

SEVP Spotlight

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

SEVP's Commitment to Professional Courtesy



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



As we kick off 2015, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support during the many programmatic changes we implemented in 2014. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to professional courtesy in law enforcement and national security, and we continuously work to implement it throughout our daily work.

Professional courtesy is a topic that our program has discussed in great detail, and we always look for ways to improve our performance with stakeholders. We strive to provide consistent, high-quality service – whether through the SEVP Response Center (SRC) or a field representative.

I am proud to say that based on stakeholder feedback, you recognize our commitment. As the director of SEVP, I assure you that professional courtesy is not an option at SEVP; it is a requirement in everything we do — in emails, letters, conference briefings, correspondence with stakeholders, telephone conversations, conduct at meetings and treatment of each other within the program.

As I mentioned earlier, our field representatives embody SEVP's standard of professional courtesy in their daily operations. Field representatives serve as the direct day-to-day liaisons between SEVP and certified schools, as well as

those schools seeking initial SEVP certification. In their communications with school officials, they represent SEVP's commitment to national security by fostering regulatory adherence and Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) data integrity. Additionally, their support aids school officials in the certification process to remain compliant with SEVP rules and regulations.

The SRC is another example of SEVP's dedication to professional courtesy. Our highly trained staff is available from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday, to address stakeholder inquiries. SEVP strives to provide stakeholders with consistent guidance and professional courtesy, regardless of the question.

In closing, I want to repeat what I said earlier — professional courtesy is not an option for SEVP, but a requirement in everything we do. I firmly believe the success of our program is heavily driven by our ability to fully adopt this mentality and it is my promise to you — our valued stakeholders — that we will continue to work together to make strides in international education while maintaining our national security mission.

Take care,
Lou



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

Designated School Official Annual Verification

All Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified schools must complete the primary designated school official (PDSO)/designated school official (DSO) annual verification in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) by March 2, 2015.

As a federal database, SEVIS is subject to the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). FISMA requires users to verify they have both a business need and the proper authorization to access federal systems. To comply with FISMA, each year, PDSOs must verify that every PDSO and DSO is still employed by the institution requires continued SEVIS access.

If a PDSO fails to verify this SEVIS information by March 2, DSOs at unverified schools will lose access to SEVIS. As a result, unverified schools will be unable to use batch processing, and these unverified schools will be considered out of compliance with recordkeeping and reporting regulations.

When completing this verification, several schools have reported instances where a DSO was listed several times per campus on the SEVIS Verification Page. In these instances, the PDSO verified one entry as “Yes” and the other entries as “No.” And in these cases, upon submission, the DSO lost SEVIS access.

If an official is listed multiple times on the SEVIS Verification Page, please follow these steps:

1. Select the same answer (Yes or No) for each line on the list where that person appears.
 - a. If the person is still employed at the institution and requires continued access to SEVIS, designate all instances where the person appears as “Yes.”
 - b. If the person does not require continued SEVIS access, designate all instances where that person appears as “No.”
2. Call the SEVIS Help Desk (1-800-892-4829) to request removal of the duplicate record(s).

This DSO verification process will take place each year from Dec. 2 to March 2. SEVIS users will receive reminders of this annual process by SEVIS Broadcast Message, as well as on the SEVIS message board.

For more information on the annual verification process, watch the SEVP and the U.S. Department of State’s SEVIS 6.18 Post-Release Webinar recording, available on [Study in the States](#). The webinar includes key facts, dates and tips on how to verify school officials.

You may also direct questions regarding SEVIS verification of PDSOs and DSOs to SEVISTechnicalFeedback@ice.dhs.gov.

SEVP Enhances Digital Content

The Study in the States website (<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov>) launched an updated feature designed to help prospective students interested in studying in the United States. Sponsored by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), the [Study Guide to the States](#) launched in November 2014. It is an easy to use resource that highlights the step-by-step process for potential students to follow before they enter the United States, during their course of study and after their program of study is complete.

