

SEVP Spotlight

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Resources for Designated School Officials... and a Big Thank You



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

The academic community is at the forefront of our mission and is an important partner to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). Since you, designated school officials (DSO), interact with the F and M students enrolled in SEVP-certified schools, we trust you to help legitimate students remain in compliance during their time of study in the United States. To assist, SEVP has many resources that can help make your job easier:

- **Have a question or problem?** The [Contact Us](#) page on *Study in the States* has information on how to get in touch with various SEVP subject matter experts. For general SEVP questions, please contact the SEVP Response Center at 703-603-3400 or sevp@ice.dhs.gov.
- **Take the designated school official training:** You can find [SEVIS Training for School Officials](#) on [SEVP's website](#). This online training course is for new and seasoned DSOs who need guidance on updating and maintaining student information in SEVIS.

- **Provide input on draft policy guidance:** SEVP's Policy Team periodically requests feedback from the public via the *Study in the States* [draft guidance page](#). SEVP reviews and incorporates stakeholder feedback into the final policy guidance. These guidance documents affect SEVP-certified schools and F and M nonimmigrant students. You also can sign up to receive e-mail notifications whenever new draft policy guidance is posted on *Study in the States*.
- **Need to report fraud or visa abuse?** In 2012, SEVP and the Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit initiated the [Project Campus Sentinel](#) outreach program. This program builds partnerships between DSOs and ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to detect and combat school fraud and visa exploitation. If you see suspicious activity at your school, report it via the [HSI tip form](#) or by e-mailing tips directly to [Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit](#).
- **Learn more on *Study in the States*:** Our [Schools Portal](#) contains specific information about the SEVP certification process. You also can find [conference materials](#), [webinars](#) and information about our [live question and answers sessions](#). In the [Students Portal](#), you can direct your students to [resources](#) like [Study Guide to the States](#) and the [school search page](#).

STAKEHOLDERS

Visit our draft guidance page to provide your feedback

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Whether you are a seasoned DSO or brand new to the F and M education community, we want to hear from you. Send us your thoughts through our [feedback form](#) or on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

I want to conclude by saying that the 30,000 DSOs throughout the United States are an incredible asset and value to the ICE and the American public. You play a critical role in supporting the national security of the United States. We recognize that the responsibilities are great, and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your dedication and commitment. It makes F and M education and our national security stronger.

Take care,
Lou



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

The SEVIS Help Desk and SEVP Response Center

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has many resources available to ensure it addresses questions and concerns. Two of the most widely used resources are the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Help Desk and the SEVP response center.

THE SEVIS HELP DESK

Currently, the SEVIS Help Desk is available only to school and program officials. The SEVIS Help Desk's primary goal is to provide technical assistance related to problems with SEVIS and to address data fixes for F, M and J SEVIS records. The most common examples of requests are data correction requests and data fixes. Additionally, the SEVIS Help Desk assists users with batch technical issues, including those experienced during batch testing.

The SEVIS Help Desk is available to help users with questions regarding SEVIS usage and processes and procedures. Users may also submit record correction requests via SEVIS. When the SEVIS Help Desk receives a request, they create a ticket. Generally, the SEVIS Help Desk resolves the ticket by completing the request using SEVIS and other systems, denying the request or by referring the caller to the appropriate resource.

When working with the SEVIS Help Desk, SEVIS users should remember to do the following:

- Respond to requests for information within four business days.
- Submit requests for information responses and documents as one document, if possible. Fewer documents make it easier for the SEVIS Help Desk to process the request.
- Put receipt numbers (if any), date and any other useful information in the remarks field for correction requests to be made in SEVIS.

If in doubt about whether a case is more suitable for a correction request or a data fix ticket, call the SEVIS Help Desk to ask for guidance. Contact the SEVIS Help Desk Monday through Friday, except holidays, between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. (EST):

E-mail: SEVIShelpdesk@hp.com

Phone: (800)-892-4829

THE SEVP RESPONSE CENTER

The SRC is available to all SEVP stakeholders, including students, school and program officials, government users and the general public. The SEVP Response Center's primary goal is to provide policy guidance related to F and M nonimmigrant students regarding Code of Federal Regulations Title 8 Section 214.2 student regulations.

