

## SEVIS And Homeland Security: ICE's Role

SEVIS was established as part of ICE's objective to restore integrity to the immigration system. By more effectively managing status information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States, SEVIS plays a key role in ICE's homeland security mission while ensuring that all eligible international students and exchange visitors can experience the benefits of America's exceptional schools, educational programs, and cultural opportunities.



# SEVIS

## The Year in Review

August 2004



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

072704

## Background On The SEVIS Program

With the formation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on March 1, 2003, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) was created to help restore integrity to the U.S. immigration system by ensuring that international students, scholars, and exchange visitors studying in the United States comply with visa rules and immigration law.

SEVP is a component of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the largest investigative arm of DHS. SEVP's mission within ICE is to facilitate the entry of foreign students and exchange visitors who wish to benefit from America's outstanding academic and cultural programs while safeguarding our nation against those who would do us harm.

The **Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)**, a web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors to the United States, is ICE's core technology in this critical homeland security mission.

Since becoming fully operational on January 1, 2003, SEVIS has undergone almost continuous improvement and enhancement. In its first two years, a total of 12 major technology upgrades will have been made to the system, which represents several hundred individual improvements that have made SEVIS more effective and user-friendly.

## SEVIS: The First Year

Congress mandated that all non-immigrant students and exchange visitors attending SEVIS-approved schools and programs would be required to register with the SEVIS system by August 1, 2003.

Anticipating that many schools might have difficulty meeting this compliance date, ICE created a special SEVIS Response Team (SRT) to assist students and exchange visitors who may not have been registered in the SEVIS system due to their school not being certified.

The SRT worked with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers, adjudicators, investigators, schools, and students to resolve issues related to student admission into the United States. For close to one and a half months, the SRT received more than 8,000 calls and assisted with more than 5,400 cases involving student and exchange visitors attempting to enter the United States.

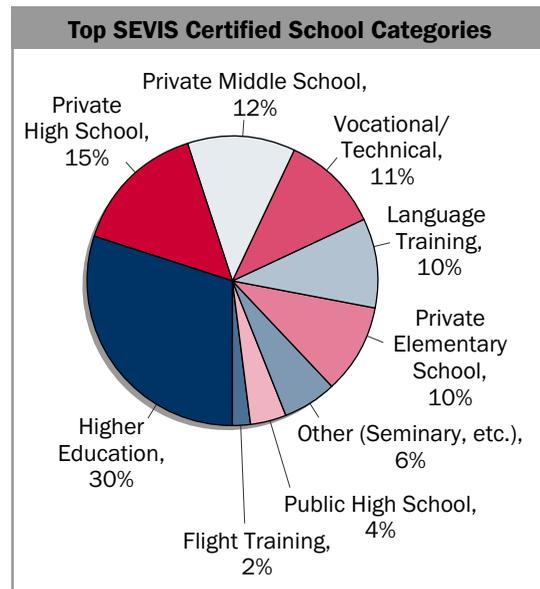
In January 2004, the SRT assisted CBP officers in determining the admission eligibility of foreign students and exchange visitors entering the United States for the new school sessions. During this period, the SRT experienced an extremely low volume of cases and calls—only 550 cases in January 2004—an indication that CBP officers at ports of entry have become much more proficient in using SEVIS to determine the admission eligibility of foreign students arriving to the United States.

## SEVIS By The Numbers

As of July 2004, there are more than 770,000 students and exchange visitors (F-1, M-1, and J-1 visa categories) registered in SEVIS. In addition, SEVIS maintains records on more than 100,000 dependents of students and exchange visitors.

The program is working: Since August 2003, initial analysis of SEVIS records flagged more than 36,600 records for potential violations of immigration status. Following a rigorous vetting process, nearly 1,600 credible leads were ultimately referred to ICE field agents for further investigation, resulting in 155 arrests of immigration status violators.

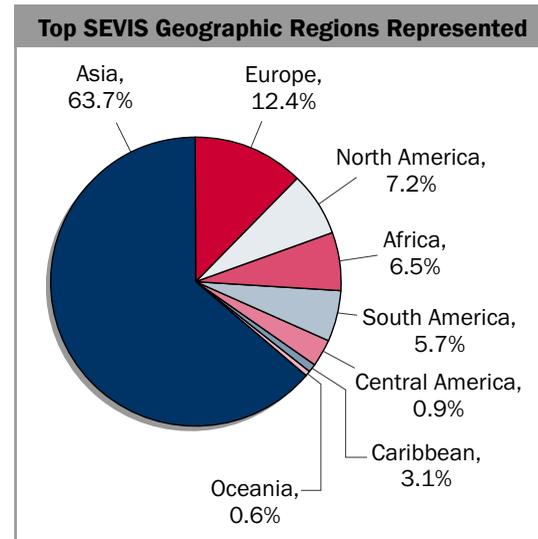
There are currently 7,318 approved schools certified with SEVIS, representing over 9,500 campuses nationwide. In



addition, more than 1,400 exchange visitor programs are registered in SEVIS. Some of the top educational program categories of the SEVIS certified schools are depicted in the previous pie chart.

## A Global Program

SEVIS academic and vocational students represent countries and cultures from around the world, as illustrated below:



## Selected First-Year Accomplishments

### SEVIS Selected For E-Gov Institute's Pioneer Award

The E-Gov Institute Government Solutions Center selected SEVIS as one of 15 award recipients this year as a "best practice" program that delivers improved operation with innovative applications and streamlined processes.

## Enhanced Procedures For Issuing Social Security Numbers

A new joint venture between DHS, the Social Security Administration (SSA), and the State Department is using SEVIS to conduct searches in response to SSA inquiries regarding student and exchange visitor status. Using SEVIS to verify status replaces a manual search process, which often took weeks. The result is that eligible students and exchange visitors receive Social Security numbers in a more efficient and timely manner. Since January 2004, SEVIS data has been used for verification in more than 32,000 cases.

### GAO Recognizes Improved SEVIS Performance

A June 2004 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congress's investigative arm, assessed the progress of SEVIS in its first year. Based upon GAO analysis and feedback from educational organizations, the report indicated that SEVIS performance has improved over the course of its first year and recommended additional improvements for the future.

### SEVIS Outreach To Stakeholder Community

In order to continue building upon improvements to the SEVIS program, SEVP hosts biweekly conference calls with the academic community and has participated in numerous academic conferences and roundtable events in order to solicit feedback on the system's performance.

## Coordination Between SEVP And ICE Compliance Enforcement Unit (CEU)

To ensure that ICE investigative resources are used as effectively as possible in pursuing immigration status violators, SEVP has established a liaison position to assist ICE's Compliance Enforcement Unit (CEU) in researching and analyzing investigative leads on potential status violators.

## SEVIS: Steps For The Next Year

### Student and Exchange Visitor Fee Regulation

Beginning September 1, 2004, SEVP will collect SEVIS fees—in most cases, \$100—from F, J, and M non-immigrant students and exchange visitors. This fee, which is mandated by Congress, is essential to the program's continued viability and will allow ICE to provide additional outreach field officers to enhance coordination with SEVIS institutions. See the SEVIS website at [www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov) for more information on the fees.

### SEVIS Federal Advisory Committee (FAC)

In response to feedback from the academic community and other stakeholders, ICE plans to establish an advisory group to consider suggested improvements to SEVIS. This advisory group will supplement ICE's aggressive outreach efforts to ensure that stakeholder communities have a voice in the continuing improvement of the SEVIS program.