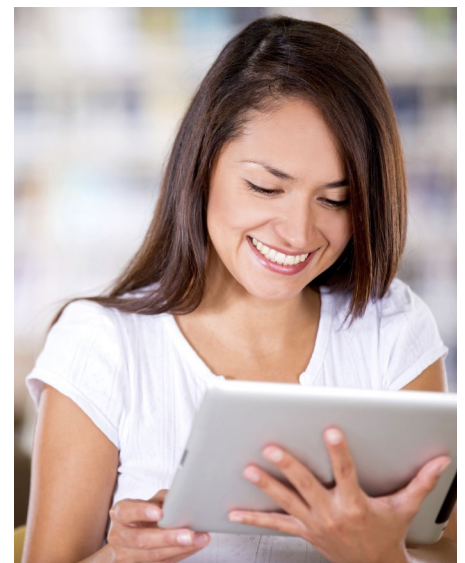
Since its launch, the Study Guide to the States has already received more than 8,000 page views and is one of the top five most-visited pages on Study in the States. While navigating through the Study Guide to the States, users can find links to several key pieces of information, including:

- The SEVP 101 tutorial to learn more about the international education process;
- U.S. embassy or consulate information needed to apply for a visa;

- Steps to maintain student status while in the United States;
- How to apply for U.S. benefits such as employment opportunities or a driver’s license; and
- Steps to depart the United States upon program completion.

In addition to this new tool, SEVP also launched its first BuzzFeed article titled, [“The Top 10 Things You Didn’t Know about International Students in the States.”](#) The article serves as a reminder to students and school officials about the required steps for studying in the United States.

BuzzFeed is a news and entertainment website that reaches millions of people each month. The article launched Nov. 17 in conjunction with other SEVP efforts to celebrate the Department of State’s International Education Week.



Meet Field Representative, Inessa Stepanenko

Inessa Stepanenko is the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) field representative located in San Antonio. Ms. Stepanenko is a member of the second class of field representatives and deployed to her territory on Nov. 17.

Meet Ms. Stepanenko and gain an insider perspective on her background and experience as a field representative.

- **Are there any experiences that made you want to become a field representative?**

When I learned about the field representative program at a NAFSA: Association of International Educators conference several years ago, I immediately thought that the position was perfectly designed for my diverse personal background, my own immigration story and nearly my entire professional career. It was a perfect fit!

- **What is an interesting fact about you?**

I travel with purpose. For example, in 2008 I completed the Inca Trail — a four-day hike to Machu Picchu on behalf of Peruvian Promise, a charity that supports orphanages in Peru. In 2010, I partnered with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

through Rotary International on the “End Polio” vaccination campaign and the “Potty for Schools” project in India. Finally, in 2014 I worked at the XXII Sochi Winter Olympic Games as the National Olympic Committee Assistant to Team USA in Russia.

- **What is the most valuable thing you have learned since becoming a field representative?**

Balance! Since becoming a field representative, I have learned how to find a better work life balance. In my personal life, I make it a point to spend valuable time with family and friends, and to schedule activities that help me recharge. As a field representative, I strive to balance efficiency and effectiveness so I can provide better services to support SEVP’s mission, which in itself, balances two important missions of homeland security and the international student lifecycle.

- **What has prepared you in your role of becoming a field representative?**

In 1995, I came to the United States as an international student from Russia. I studied at Schreiner College as an F-1 student, where Darlene Bannister was my international student advisor.

Nearly 20 years later, Schreiner University is in my territory of schools, and Darlene was the second designated school official (DSO) I visited as part of my field representative responsibilities.

Prior to accepting the SEVP field representative position, I was a DSO for more than 15 years. Working with international students and international education colleagues in that role greatly equipped me to be a field representative. The SEVP training course was also a great opportunity to learn from leadership and exceptional colleagues before deploying to the field.

- **Based on your experience, what is one recommendation you have for school officials engaging with SEVP?**

SEVP is meant to act as a bridge for government organizations and SEVP-certified schools that enroll international students. There is a saying, “It takes a community to build a village.” Using that as a principle, I would recommend that school officials help make that bridge even stronger by welcoming SEVP interaction to ultimately benefit school officials, the institutions they represent and the students they serve.

School Officials: Plan Ahead for Recertification

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) strongly recommends that school officials review their school’s [Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student,”](#) on a regular basis to ensure accurate and timely reporting. Regular reviews and [updates](#) to the form will make the recertification process much easier.

All changes to the Form I-17 must be adjudicated prior to filing for recertification. Therefore, it is imperative that school officials keep in mind important dates, like the school’s Certification Expiration Date (CED), when planning to update records. School officials will **receive a notification 180 days prior** to the CED, and SEVP strongly recommends they review the current Form I-17 and update it immediately, if needed.

To assist school officials, there are updated recertification documents available on [ICE.gov](#), under SEVP’s Recertification tab. The [Recertification Checklist](#) includes updated details on how to prepare the Form I-17, specifically in regards to the filing of petition updates.