In the first quarter of 2014, the SEVIS Help Desk and the SEVP Response Center will merge and become the Enhanced SEVP Response Center. Once combined, the Enhanced SRC will be a single point to serve and assist our SEVIS community in answering questions, resolving data fixes, and providing accurate guidance. The Enhanced SEVP Response Center will provide:

- Technical and policy assistance to school officials
- Assistance to F, M and J nonimmigrant students who are currently attending an SEVP-certified school or program in the United States; and,
- Guidance for students and exchange visitors seeking admittance to the United States to attend an SEVP-certified school or U.S. Department of State-designated program

Contact the SEVP Response Center Monday through Friday, except holidays, between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. (EST):

E-mail: SEVP@ice.dhs.gov

Phone: (703)-603-3400

POLICY UPDATE

Upcoming Draft Policy Guidance

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) has been developing draft policy guidance to clarify how program adjudicators interpret regulations. As released, stakeholders have the opportunity to read and provide comments on the draft versions posted on [Study in the States](#). SEVP then reviews this feedback and revises the draft policy guidance before releasing the final version.

The following topics are currently in the development process. Once complete, SEVP will post them on Study in the States for public comment.

- **Annual vacation:** Clarifies the regulations on several issues affecting SEVP adjudications regarding this topic;
- **Temporary absence:** Clarifies Code of Federal Regulations Title 8 Section 214.2(f)(4) regarding a temporary absence from the United States;
- **On-campus employment:** Clarifies Code of Federal Regulations Title 8 Section 214.2(f)(9)(i) concerning on-campus employment regarding different issues related to where and when a student can work;
- **Off-campus employment:** Clarifies Code of Federal Regulations Title 8 Section 214.2(f)(9)(ii) concerning off-campus employment regarding different issues related to where and when a student can work;
- **Emergent circumstances:** Clarifies regulations concerning special student relief for students with an emergent circumstance designation;
- **Bridge programs and conditional admission:** Clarifies regulations regarding how SEVP will adjudicate bridge programs for purposes of SEVP-certification. Also clarifies how conditional admission, while acceptable as a business practice, is inappropriate for purposes of Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status," issuance. Initial draft previously released for public comment – release of another version with feedback incorporated is forthcoming for additional public comment; and,
- **Change of ownership:** Clarifies Code of Federal Regulations Title 8 Section 214.4(a)(3)(iii) on what constitutes a change of ownership.

Visit [Study in the States](#) to sign up to receive notification about the release of future draft guidance.

Practical Training for F and M Students

Internships and co-ops can be an important part of a student's education and set the foundation for a career path after college. Many F and M international students are able to receive this kind of practical training during and after their programs of study. The following is an overview of the types of training available to international students and the basic U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) rules for each.

The following types of practical training are available to most international students:

- Optional practical training is related to a student's major or field of study that can occur during or after completion of a program of study; and,
- Curricular practical training is an internship, work-study or co-op that is an "an integral part of an established curriculum." Curricular practical training must be part of a student's program of study, either required for completion or optional, but for academic credit.

OVERVIEW OF OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING:

- Designated school officials (DSO) must recommend optional practical training in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and then print and sign a student's Form I-20, "Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status." U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must authorize optional practical training prior to a student starting employment. Students must file a Form I-765, "Application for Employment Authorization," with USCIS. Upon approval, students will receive a Form I-766, "Employment Authorization Document," for

optional practical training;

- Most F-1 students are eligible for optional practical training after completing one academic year of full-time academic study;
- English language students are not eligible for optional practical training;
- Eligible F-1 students can participate in optional practical training during their program (pre-completion) or immediately following completion of their program (post-completion). M-1 students are only able to participate in post-completion optional practical training;
- F-1 students may engage in pre-completion optional practical training only on a part-time basis during the school year, not to exceed 20-hours per week. Students may engage in full-time optional practical training during official school breaks and after completion of a course of study;
- Students are only eligible for a cumulative total of 12 months of optional practical training, pre-completion and post-completion, per academic level;
- F-1 students on post-completion optional practical training may be eligible for a 17-month extension if they received a degree in a DHS-designated science, technology, engineering or mathematics field; and,
- For any post-completion optional practical training, a period of unemployment lasting 90 or more days will result in the loss of F-1 status.

