



May 15, 2006

# Fact Sheet

## **F/M/J Nonimmigrants: Managing Information that the U.S. Government Needs About Nonimmigrants During Their Visit**

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) relies on a number of data systems to provide information on nonimmigrants in the United States. DHS and other government agencies use these systems to verify nonimmigrant eligibility for employment and certain benefits. Unfortunately, inconsistencies in data related to a single individual may indicate a potential status violator.

Many data inconsistencies are unintentional. Mistakes in data detract from the fundamental purpose of DHS to protect national security. They waste limited resources for schools, students, sponsors, exchange visitors and the government agencies. Data discrepancies from data entry errors are largely avoidable.

Until data systems are designed with features that help eliminate most data discrepancies, everyone – government, school and sponsor officials, as well as F/M/J nonimmigrants – needs to take steps to improve data integrity. From the earliest communication with prospective F/M/J nonimmigrants, designated school officials (DSOs) and responsible officers (ROs) need to emphasize to them where errors can occur and how they can prevent them. For example, the Social Security Administration (SSA) identifies **Form I-94, Arrival/ Departure Record, discrepancies as the primary reason for delays** in issuing Social Security numbers (SSNs) to nonimmigrants. This Fact Sheet provides guidance on how to fill out forms and correct inaccurate data. This information can be helpful to school and sponsor officials, and F/M/J nonimmigrants. The sections on **Nonimmigrant Responsibilities** and **Directions for Completing the Form I-94** primarily address nonimmigrants.

### **Data Consistency**

Most of the data systems with information about nonimmigrants depend on the consistent spelling of names, accurate dates, country of origin (birth), and country of citizenship. Other information is important, but these data elements are most critical. It is critical that these data elements are the same throughout all data systems to ensure the correct records are consistently updated.

### **Names**

Name submissions must be consistent on all official travel documents (passports, visa, Form I-20, *Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status*/Form DS-2019, *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status*, and Form I-94). The earliest official document sets the standard.

- When a DSO creates the Form I-20 or an RO creates the Form DS-2019, enter the name in SEVIS exactly as it appears on the nonimmigrant's passport or national identification card. If no passport is available use the name contained on the national identification card.
  - If the nonimmigrant has only one name, it must be used as the last name. For this individual, do not enter anything in the first name field in SEVIS.
  - **Spacing** is as important as spelling and must be consistent. For instance, systems will not read Mc Millan and McMillan as the same name.
  - **Hyphens** must also be used consistently.
  - Consistency with **capitalization** is helpful, but not critical.
  - Name entries must be in English and **must use standard United States characters**. Letters like ñ, é, ü, ç are not recognized by DHS and DOS data systems. Enter names like Muñoz and Sémonin as Munoz and Semonin. Do not change spellings to reflect sounds of the language of origin.
- F/M/J nonimmigrants must be consistent in how they enter last, first, and middle name on the Form I-94 from their passport. For example, this inconsistency frequently occurs among some Hispanic nonimmigrants that may use their mother's maiden name as part of their name. Sometimes it is given as a middle name and other times as part of a hyphenated last name. They may choose either in applying for the passport, but the Form I-94 must be exactly like the passport.

Please note that, if a nonimmigrant has a number of records where the spelling of the name is inconsistent, government officials are more likely to interpret this as a deliberate attempt at misrepresentation.

## Dates

Be very careful when entering dates. The date of birth is an especially critical data element.

The U.S. standard format for dates is mm/dd/yyyy while most other countries use dd/mm/yyyy. However, not all of the U.S. government forms follow the U.S. standard.

- SEVIS, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and SSA forms use the U.S. standard format – month/day/year (i.e., mm/dd/yyyy).
- The Form I-94 uses the day/month/year format (i.e., dd/mm/yy) format (as do passports and birth certificates from most countries).
- The Form DS-156, Nonimmigrant Visa Application, uses the day/month/year format as follows - dd/mmm/yyyy. The month should be entered in the 3-letter English abbreviation, not numerals. To minimize mistakes, recommend that nonimmigrants use the E-form version of the Form DS-156 (available at <http://evisaforms.state.gov/>). This form has a drop down list for dates and some other critical data elements.

## Country of Origin (Birth) versus Country of Citizenship

The country of origin (birth) is the country that issued the student's or exchange visitor's birth certificate. All U.S. government systems use a standard data table for this field. It should be the name of the country at the time of the student's or exchange visitor's birth, even if that country no longer exists.

The country of citizenship is the country that issued the nonimmigrant's passport. This data field is restricted to countries that exist at the time the documentation is completed.

## Nonimmigrant Responsibilities

F/M/J nonimmigrants must assume ownership for the accuracy of their records and take responsibility to check their travel and admission forms when they are issued. Correcting mistakes on the spot is quicker and cheaper than delaying, and it prevents confusion. By accepting the conditions of their visa from the U.S. government, they have made legal commitments and need accurate records to verify their compliance.

Nonimmigrants should carefully review their Forms I-20/DS-2019 when they receive them. The information should match the name listed in their passport or on their national identification card. If the Form I-20/DS-2019 spelling that the DSO or RO entered differs, the nonimmigrant should contact the school or sponsor official immediately to get a replacement Form I-20/DS-2019 with the corrected information reissued to them. SEVIS allows the DSO or RO to edit the form using the same SEVIS identification number. If the nonimmigrant does not yet have a passport, the name on his or her passport application (Form DS-156) should match the name displayed on the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019.

### *SEVIS Fee Payment*

F/M/J nonimmigrants are encouraged to pay the SEVIS Form I-901 fee using the Form I-20/DS-2019 as a reference. Entering the data in the same manner as displayed on the Form I-20/DS-2019 will ensure that the fee transaction is readily accepted. Different information may delay the payment receipt.

### *Form I-94*

The Form I-94 is a critical document. It shows that a nonimmigrant has been legally admitted to the United States, the class of admission (i.e., visa used to enter the United States), the date the nonimmigrant entered the United States, and the authorized period of stay (i.e., “Admitted Until...” date). It is very important that the information on this form is correct.

Complete instructions for filling out the Form I-94 are at [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id\\_visa/i-94\\_instructions/filling\\_out\\_i94.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/filling_out_i94.xml). We have also included a sample form and instructions as the last page of this Fact Sheet. Nonimmigrants may want to fill in the sample prior to traveling and use it to complete the actual form upon arrival in the United States.

### *Entering the United States*

Nonimmigrants should hand-carry all immigration documents (i.e., passport, national identification, Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, Form I-94; letters from school or sponsor representatives\*, etc.) with them for ease of processing by the immigration inspectors at the United States ports-of-entry. Persons arriving in the United States cannot get to their checked luggage prior to being processed for entry into the United States. Lack of immigration documentation delays processing at the port-of-entry and may ultimately result in denial of the person’s entry into the United States.

Review the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) at [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id\\_visa/i-94\\_instructions/arrival\\_departure\\_record.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml) before traveling to the United States. It explains the purpose of the Form I-94 and briefly describes the arrival inspection process.

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\* There is no official requirement for letters from school or sponsor representatives. However, if there are entries in the nonimmigrant’s SEVIS record which may cause questions or concerns for consulate or port-of-entry officials, explanation and/or contact information to the school or sponsor representative in an official letter may expedite approval of nonimmigrant entry into the United States.

### *Exiting the United States*

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ), [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id\\_visa/i-94\\_instructions/arrival\\_departure\\_record.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml) points out how important it is that the nonimmigrant turns in the Form I-94 to an airlines representative or Customs Border Protection (CBP) official when leaving the United States. Returning the Form I-94 proves that the nonimmigrant did not violate U.S. laws by staying in the country too long and that the nonimmigrant obeyed U.S. immigration laws. This is essential if he or she wants to return to the United States at a future date.

### *Double Check Documentation*

The visa category and class of admission need to be consistent. The visa category is printed under Visa Class/Type on the visa stamp.

- The class of admission/visa category for exchange visitors is J-1 for principals and J-2 for dependents. This will be indicated above the barcode on the Form DS-2019. Be sure the visa category on your visa matches the class of admission on your Form DS-2019.
- The class of admission/visa category for students (F/M) is printed at the top of page 1. It is F-1 for academic and language students and M-1 for vocational and technical students. Dependent (F-2 or M-2) Forms I-20 will have *Dependent's Copy* printed above the barcode.

Upon clearing the nonimmigrant for entry, the CBP Officer will stamp the Form I-20/DS-2019 and the Form I-94. On both forms, the officer will handwrite the class of admission. It is important that the class of admission written on the Form I-20 or DS-2019 and the Form I-94 are identical and match the Form I-20 (F/M) or Form DS-2019 (J). It is best to have errors fixed immediately by a CBP officer before the nonimmigrant leaves the port-of-entry to the United States.

## **Correcting mistakes in travel and admission documents**

### *DHS Verification Information System (VIS)*

Government agencies outside of DHS (including SSA and Departments of Motor Vehicles) use the DHS Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program's Verification Information System (VIS) as their primary data source to verify the legal entry of a nonimmigrant into the United States and authorization to receive a benefit. Also, employers view VIS as part of their determination of a nonimmigrant's authorization for employment.

Nonimmigrant data in VIS—the data transcribed from the Form I-94—is superseded by new data each time the individual reenters the United States. Given the frequency of travel and the limited application of VIS data, it is not feasible to correct data discrepancies here. Status verification, in some instances, can also be done using the information in SEVIS.

