



SEVIS

Student And Exchange Visitor Information System

Newsletter

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U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

A Message From Susan Geary, Director

“Lessons Learned” is an ongoing theme in this edition of the newsletter. We continue to listen to suggestions from the SEVIS user community and implement them to make our program better. An excellent place for this exchange was the NAFSA: Association of International Educators international conference in Montreal. This annual conference continues to provide a forum for productive dialogue on emerging issues.

On August 8, I briefed Julie Myers, Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, on the case involving 11 Egyptian students who were issued Form I-20s to attend a program at Montana State University and did not report to the University.

It was a pleasure to advise Assistant Secretary Myers that this case illustrates how the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) ensures that those who come to this country on a student visa, fulfill that obligation. It was also an excellent example of how the various improvements during the past three years have enhanced SEVIS. For example, improvements to the data matching of port of entry information

between SEVIS and Customs and Border Protection’s Arrival/Departure Information System (ADIS) ensured that the records on the 11 students were updated.

I also want to point out the excellent relationship Montana State University maintains with the local ICE office. It is that type of relationship that enabled quick and decisive actions to be taken in SEVIS with immediate follow-up by ICE.

All 11 students were located by ICE agents, illustrating our partnership with ICE’s Compliance Enforcement Unit. Please see the follow-up story later in this newsletter for an analysis of the lesson learned.

Finally, I urge you to take advantage of the experiences of the seven schools that were affected by Hurricane Katrina. Their experiences can serve as a template for continuity of operations planning on your campus.

Susan A. Geary, *Director*

SEVIS By The Numbers As Of September 29, 2006

Total approved schools	8,740
Total approved sponsors	1,449
Active student and exchange visitors	854,415
Active dependents of students and exchange visitors	120,147

Upcoming Events

FAQs on

- Becoming a Student in the U.S.
- Basic Immigration Documents
- Updated Travel Including Entry

Regulations

- Recertification
- Appeals

Information Technology

- Rollout and Implementation of Release 5.4

The Egyptian 11

It was the kind of program many campuses sponsor during the summer. The Montana University, Mansoura University exchange program was to last 30 days and give Egyptian students the opportunity to experience English and American cultural events. Twenty Egyptian students were selected for the program, but three were refused visas.

On July 29, the group of 17 students arrived in the US at the Kennedy port of entry with valid visas. Six arrived at Montana University, but the remaining eleven did not report into the school.

Montana State repeatedly tried to contact the missing students, including via e-mail. When that failed, the school listed the Egyptians as "no-shows" in SEVIS and notified the local ICE office.

When the 11 did not report by the end of the first week of the program, a lookout was issued to state and local law enforcement. Eventually all 11 students were detained and are currently awaiting deportation hearings for violating the terms of their F-1 non-immigrant status by failing to report to the school within the designated time period.

As a case study, this event provides a number of insights and best management practices:

1. Through SEVIS, we knew that these students were coming; we knew when they did not arrive, and we knew we had to find them.
2. The school maintained a relationship with the local ICE office and this relationship expedited the reporting function.

3. Schools should monitor their short-term programs carefully, particularly when groups of students from one school or area are involved.
4. When these students had not arrived within three days, a significant portion of a 30-day program, school officials were proactive.

While no national security threat was identified in this case, the understanding of reporting requirements and systems reporting by school officials could impact national security in the future. Such diligence could also secure the personal security of international students in a future scenario.

F/M Visa Validity and the Five-Month Rule

A Department of State (DOS) cable dated January 19, 2006, provided consular officers with guidance on those student situations in which a break in studies has occurred. The cable advised the following:

Transfers: Student transfers that do not begin at the transfer-in school within the required five months of the date of transfer out of the previous school or within five months of the date of program completion, whichever is applicable, are no longer in valid student status.

However, if the student's reinstatement is approved, the student's visa will remain valid, unless it has expired. If the reinstatement is denied, the F or M visa is considered to be automatically cancelled because the student will be out of status. Section 222g of the Immigration and Nationality Act requires that the student then apply for a new visa in the country of citizenship.

Break in studies: If a student is outside the U.S. for more than five months on a break from studies, DOS states that "the student's F or M visa is subject to cancellation and should not be used, even though it remains valid on its face." To resume studying in the U.S., the student would have to obtain a new visa.

Out of country for academic related coursework: When the student is outside the U.S. for more than five months for activities related to their course of study, these students continue to maintain their student status while overseas and their F-1 visa is considered valid.

The Affects of Hurricane Katrina Linger

In September, SEVP traveled New Orleans to meet with the designated school officials of the seven schools that were affected by Hurricane Katrina. After a year, the schools are still dealing with the affects of this natural disaster. While all are operational, none have completely recovered. The lessons that these school officials have learned firsthand and their recommendations can serve as a template for continuity of operations planning on your campuses.