OVERVIEW OF CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING:

- Most F-1 students are eligible for curricular practical training after completing one full year of academic study. Graduate students may begin curricular practical training immediately if enrolled in a program requiring immediate participation in an internship;
- English language students and M-1 students are not eligible for curricular practical training;
- Curricular practical training can be either part-time or full-time;
- International students who participate in 12 months or more of full-time curricular practical training are ineligible for optional practical training.
- To participate in curricular practical training, international students must receive authorization from their DSO in SEVIS prior to starting employment; and,
- No USCIS application is required for curricular practical training. DSOs will provide students with a new signed Form I-20, which shows the curricular practical training authorization

Understanding the rules for optional practical training and curricular practical training will help students take advantage of these benefits without jeopardizing their immigration status. For more information on practical training and other benefits available to international students, visit *Study in the States* and the USCIS website. International students should also speak with their DSO prior to starting any employment.

STUDY IN THE STATES UPDATE

Study in the States Two-Year Anniversary

Since launching in 2011, *Study in the States* has reached more than 330,000 students, school officials, parents and the broader F and M education community. In the past year, *Study in the States* continued to add features to keep stakeholders better informed about the F and M student process.

ON THE BLOG

Study in the States launched [Questions from Designated School Officials](#) (DSO) to answer questions from an important stakeholder community. To date,

Study in the States has published 16 posts, which have been viewed by 13,108 site visitors. To help current and prospective students, *Study in the States* launched another blog, [Ask a DSO](#), which provides DSO insights into common student issues. Six posts have been published to date. Additionally, to showcase how various government agencies are involved in the F and M student process, blog posts were added to the [Here to Help](#) series, as well as a video "[Student to Student: Studying in the States.](#)"

New content is added to the *Study in the States* blog several times per week, to read more about a particular topic, use the [feedback form](#), [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Through [live questions and answer sessions](#), stakeholders can talk directly to subject matter experts at the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). The [Conference Materials](#) page highlights SEVP's participation in current and upcoming conferences and events. Since last year, SEVP has received feedback from hundreds of stakeholders on [draft guidance](#).

Feedback helps SEVP better understand areas of concern and provides a forum for discussion.

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

September was National Preparedness Month. This is an important time for students and school officials to prepare themselves for emergency situations. *Study in the States* promoted the issue by publishing five blog posts and posting images and safety tips on Facebook and Twitter about National Preparedness Month. The posts highlighted the Federal Emergency Management Agency's main themes for National Preparedness Month from their website, [Ready.gov](#) including "be informed, make a plan, build a kit, and get involved." *Study in the States* took these themes and provided the necessary context for F and M nonimmigrant students. For example, students need to know what documents they need to bring with them if they must evacuate and how the U.S. government can help them prepare through custom applications and other online tools. Preparedness is an important topic for F and M nonimmigrant students because they must maintain their status, even in emergency situations.



Improved SEVIS Functionalities and Their Impact on You

Several new Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) functionalities have been identified to improve the usability of the system. Significant improvements include data entry, reporting, system responsiveness, and training and instructional text.

DATA ENTRY:

- Users will be able to input complete accreditations and Federal Aviation Administration certification information directly into SEVIS;
- Updates will be able to identify and correct inaccurate information;
- Validation rules and formalized steps will be able to reduce erroneous transactions and prevent the entry of incorrect and non-standard information;
- SEVIS will be able to enforce standards for data entry (e.g., names, dates and character sets);
- Users will be able to input multiple record updates in one action;
- SEVIS will be able to look at records coming in, update the most appropriate SEVIS record based on that information, look at existing records within the system and correlate those records around a single identity; and,
- SEVIS will be able to validate legitimate U.S. addresses.

REPORTING:

- School and program officials will be able to generate standardized reports of their student populations.

SYSTEM RESPONSIVENESS:

- SEVIS will be able to quickly alert managers and business owners of system outages;
- SEVIS will be able to have consistent response times even during peak usage periods;
- Improved user-friendly steps will be able to support an easier transfer of F and M nonimmigrants between schools and require a valid certificate of eligibility prior to the transfer;
- SEVIS processes will be able to shorten the adjudication time of newly identified school and sponsor officials (e.g., principal designated school officials, designated school officials, responsible officers and alternate responsible officers); and,
- Designated school officials will be able to change system values, such as grace period lengths, without the need for time-consuming programming changes.

TRAINING AND INSTRUCTIONAL TEXT:

- SEVIS will be able to have a simulated training environment with realistic scenarios for student practice;
- SEVIS will be able to have clear instructional text on every screen; and,
- SEVP will be able to change or update instructional content and help files quickly to support policy or regulatory changes.

CONTACT US

SEVP Contacts

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to maintaining open communication with international students and academic officials in an effort to provide 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

Find us on the Web:

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

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

Disclaimer: The information presented in the SEVP Spotlight is provided for informational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice.