



## U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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### **FACT SHEET** *SEVIS – Year Three*

The **Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)** is a Web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors and their dependents in the United States. Administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and utilized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (CIS) and the U.S. Department of State (DoS), SEVIS is designed to keep our nation safe while facilitating the entry and exit process for foreign students and exchange visitors coming to the United States.

Today, a total of 10,174 schools and exchange visitor programs are certified to participate in the program. This reflects a 28% increase from the previous year. As of the last quarter of 2005, there are more than 766,052 students and exchange visitors (F-1, M-1, and J-1 visa categories) approved to study in the United States today and their data is being managed by SEVIS. In addition, SEVIS maintains records on more than 115,747 dependents of these students and exchange visitors.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 mandates ICE to use SEVIS data for monitoring and enforcement purposes. Interfaces between SEVIS and border systems upload arrival information into SEVIS to notify ICE and schools of a student's arrival. Schools are then required to report foreign students who fail to enroll within 30 days of the registration deadline, and report subsequent changes in a student's status. The ICE Office of Investigations (ICE OI) Compliance Enforcement Unit (CEU) extracts data from SEVIS on certain terminated records. In 2005, the CEU reviewed over 85,000 potential violators. Reasons for an individual being considered in violation include not showing up for class, expulsion, suspension, failure to maintain a full course of study, and others. The CEU conducted an extensive examination of the potential violations using DHS and law enforcement databases and referred 2,333 leads to the field for further investigation. ICE OI field offices conduct a comprehensive investigation prior to any enforcement action being taken as a result of SEVIS violator leads. Based on those investigations, ICE OI field offices made 592 arrests of student and exchange visitor violators.

The SEVIS program enables CBP officers to access information in a timely manner, allowing them to quickly process legitimate students and exchange visitors through the

ports of entry. Students and exchange visitors who are registered in the program no longer have to present extensive paper documentation for CBP officers to review. However, failure to provide required documentation and to comply with entry/exit procedures is cause to refuse the student or exchange visitor admission into the United States. At the discretion of the CBP officer a Form I-515A, Notice to Student or Exchange Visitor, may be issued, which authorizes temporary admission for 30 days into the United States and requires the student or exchange visitor to take immediate action to submit proper documentation. During 2005, there were 5,504 Forms I-515A issued.

## *SELECTED THIRD YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS*

### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE**

SEVP began to work with foreign students and SEVIS certified schools affected by Hurricane Katrina and subsequent flooding caused by the levees breaking soon after the storm hit. SEVP created an internal task force that immediately responded by using SEVIS to identify 30 certified schools representing approximately 3,000 nonimmigrant students in the impacted area. More than 400 hundred schools were contacted by SEVP and provided status updates. SEVP continued this approach throughout the hurricane season by maintaining a dedicated telephone line, email box, and a toll-free number for evacuees. SEVP facilitated through SEVIS the transfer of students from affected schools in the New Orleans area to fully operational, certified schools around the country upon request and continued to develop answers to frequently asked questions as a result of the hurricane, posting those answers on the ICE.gov Web site.

### **DATA INTEGRITY**

SEVIS enables the United States to collect and manage information on foreign students and exchange visitors by maintaining up-to-date data that can be accessed electronically. SEVIS has simplified what was once a manual process, resulting in more accurate and timely data, faster processing and fewer delays for student and exchange visitors. SEVIS, fully implemented in January 2003, was the first automated system in the nation that created this management capability for visiting students and remains the only automated system capable of monitoring non-immigrants upon arrival, during their stay, and through their departure.

Effective October 31, 2005, SEVP met its goal of eliminating all backlogged data fix tickets over 90 days for changes to information in SEVIS within six months. A data fix ticket is generated when a school or exchange program official requests that SEVP change information in a particular foreign student's or exchange visitor's SEVIS record because it is inaccurate.

Eliminating this backlog enabled the correction of 25,843 student and exchange visitor records in SEVIS. Accurate and up-to-date information in SEVIS is a priority and is the

most effective way to ensure that only legitimate foreign student and exchange visitors are studying in the United States.

SEVP also took preventive steps to avoid future backlogs by developing an instructional guide for designated school officials and exchange program officials to help them identify the situations that tend to create data fixes, offering preventive solutions. Responding to stakeholder requests for additional ability to correct records at the user level, SEVP introduced System Release 5.1 in December 2005. Preceded by extensive informational briefings throughout the month, this release provides additional functionality to end users allowing them to correct certain data onsite, rather than requesting a data fix.

### **SEVIS FEES**

The 1996 law that mandated the establishment of SEVP and SEVIS also required the program be funded through the payment of fees. The implementation of a \$100 fee for international students, exchange visitors and scholars took effect on September 1, 2004. The fee covers the costs for the continued operation of the Student Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), including the administration and maintenance of SEVIS. During FY 2005, 545,000 payments were made either by credit or debit card via the Internet, check or money order, Western Union or through bulk filing. Individuals can check the status of their payment by using a customer service Web site.

Rejection or error rates have been less than 1%, as a result of the efforts of the Case Resolution Unit (CRU) dedicated staff whose task is preventive, to avoid and resolve application errors. The unit also responds to inquiries and has responded to more than 36,000 emails. May, June and July continue to be the most active months for payment activity, followed by December for spring registrations.

### **SEVIS OUTREACH**

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) continues to involve all stakeholders in the international student and exchange visitor communities. SEVP holds bi-weekly stakeholder conference calls to provide updates on the system and policy interpretation, while proactively soliciting feedback and suggestions on ways to improve SEVIS. A number of these suggestions have been implemented by SEVP.

DHS also sponsors outreach events, attends academic conferences, and meets with stakeholders to address any issues that may arise and to keep the public informed of SEVIS progress. DHS has also worked with the State Department to develop informational brochures and fact sheets for international students and exchange visitors.

During 2005, SEVP participated in 36 conferences and meetings with the educational community. This included: five national conferences, 15 regional conferences, two

(metropolitan) meetings and 14 teleseminars. SEVP estimates that its audience for these events totaled 11,950 individuals.

SEVP launched its first online training modules for designated school officials in August 2005. The training modules are designed for ease of use and accessibility and to provide a comprehensive review of the basic information, policies and procedures that are necessary to administer the program. The training is self-paced and will eventually contain both an assessment tool and a reporting history.