



SEVIS

Student And Exchange Visitor Information System

Newsletter

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U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

A Message From Susan Geary, Director

This fall, Gulf Coast area hurricanes brought new registration challenges for many of our SEVIS schools and their international students who had to endure flood water, winds and other hardships resulting from area hurricanes. Our thoughts and best wishes extend to those who continue to recover from the devastation left along the Gulf Coast by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Such natural disasters are a challenge to those in their midst, as well as for those organizations that must react and provide assistance. While news reports were following the approach of Katrina, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) anticipated logistical difficulties that could occur based upon experience with previous disasters created by severe weather conditions. On Tuesday, August 30, SEVP reached out to the National Association of Foreign Student Administrators (NAFSA) regional coordinators in the two affected regions and we were thrilled to learn that the post-secondary schools had evacuation plans in place.

By Thursday, September 1, SEVP staff had drafted a set of

frequently asked questions and answers (FAQs) that were designed to provide responses to questions that international students and their host SEVIS certified schools would have in emergency circumstances. By Friday, September 2, these FAQs were posted to the SEVP Web site. Simultaneously, a coordinating email had been sent to the schools identified in the disaster area offering them SEVP communication capabilities as a conduit to their students and others affected by delayed school start dates or temporary school closures.

While approximately 3,000 international students and 30 schools have been identified as affected in the New Orleans area, preliminary estimates through this communication outreach effort indicated that these totals could have risen to as much as 5,000 international students as we braced for Hurricane Rita. Fortunately, the number of schools and affected students turned out to be far fewer than originally predicted.

I would like to thank the Designated School Officials (DSOs) of the schools affected by both Katrina and Rita who were back on

SEVIS By The Numbers As Of November 17, 2005

Total approved schools	8,262
Total approved sponsors	1,465
Active students and exchange visitors	760,134
Active dependents of students and exchange visitors	115,162

Upcoming Events

Policy

- Proposed Regulations on Recertification
- Proposed Regulations on Appeals
- Frequently Asked Questions on Employment: OPT and CPT
- Frequently Asked Questions on Social Security

Information Technology

- Release 5.1 Rollout and Implementation

line to assist their international students as quickly as possible and the schools who graciously, and often creatively, made room so that these students could continue their education. My heartfelt thanks to those of you who worked with us so tirelessly and effectively.

One of the lessons learned from these natural disasters is that preparation should be a constant mindset. I encourage students and schools to keep their contact information current and readily available and to establish emergency back-up contact information for student and SEVP members.

Susan Geary,
Director

How To Avoid A Data Fix

Top Five Reasons For An F/M Data Fix Request And How To Prevent Them

Change Record Status: Terminated to Active

1. **Data fix reason:** P/DSO fails to register continuing student's record and record is Auto-Terminated.

Data fix prevention: Register continuing students within 30 days after next session start date. Utilize the alert entitled "Active Students Requiring Registration". Please note, this alert only displays students that are past their next session start date.

Change Record Status: Canceled To Initial

2. **Data fix reason:** Non-immigrant is pending change of status to F-1/M-1 and record is Auto-Canceled 60 days after program start date.

Data fix prevention: If the student's change of status is not approved by the program start date on their record, defer the program start date to the next available term/session. Utilize the "Students In Initial Status" list and/or the "Students With Pending Change Of Status Request" alert.

Transfers And Optional Practical Training

3. **Data fix reason:** P/DSO transfers a student record who is participating in optional practical training (OPT).

Data fix prevention: Prior to initiating a transfer, ensure the student does not intend to apply for post-completion OPT or is currently on OPT. If the student intends to seek post-completion OPT, the transfer should be initiated upon completion of OPT, but only if approved. Please note, if the student transfers/begins new program prior to completion of OPT, the student forfeits all remaining OPT.

Extending Program End Dates

4. **Data fix reason:** P/DSO fails to extend the student's program prior to the program end date.

Data fix prevention: Utilize the "Students Within 45 Days Of Program End Date" alert.

Transfers And Duplicate Records

5. **Data fix reason:** School A transfers record to school B; however school B also creates a new record for the student; i.e., student now has two SEVIS IDs (duplicate records).

Data fix prevention: School B should utilize the "Students In Transfer Status" list.