### *Forms I-20/DS-2019 and SEVIS*

When errors are found, DSOs and ROs/AROs should correct SEVIS as soon as practical and print corrected Forms I-20 or DS-2019. For schools, this is a reporting requirement and must be completed within the time frames defined in 8 CFR 214.3(g).

### *Forms I-94*

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reviews requests for corrections and, if appropriate, issues the necessary documents to remedy errors made on the Form I-94 at the time of entry to the United States relating to:

- Improper non-immigrant classification

- Inaccurate biographical information
- Incorrect period of admission

Any designated deferred inspection location or CBP office located within an international airport should be able to assist you, regardless of where the actual document was issued.

See the CBP Web site at [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id\\_visa/i-94\\_instructions/arrival\\_departure\\_record.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/i-94_instructions/arrival_departure_record.xml) for more detailed information.

### *Passports*

Students and exchange visitors should consult with their embassy to find out how to correct, update or renew their passport. Most embassies will have a website with information for their citizens.

### *Visas*

Visas are used for entry into the United States. If discrepancies are noticed while in the United States, they can be corrected when the student or exchange visitor travels home. Consult the DOS website at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa\\_1750.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html) for details.

Technically, visas can be corrected at any U.S. embassy/consulate outside the United States. However, if a DOS official is not able to verify eligibility from an application/correction at other than home country, the nonimmigrant will not be readmitted to the United States. It is highly recommended that adjustments to visas be sought at the issuing country.

# Directions for Completing the Form I-94

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

OMB No. 1651-0111

Admission Number *Welcome to the United States*

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### I-94 Arrival/Departure Record - Instructions

This form must be completed by all persons except U.S. Citizens, returning resident aliens, aliens with immigrant visas, and Canadian Citizens visiting or in transit.

Type or print legibly with pen in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. Use English. Do not write on the back of this form.

This form is in two parts. Please complete both the Arrival Record (Items 1 through 13) and the Departure Record (Items 14 through 17).

When all items are completed, present this form to the CBP Officer.

Item 7 - If you are entering the United States by land, enter **LAND** in this space. If you are entering the United States by ship, enter **SEA** in this space.

CBP Form I-94 (10/04)

Admission Number OMB No. 1651-0111

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

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### Arrival Record

1. Family Name		_____	
2. First (Given) Name	_____	3. Birth Date (Day/Mo/Yr)	_____
4. Country of Citizenship	_____	5. Sex (Male or Female)	_____
6. Passport Number	_____	7. Airline and Flight Number	_____
8. Country Where You Live	_____	9. City Where You Boarded	_____
10. City Where Visa was Issued	_____	11. Date Issued (Day/Mo/Yr)	_____
12. Address While in the United States (Number and Street)			
_____			
13. City and State			
_____			

CBP Form I-94 (10/04)

Departure Number OMB No. 1651-0111

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

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### I-94 Departure Record

14. Family Name		_____	
15. First (Given) Name	_____	16. Birth Date (Day/Mo/Yr)	_____
17. Country of Citizenship			
_____			

CBP Form I-94 (10/04)

See Other Side

STAPLE HERE

Use all CAPITAL letters. Use English. Use **standard United States characters** (i.e., A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z). Letters like ñ, é, ü, ç are not recognized by DHS or DOS data systems.

### Name (Blocks 1, 2, 14, and 15)

The Family name (Blocks 1 and 14) is also referred to as surname or last name. (If the nonimmigrant has only one name, it should be entered into the surname or last name field. Leave the first and middle name fields blank.)

**Spacing** is as important as spelling and must be consistent. For instance, systems will not read Mc Millan and McMillan as the same name.

**Hyphens** must also be used consistently.

**Print your name *exactly* as it appears on your passport or national ID card.**

### Date of Birth (Blocks 3 and 16) and Date Issued (Block 11)

Your date of birth must be given in Day/Month/Year order. **This is not the same order that appears on your Form I-20 or DS-2019.** For example, if you were born on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of January in the year 1986, you should write 090186 in the birth date block (Block 3 and 16). The same date format (dd/mm/yy) is used in block 11 for Date Issued.

### Country of Citizenship (Blocks 4 and 17)

Country of citizenship is the country that issued your passport. You can find the U.S. spelling in block 1 of the Form I-20 under the Country of citizenship. It is on the second line of block 1 on the Form DS-2019 under Citizenship Country Code.

**Be sure you complete all required blocks (Blocks 1 through 17).**

Upon being granted entry into the United States, the CBP Inspector will stamp the bottom section of the Form I-94 (the departure record) with your class of admission. This section is generally stapled into your passport. This is a critical document. Make a copy and put it in a safe place. Safeguard the original.