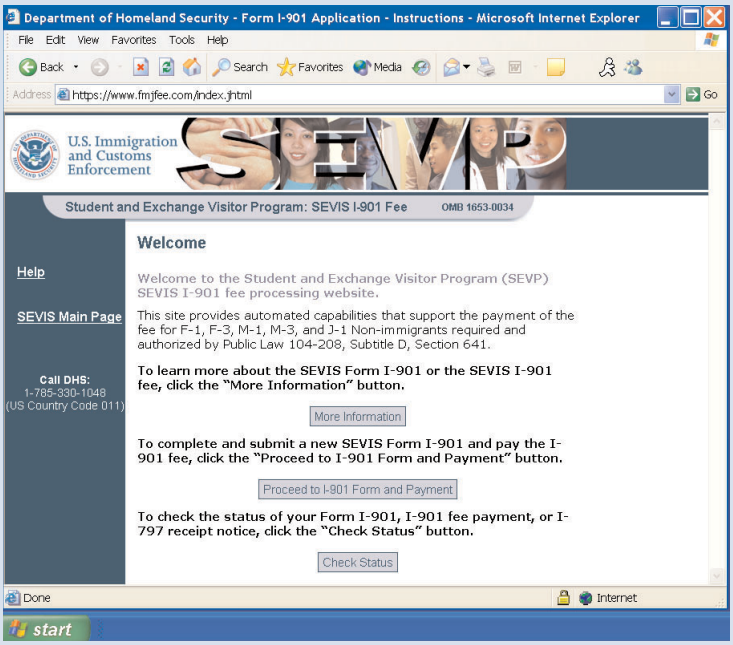
In addition, SEVP recommends that P/DSOs instruct their students to communicate their intentions for summer travel, optional practical training, etc., to their school officials at least 45 days prior to the end of the current session or their expected graduation date, so that the students' SEVIS records may be updated appropriately.

QUESTION: ***Anything else to add?***

ANSWER: One important reminder I would like to add is that all P/DSOs continue to defer attendance for your students who are reaching their program start date or have passed it. This is especially true in the case where your student has a pending Change of Status request, as we do not want to prematurely cancel or terminate any records. More information will be forthcoming in a SEVIS Broadcast Notice. SEVIS user manuals are updated with every new SEVIS release and can be found online at **www.ice.gov/SEVIS**.

Also, RO/AROs must continue to amend the program start date for nonimmigrants who are arriving late or who are delayed in the visa issuance process and to validate the participation of a nonimmigrant once they have arrived. SEVIS user manuals are updated with every new SEVIS release and are also found on the Department of State's Web site: **http://exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges/**.

I would like to thank the entire user community for their input, patience and willingness to suggest solutions. We all benefit from this high level of community involvement. I would like to especially thank those who have done it right and have worked the alert lists tirelessly.



International students and exchange visitors seeking to study in the United States will now be able to monitor the status of their SEVIS fee payment online at the www.fmjfee.com Web site—the latest program enhancement to provide enhanced convenience and customer service for the SEVIS community.

Update On School Recertification

The interim rule on school recertification is in the DHS review process. All schools will be given adequate time and guidance to prepare for and petition for recertification.

User access to SEVIS will continue as usual throughout the application process and adjudication phases. Schools will continue to be authorized to enroll nonimmigrant F/M students until they have had full opportunity to petition for recertification, as well as while their petition for recertification is pending approval.

The recertification process will confirm that schools are complying with SEVIS requirements. In addition, SEVP will review student records in SEVIS as well as updates in programs of study, advertising, record-keeping and other areas.

...Breaking News...**Breaking News**...Breaking News...

. . . . . E-filing now available for I-539s . . . . . .

. . . . . receipt immediately available . . . . . .

. . . . . recommended for reinstatements . . . . . .

see http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/e-i-539.htm

A New Look

The Evolving SEVP Web Site

In response to suggestions from stakeholders, the SEVP home page has undergone another revision to help users detect breaking news. The student and school buttons have been moved to the resource column to free their space on the home page and to accentuate issues and processes that are time sensitive. As of January 2005, this space has been used to highlight a new set of "Frequently Asked Questions" on travel and re-entry of F-1s and M-1s and their dependents.

The "Contact Us" box has been revised to encourage newly entering students and exchange visitors with fee payment issues to e-mail us at **fmjfee.SEVIS@dhs.gov**.

Latest News on SEVIS I-901 Fee Payment Options

The most significant news on SEVIS I-901 fee payment is the ever-growing use of the Western Union QuickPay option that was established in November. While this option was initially used predominantly by Chinese and Mongolian students, Western Union is increasingly being used for SEVIS payments in countries around the globe.

As of April 30, 2005, there have been 266,091 payments processed, and there was an error rate of less than 0.1 percent. Refund requests are usually processed in less than a week.

Contact Us

- **For I-901 fee payment help:** Visit the SEVP Web site at **www.ice.gov/sevis/i901**. You can also call the I-901 Customer Service hotline at **785-330-1048** (United States Country Code 011) or e-mail us at **fmjfee.SEVIS@dhs.gov**.
- **For questions pertaining to your specific school or exchange visitor program,** contact the person listed on your Form I-20 or DS-2019.

- **For schools and programs,** contact the following for all other technical questions: the SEVIS Help Desk at **800-892-4829** between 8 A.M. and 8 P.M. Eastern Time or by e-mail at **SEVIShelpdesk@eds.com** for assistance and support. For specific technical, urgent cases: **Toolbox.SEVIS@dhs.gov**
- **For school certification questions:** To check the status of an I-17 petition, confirm receipt of payment or to receive information on a site visit, contact the SEVP School Certification Branch at **schoolcert.SEVIS@dhs.gov** or **202-305-2346** or by fax at **202-353-3723**.

  The School Certification Branch is organized on a state-by-state basis. If a school administrator contacts the School Certification Branch, our staff will direct the call or message to the Case Analyst working with the schools in that state.

SEVIS' commitment to the continual process of improvement begins with your comments, concerns, or suggestions. Please contact SEVIS:

By email: **SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov**
By phone: **202-305-2346**
By fax: **202-353-3723**

By mail: **ICE/SEVIS**
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Washington, D.C. 20536