Top Five Reasons For A J Data Fix Request And How To Prevent Them

Status Change Requested: Invalid/No Show To Active

1. **Data fix reason:** Exchange Visitor (EV) reports to program but RO/ARO fails to validate the record and the record auto-changes to No Show (with POE data) 30 days past program begin date or to Invalid status (without port-of-entry data).

Data fix prevention: Validate EV in SEVIS immediately upon their arrival to the program, making sure to update the current U.S. address. Also, program end date can be amended at this time. Utilize the "Initial Status Exchange Visitors And Dependents" list.

2. **Data fix reason:** EV fails to report to program, therefore the RO/ARO fails to validate the record and record auto-changes to No Show (with POE data) 30 days past program begin date or to Invalid status (without POE data).

Data fix prevention: Communicate to the EV to report directly to the RO/ARO upon arrival in the country, not to the site of activity, so

that the record does not become Invalid or a No Show. Utilize the "Initial Status Exchange Visitors And Dependents" list.

3. **Data fix reason:** EV arrives more than 30 days after the program begin date and RO/ARO is subsequently unable to validate the record.

Data fix prevention: Ensure EV knows to communicate any intentions of changing their program begin date. Modify the program begin date accordingly if intentions are known prior to program begin date. Utilize the "Initial Status Exchange Visitors And Dependents" list.

4. **Data fix reason:** RO/ARO fails to complete a transfer-in for an EV and record auto-changes to No Show.

Data fix prevention: If you are the transfer-in program, validate the EV upon receipt of record and stress to the EV the importance of reporting to the RO/ARO upon their arrival to the new program. Utilize the "Transferred Status Exchange Visitors And Dependents" list.

Status Change Requested: No Show/Terminated To Active

5. **Data fix reason:** RO/ARO manually changes a record's status to No Show or Terminated by accident.

Data fix prevention: Learn and understand the meaning of each status and manually change the status of the record only if absolutely sure that this is the correct status; changing a record's status to Terminated will have a negative effect on the EV. Also, be aware that a record status should not be manually changed to No Show if the EV does not plan to participate in their program. Instead, change the status of the record to Invalid (indicating that the form will not be used).

Meeting the Hurricane Season Head-On

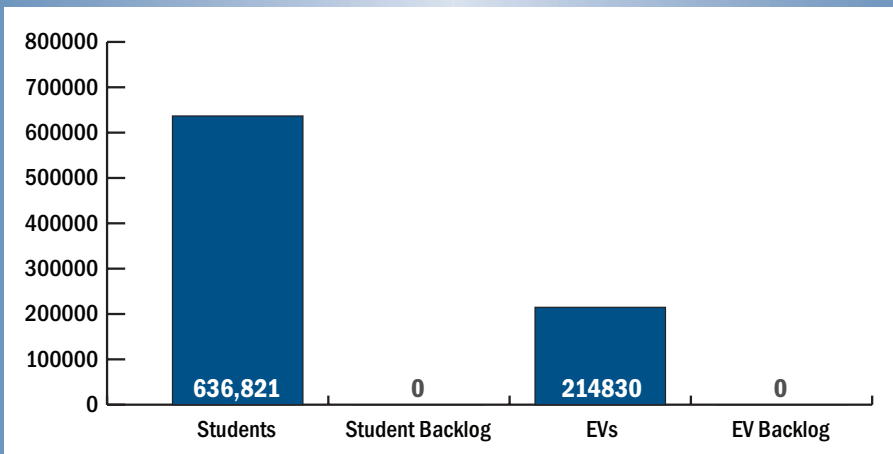
As the hurricane season continues, SEVP congratulates the academic community for its swift reaction to the storm by embracing the displaced students, welcoming them to their campuses and permitting them to continue their educational endeavors.

SEVP began to work with foreign students and SEVIS certified schools affected by Hurricane Katrina on Wednesday, August 31. SEVP immediately responded by using SEVIS to identify 30 impacted certified schools and approximately 3,000 students. Within 24 hours of Hurricane Katrina, SEVP assisted affected students and schools with transfers to other certified schools. More than 400 hundred schools were contacted by SEVP and provided status updates.

