



SEVIS

Student And Exchange Visitor Information System

Newsletter

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U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

A Message From Susan Geary, Director

As the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) begins its third year, we reflect upon our joint successes since the beginning of the program and system deployment in early 2003. Many actions were required by congressional mandate like the implementation of the SEVIS I-901 Fee. Others were joint ventures formed through a dialogue with all SEVIS users. Because 2005 was a pivotal year in our goal to improve the overall data integrity in SEVIS, I would like to share a few of the highlights.

On April 1, 2005 SEVP implemented the Data Fix Backlog Elimination Plan that included three specific initiatives for data integrity improvement. By September 29, we met our goal of eliminating all data fixes over 90 days on F/M students. All J-visa tickets over 90 days were eliminated one month later. Eliminating this backlog enabled the correction of 25,843 student and exchange visitor records in SEVIS. To avoid future backlogs we developed an instructional guide that helps end users to identify situations that create data fixes and offers preventive solutions. The existence of only 651 open tickets in March 2006 indicates that our efforts have been productive.

Our second goal included improving the information sharing between SEVIS and other systems. We are happy to report that Port of Entry and change of status information success rates are 75 percent and above with most reaching 95 percent in December.

Our final goal of the year was to implement a correction ability for SEVIS users. Phase I of that goal went into effect in our SEVIS Release 5.1 of December. Preliminary analysis indicates we have avoided over 2,000 possible data fixes being called in for correction.

Providing adequate training and guidance tools were also included in our plans to improve system integrity. We published Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on our Web site, developed from the questions we receive from the conferences we attend and the emails we receive. During the 2005 hurricane season, emergency FAQs were quickly developed and posted to the Web site.

In August 2005, we launched the first online training modules for school officials and added the Release 5.1 training presentations to our Web site.

During 2005, SEVP participated in 36 conferences and meetings with

SEVIS By The Numbers As Of February 28, 2006

Total approved schools	8,381
Total approved sponsors	1,500
Active student and exchange visitors	773,482
Active dependents of students and exchange visitors	115,832

Upcoming Events

Policy

- Transfer FAQs to be posted

Information Technology

- Release 5.3 and Release 5.4

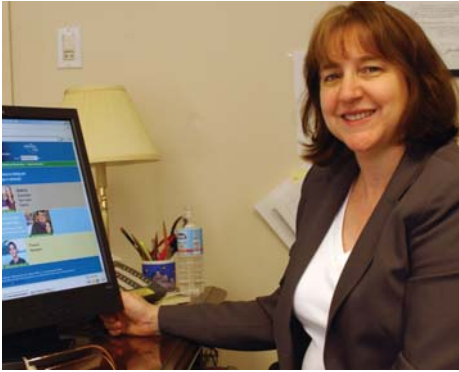
approximately 11,950 stakeholders. Monthly audioconferences continue to address issues.

During last year, 545,000 I-901 payments were made either by credit or debit card via the Internet; check or money order; Western Union; or bulk filing. The rejection of errors has been less than 1 percent as a result of the preventive actions taken by the Case Resolution Unit. A customer service Web site was activated to provide individuals with the opportunity to check the status of their fee payment online.

As SEVP continues to build on these successes and lessons learned, I encourage you to continue the dialogue we have begun and welcome your comments, suggestions, and observations to help SEVP build upon these successes.

Susan Geary, *Director*

Interview With The REACs



Mary Thompson-Jones is the branch chief for the Office of Educational Information and Resources at the Department of State. Prior to that, she was a career foreign service officer who served in public affairs offices in Guatemala, Canada, the Czech Republic and Spain. She joined the Office of Educational Information and Resources Branch in 2005.

Can you tell us what the term REAC means?

Regional Educational Advising Coordinator. We have eight of them based in key geographic regions around the world. They oversee a network of some 450 EducationUSA advisors—based in more than 170 countries around the world. The REACs are the overseas component of our office, the Educational Information and Resources Branch, which resides in the Office of Global Educational Programs in the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Our mission is to help qualified international students through the process of selecting, testing, and applying for admission to U.S. colleges and universities.

How long have REACs been in existence?

They were a concept which evolved. Our public affairs sections in our embassies realized they were spending more and more time answering questions

from foreign students about how to study in the U.S. They realized that it would help to have guidance from someone with specialized knowledge; hence the concept of the REAC was born. Soon, there was demand that every region have a REAC to help train and support the work of educational advisers. Today REACs are located in Mexico City, Lima, Berlin, Moscow, Rabat, Bangkok, Lahore and Accra.

What kind of services would a potential student be offered by the REAC?

Our educational advisers guide international students through the entire process, from selecting a college (or even a field of study); applying for admission; registering for exams including TOEFL, SAT, GRE, LSAT and others; applying for a visa through one of our embassies or consulates; applying for financial aid, if necessary; and providing a pre-departure briefing to go over the many cultural differences foreign students can expect to encounter. Perhaps the most important task of our advisers is to explain our unique and diverse system of higher education, which often has no counterpart overseas. Navigating the network of community colleges, liberal arts colleges, land grant universities, private research universities and specialized schools can be a daunting task for a student with no equivalent system.

What type of fees are involved?

In general, we do not charge for basic information sessions. Some of our centers charge for specialized services, such as help with transcript translation, photocopying,

ing, test preparation courses and extensive individualized counseling, among others.

How would a student contact a REAC office?

The easiest way is through our Web site: www.educationusa.state.gov, where they will find a complete listing of EducationUSA centers. They will also find a wealth of information on higher education in the U.S.—all of it specifically designed with international students in mind. Most of our embassies' public affairs sections also have links to EducationUSA Web sites.