The average timeframe for the adjudication of petition updates is at least 60 days and may take longer depending on the nature of the update. However, SEVP will ensure that schools do not receive Notices of Intent to Withdraw

(NOIWs) regarding failure to file for recertification if a school’s update is still pending adjudication and the school has not received a Request for Evidence 30 days prior to the CED.

Please note that failure to successfully file for recertification by the school’s CED will result in an automatic withdrawal. If a school is withdrawn on CED it may apply for reinstatement of “Approved” status within 10 business days by submitting a complete recertification package and the \$2,355 reinstatement fee. SEVP retains the right to determine if a school is ineligible for reinstatement at its discretion.

If approved for reinstatement, a school will keep the same school code and the school’s current international students will be unaffected. However, a reinstated school will not be able to issue new [Forms I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Status,”](#) or accept new international students via transfer while the school’s recertification petition is pending adjudication.

For more information, visit the Study in the States’ resource page, [Tips for Navigating the Recertification Process.](#)

Reminder for School Officials

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) offers many resources to help designated school officials (DSOs) in their daily tasks like:

- **Study in the States [Contact Us Page](#):** If you have a question or an issue, the Contact Us page lets you know how to get in touch with various SEVP subject matter experts. Do not forget that the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) Help Desk and the SEVP Response Center have recently merged. For general SEVP questions, call 703-603-3400 or for SEVIS-related technical questions, call 1-800-892-4829 between the hours of 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET. You can also email sevp@ice.dhs.gov.
- **DSO Training:** [SEVP's official website](#), housed on ICE.gov, consists of Web-based training courses, including the [SEVIS Training for School Officials](#), which provides added guidance and instructions on SEVIS responsibilities.
- **Draft Guidance Input:** SEVP's Policy Unit periodically requests feedback from the public on the SEVP Guidance for Comment page on Study in the States. Once the draft period closes, SEVP reviews and incorporates stakeholder feedback into the final guidance. You can also sign up to receive email notifications when new draft guidance is posted.
- **Project Campus Sentinel Outreach Program:** Counterterrorism and Criminal Exploitation Unit's (CTCEU) [Project Campus Sentinel outreach program](#) helps to effectively detect and combat school fraud and visa abuse. If you see suspicious activity at your school, report it via the [HSI tip form](#) or email tips directly to CTCEU at CTCEU@dhs.gov.
- **Study in the States Schools Portal:** [The Schools Portal](#) contains step-by-step information about the SEVP certification process, conference materials, webinars and more. Direct your students to the [Students Portal](#) for student-related resources.
- **SEVP Field Representatives:** SEVP's field representatives are federal employees that serve as liaisons between SEVP and schools. They also help schools comply with rules and regulations while maintaining the integrity of SEVIS data. Learn more about [field representatives](#).

SEVP Increases Conference Engagement

SEVP kicked off the Fall/Winter conference season Oct. 1, 2014, by posting the [2014-2015 Fall/Winter Conference Presentation](#) to the Study in the States [Conferences and Outreach](#) page. This season's presentation focused on a variety of topics of interest to our stakeholders, including improved customer service, increased stakeholder engagement and key program updates. As of January 2015, the Fall/Winter presentation received more than 2,700 views on Study in the States. We encourage anyone unable to attend an SEVP conference or event to view this presentation or download the accompanying [Executive Summary](#) for the latest program news and updates. In the fall alone, SEVP presented both in-person and virtually at 26 conference and events across the United States — a 46 percent increase from fall of 2013. SEVP will continue to expand its outreach efforts and participate in stakeholder events throughout 2015. We will continue to engage with new, as well as traditional, stakeholder audiences. Additionally, SEVP will increase its virtual engagement with stakeholders through informational webinars hosted on Study in the States. We encourage you to stay tuned to Study in the States and social media for additional information about upcoming SEVP webinars.

SEVP looks forward to working with our stakeholders in 2015. Please contact us about participating in any upcoming conferences and events by emailing your request to SEVPCommunications@ice.dhs.gov. Participation in these events allows us to engage directly with our stakeholders, provide program updates and address stakeholder questions. Additionally, we encourage you to provide feedback on your SEVP event experience by taking our online [Stakeholder Satisfaction Survey](#) available on Study in the States. SEVP regularly reviews all stakeholder feedback and uses your comments to develop new and improved presentations and Study in the States content and resources.

For the latest SEVP conference news and updates, you can subscribe to the monthly SEVP Conference Bulletin by emailing SEVPCommunications@ice.dhs.gov with your request.

CONTACT US

SEVP Contacts

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is dedicated to maintaining open communication with international students and academic officials to provide the 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 email SEVISHelpDesk@ice.dhs.gov

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

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