Tips gleaned from their experiences are available at www.ice.gov/sevis/emergency/evacuation.htm, and consider including them in your admissions package.

Lessons Learned

- Key individuals must have laptops.
- Have cell phones with a different area code. Even outside of New Orleans, cell phones with a New Orleans area code did not work well.
- Consider using satellite phones for voice communication.
- Use text messaging—it worked when the phones did not.
- Have all contact numbers and alternate e-mail addresses.
- Set up procedures for students to check-in via the Web during an emergency.
- Locate back-up systems in another city. An alternate Web site is key.
- Consider distance learning as an alternate so that professors can switch to a virtual classroom.
- Administrative officers should be able to operate virtually.



SEVP staff was recently invited to New Orleans to meet with representatives of Delgado Community College, Loyola, Notre Dame Seminary, Southern University, Tulane, University of New Orleans and Xavier University.

- Pursue agreements in advance with other schools to provide alternate location for classes and faculty.

Preparing for Any Eventuality

New international students should be encouraged to be prepared in the event of an emergency and take travel documents with them if evacuated. All international students should also be encouraged to review their documents to prevent costly data integrity errors. In developing the currently posted Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on Social Security protocols for international students and exchange visitors, SEVP developed guidance to help prevent data errors. This information is available as a FAQ and as a Fact Sheet for easier transmission. If you choose not to include the entire Fact Sheet in your admissions packets, at a minimum, include the following guidance:

1. Please ensure that the spelling of names, country of origin (birth), country of citizenship and dates are correct since most of the data systems with information about nonimmigrants depend on the SEVIS database. Other information is important, but these data elements are most critical.

2. Encourage international students to review their documents for consistency. If the I-20 has incorrect information, advise them to contact you for correction.
3. For international students with only one name, that name must be used as the last name.
4. Name entries must be in English and *must use standard U.S. characters*. Letters like ñ, é, ü, ç are not recognized by the U.S. data systems. Enter names like Muñoz and Sémonin as Munoz and Semonin. Do not change spellings to reflect sounds of the language of origin.

Consistent, preventive data correction actions on the part of all SEVIS users will help to prevent costly and time consuming delays when benefits are requested.

As you review this information at www.ice.gov/sevis/faqs/data_integrity.htm, please note the new information that has been posted on the recently revamped SEVP Web site now located at www.ice.gov/sevis. FAQs and Fact Sheets have been posted explaining Social Security protocols, including sample letters. Job aids detailing termination codes, appropriate school opportunities for various visa categories, and data fix preventives and correctives are available at www.ice.gov/sevis/nafsa2006.htm

Update on Release 5.4

The anticipated SEVIS Systems Release 5.4, will include tools for both Principal/Designated School Officials (P/DSOs) and Alternate/Responsible Officers (A/ROs). This new release will allow A/ROs to implement the anticipated maximum duration for professors and research scholars. The maximum duration of participation for the Professor and Research categories has changed from 42 months to 60 months (five years). An extension beyond the maximum duration will only be allowed for these categories if the exchange visitors are in a specific program where the program number begins with the new program serial of G-7.

P/DSOs will have the capability to: Request a Change in Student Status, Program Start Date and Termination Reason without contacting the Help Desk; view available departure information for students and dependents on the Student Information and Dependent Information screens; and view a more comprehensive Student and Alert list. During the first week of August, SEVP provided selected stakeholders with a preview of the upcoming release screen changes to solicit their input for the focused training that will be conducted shortly after the implementation of Release 5.4.

The user manuals, online help and tutorials will be updated and included in the final SEVIS System Changes Notice as well as posted online at www.ice.gov/sevis.



Sharing the dais with Susan Geary, SEVP Director are Danny Andrade of USCIS (left) and Martin Tatuch (right) of the Department of State who participated in their final NAFSA presentation before leaving for other positions. The two have provided invaluable support to the SEVP program.

From Montreal

The 58th Annual NAFSA Conference was a record breaker with more than 7,300 attendees. For SEVP, this annual conference is an opportunity to meet with one of its largest stakeholder populations.

SEVP was the focus of the government update panel, which provided

the attendees with a detailed explanation of program enhancements that would be available in the near future, in Release 5.4. More than 1,500 individuals attended this panel, filling every chair and much of the floor.

SEVP and US-VISIT personnel staffed the DHS exhibitor space providing attendees with updated policy handouts and job aids which are now posted on the SEVP Web site at www.ice.gov/sevis/nafsa2006.htm.

SEVP staff also provided technical guidance to designated school officials who had unique problems, issues, or suggestions. It gave the SEVP team the opportunity to meet with many stakeholders and provided a forum for productive dialogue on emerging issues and recent successes.



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 e-mail 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.

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

By email: SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov

By phone: (202) 305-2346

By fax: (202) 353-3723

By mail: ICE/SEVIS

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