SEVP took the following steps to assist:

- Created a task force of employees dedicated to responding to student and school SEVIS issues. This task force continues to monitor the dedicated phone line (202) 305-2346 and email box, SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov to respond to queries from affected students or DSOs.
- Established a toll-free number that enables the evacuees to reach SEVP, 1-800-961-5294.
- Upon request, facilitated the transfer in SEVIS of students from affected schools in the New Orleans area to fully operational, certified schools around the country.

Data Fix Backlog Elimination Update



Effective September 30, 2005, there were no F/M data fix tickets older than 90 days. As of October 31, 2005 that goal was also met for J tickets. Our Ultimate Goal: No Data Fix Tickets Older Than 10 Days.

While the elimination of the 25,000 backlogged and new incoming data fixes was a team effort involving the entire SEVP community, SEVP would like to publicly commend the Information Technology (IT) staff, managed by Denise Mackie-Smith, IT Branch Manager. Thank you also to headquarters staff: Cynthia Alexander, Jim Andrukaitis, Amy Bullock, Bryan Moler and Carol Schedyt.

- Continued to develop answers to frequently asked questions as a result of the hurricane and posted those answers on the Web site.
- Included information for affected foreign students in FEMA's recovery newsletter as another attempt to reach the international student evacuees.
- Developed and posted to our Web site, a list of the DHS certified schools in the affected area that are closed, opening late, or fully operational to better assist the students in determining the status of their school and their transfer options.
- Communicated via broadcast email with the DHS certified schools in the affected area to assist them in accounting for all of their foreign students.
- Met with NAFSA to continue to keep them apprised of our efforts.

Foreign students in the affected area have not only been displaced from their school, but also have had the added concern of maintaining their immigration status. SEVP will continue in the coming weeks to focus our assistance on each of the 3,000 foreign students displaced by Hurricane Katrina, ensuring that together with the academic community, each student is accounted for and is able to maintain nonimmigrant status.

New Visa Agreement Announced Between the United States and China

The U.S. and Chinese governments have recently agreed to a reciprocal agreement to extend the length of validity of visas given to students. For Chinese students and scholars, this means that visas can be issued for up to 12 months in the F, M and J categories. This will allow students to depart the United States and return during the academic year for family visits, conferences, and other purposes.

As of June 20, 2005 student (F-1) visas, exchange visitor (J-1) visas and vocational training (M-1) visas were issued to eligible Chinese nationals for periods of up to 12 months and for multiple entries. Previously, the maximum validity was for up to six months with multiple entries.

Family members or persons deriving status from the primary student or exchange visitor, receiving F-2, J-2, or M-2 visas, will also be eligible for multiple-entry 12-month validity visas.

Both countries reserved the right to limit periods of validity and number of entries as required by law and regulation, determining eligibility on a case-by-case basis.

A Reminder...

After tackling fall semester enrollment during three consecutive hurricanes, the School Certification Branch would like to remind you that maintaining your institution's contact information is as important as maintaining your student records. Please take a moment to review your address, P/DSO roster, P/DSO telephone numbers, and P/DSO email address and update your I-17 with current and correct information.



Contact Us

- **For I-901 fee payment help:** Visit the SEVP Web site at www.ice.gov/sevis/i901. You can also call the I-901 Customer Service hotline at **785-330-1048** (United States Country Code 011) or e-mail us at fmjfee.SEVIS@dhs.gov.
- **For questions pertaining to your specific school or exchange visitor program,** contact the person listed on your Form I-20 or DS-2019.
- **For schools and programs,** contact the following for all other technical questions: the SEVIS Help Desk at **800-892-4829** between 8 A.M. and 8 P.M. Eastern Time or by e-mail at SEVISHelpdesk@eds.com for assistance and support. For specific technical, urgent cases: Toolbox.SEVIS@dhs.gov
- **For school certification questions:** To check the status of an I-17 petition, confirm receipt of payment or to receive information on a site visit, contact the SEVP School Certification Branch at schoolcert.SEVIS@dhs.gov or **202-305-2346** or by fax at **202-353-3723**.

The School Certification Branch is organized on a state-by-state basis. If a school administrator contacts the School Certification Branch, our staff will direct the call or message to the Case Analyst working with the schools in that state.

SEVIS' commitment to the continual process of improvement begins with your comments, concerns, or suggestions. Please contact SEVIS:

By email: SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov

By mail: ICE/SEVIS

By phone: **202-305-2346**

425 I Street, N.W, Suite 6034

By fax: **202-353-3723**

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