If you were speaking to a potential student, what advice would you offer?

Begin the process early. Ask as many questions as you can—be well informed. Come with an open mind.

What else should the academic community should know about the REACs?

We've seen a real upsurge of interest on the part of many U.S. colleges in recruiting more international students—and we couldn't be more pleased. Some have been doing this for years; others are relative newcomers. We welcome the movement to internationalize the campus and we'd love to share our knowledge with you—many of our advisers have been on the ground for many years. They have expertise not only for foreign students about the U.S. system, but for U.S. educational administrators trying to understand the foreign educational systems from which international students come. We see you as our natural partners.

Rice-Chertoff Vision Update

Two significant changes for the student/exchange visitor population were recently announced in the Rice-Chertoff Joint Vision. The first change expands the visa issuance from 90 days to 120 days prior to the program start date for the primary and dependent F and M visa applicant.

On February 10, 2006, the Department of State issued an instructional cable to their diplomatic and consular posts advising them of this change. The cable also reinforced that: “This change applied only to initial entry students as continuing students may apply for a new F or M visa at any time. J-1 and J-2 visas could be issued at any time before the beginning of their programs.”

Student visas may not be issued to an applicant more than 120 days in advance of the program start date and applicants must be advised that they cannot enter the United States more than 30 days in advance of their program start date.

The second change gives the student/exchange visitor an additional 15 days for initial entry. This provision of the policy will not take effect until the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) publishes the appropriate implementing regulation moving the current 30 days in advance of program start date to 45 days.

Data Fix Documentation Requirements Reduced

To improve the processing time of data fix requests, SEVP revised the

data fix documentation requirements for designated school officials (DSOs).

The streamlined criteria now require the user to provide a detailed letter on official letterhead. The letter must include: the circumstances and requested action, the employment type (optional practical or off-campus), the employment start and end dates and the associated receipt number from the service center. Users will still be required to complete a spreadsheet if the ticket includes more than five students.

Definitions: The Difference Between “Re-designation” and “Recertification?”

“Re-designation” is the term used in the Exchange Visitor Program to refer to the periodic review of program sponsors of exchange visitors that occurs on a two-year cycle.

Sponsors are reminded twice through SEVIS alerts of the upcoming need to submit a re-designation application six months and three months prior

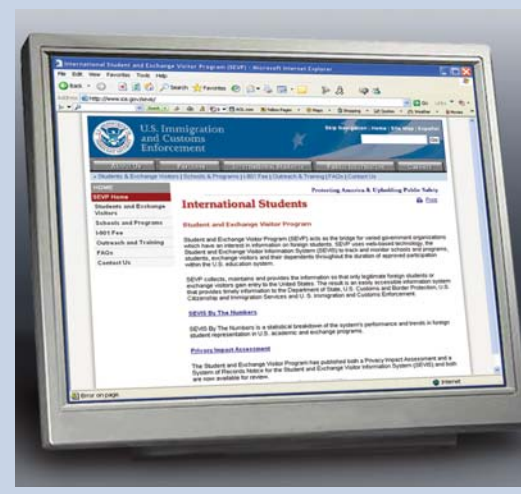
to the expiration of the designation period. For further instructions on how to complete a DS-3036 and DS-3037, sponsors may refer to <http://Exchanges.state.gov/education/jexchanges/about/sevis.htm>

“Recertification” is the term used to describe a similar process for schools approved to issue the Form I-20 to an F/M student. Recertification will also occur on a two-year cycle. The SEVIS proposed recertification rule is still pending review within the DHS. Once SEVP publishes this rule, the anticipated process will include sending three notification messages to Designated School Officials (180, 90 and 30 days from the school’s recertification expiration date).

Additionally, an ALERT message indicating that the school should begin the recertification process will be active when a school accesses SEVIS.

While the recertification rule is pending, schools pending recertification will not lose SEVIS access solely due to this delay in publishing.

On the Web



Look for our latest redesign efforts. Our URL is www.ice.gov/sevis. We encourage you to review the Transfer FAQs in conjunction with the online DSO training that is available 24/7 on the School and Programs section of the Web site.

If you missed the Release 5.1 training teleconferences, the training slides and questions and answers are posted on the Web site, as well as those from the monthly Policy and Information Technology audioconferences.

Marketing: Dos and Don'ts

Marketing the fact that a school is SEVIS-certified can give the school an advantage when trying to attract international students. However, Title 8 Code of Federal Regulations 214.3(j) limits how schools may advertise this certification. By regulation, schools are only authorized to state that: "This school is authorized under federal law to enroll non-immigrant alien students."

Joanne Jurmu, chief of the SEVP School Certification Branch explains the regulation: "This regulation attempts to level the playing field for all approved schools by stipulating that schools may only note that they are SEVIS certified. It attempts to avoid the creation of a perception that student visas can be obtained through some other process, that the school can somehow use its influence to ensure the issuance of a student visa." Some schools have already received calls or letters from the branch advising them that their advertising was beyond the scope of the regulations. According to Jurmu, "no school has been withdrawn solely because of this issue, but it is something that SEVP will continue to look at, especially during recertification."

SEVP is currently examining alternatives for advertising the SEVIS certification. In the meantime, schools who have questions about the regulation may contact the SEVP School Certification Branch at schoolcert.SEVIS@dhs.gov



(above) SEVP Director Susan Geary spoke to a post-secondary school town hall meeting at George Mason University.

(left) SEVP Deputy Director Melissa Edmon spoke to the international educators of the Washington, D.C. area at a meeting hosted by Johns Hopkins University.



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 mail: ICE/SEVIS

By phone: (202) 305-2346

425 I Street N.W. Suite 6034

By fax: (202) 353-3723

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