



September 18, 2007

Fact Sheet

F/M-Visa Nonimmigrants: Getting a Social Security Number

The Social Security Administration (SSA) uses the DHS Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program's Verification Information System (VIS) as its primary data source to verify legal entry into the United States and, in conjunction with travel documentation, to verify the immigration status of non-citizen Social Security number (SSN) applicants. It may take several days after the arrival of a nonimmigrant for arrival data to upload to VIS. To provide a secondary data source, the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP), along with the SAVE Program, developed a method for SSA officials to indirectly access Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) data for comparison. SEVIS offers alternate data verification for F/M/J nonimmigrants and more rapid updates. Since this alternate approach was introduced in early 2004, the immigration status of nearly 125,000 F/M/J SSN applicants has been verified using SEVIS.

What you can do if you are a designated school official

Step 1: Have students who need to begin employment immediately, report to you as soon as possible after admission at the port-of-entry. Delays in reporting to you cause delays in updating SEVIS. If SEVIS is not updated, it cannot be used as a secondary method to verify immigration status for SSN purposes.

Step 2: Students **must have an active SEVIS record** when applying for an SSN. When your prospective SSN applicants report to you for the term or program, you need to activate their SEVIS records as soon as possible. This ensures that SEVIS can be used, if needed, to verify the applicant's current immigration status.

Step 3: Make sure applicants **wait at least 10 days** from arrival into the United States before applying for their SSNs to allow time for necessary arrival data to be uploaded in VIS.

Step 4: Make sure applicants apply for their SSNs at the local SSA office with all the proper documentation. For evidentiary requirements and other useful information, visit the SSA website at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10181.html>. (This includes recent documentation changes for on-campus employment of F-1 students.)

Step 5: Advise applicants to ask for letters from the SSA official acknowledging that they filed an SSN application. Presenting these letters to employers may better enable applicants to begin employment immediately and get paid without delay.

Step 6: Employer questions? See the web address above or the following:

- SSA website regarding *Employer Responsibilities When Hiring Foreign Workers* at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm>
- Department of Labor website regarding the timing of payment of wages at <http://www.dol.gov/elaws/esa/flsa/screen5.asp>
- State payday requirements at <http://www.dol.gov/esa/programs/whd/state/payday.htm>
- Internal Revenue Service website regarding delays in SSN assignment and consequent employer reporting issues at <http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129227,00.html>

Step 7: Discourage applications for invalid reasons.

- Authorized employment is almost always the basis for assignment of an SSN. Other situations for which an SSN might be requested (e.g., in order to get a drivers license or loan, open a bank account, or enter into a rental agreement) are not valid reasons for assigning an SSN. For more information, see [Social Security Numbers for Noncitizens](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10096.html) at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10096.html>.
- If F/M nonimmigrants have difficulty getting benefits or services in your community, consider writing a letter on the letterhead of your institution. Explain that SSA does not assign SSNs for nonimmigrants if a number is not needed for authorized work. Suggest that the business accept the student's passport, and valid U.S. government immigration documents (Form I-20 and/or Form I-94) for identification. You might include the individual's name, address, program start date, and program end date.

Step 8: As always, you are the F/M nonimmigrant's primary advocate in the United States. When individual nonimmigrants contact SEVP, we either send them directly to you or copy you in our response. We expect you will assume the lead in assisting them if they are denied employment, salary, benefits, or services as a result of not having an SSN or if there is a delay in assigning an SSN.

Step 9: If these steps are followed and there still are difficulties, contact the local SSA office. Some schools have called and/or met with local SSA office managers to develop processes for handling student applicants, particularly if schools have large numbers of applicants going to one office. You may also want to call ahead and discuss optimal times for office visits. This helps ensure that SSA has sufficient office staff available to handle the traffic and can help expedite the application process. If this doesn't help, advise SEVP through an email addressed to SEVIS.Source@dhs.gov. Provide:

- Applicant's family name, first name, SEVIS ID#, date of birth, and most recent I-94 number
- Applicant's contact information (include mailing address and telephone number)
- Specific SSA office where the application was submitted and the submission date
- A brief description of the problem.

SEVP and SSA will work together to resolve the problem. However, investigation will not begin until all information requested above is received. Allow several weeks for resolution.

Step 10: Avoid data discrepancies. Review the SEVP Fact Sheet—*F/M/J Nonimmigrants: Managing Information that the U.S. Government Needs About Nonimmigrants During Their Visit*. Each of us has a role in alleviating data discrepancies.

NOTE: SSA identifies **Form I-94 discrepancies as the primary reason for delays in issuing SSNs to nonimmigrants**. Students need to know that a Form I-94 is as important as their passport or visa—not to be completed carelessly.

Step 11: To avoid compounding the impact of data discrepancies, give students guidance to determine when and how to have documents corrected. Review the SEVP Fact Sheet—*F/M/J Nonimmigrants: Managing Information that the U.S. Government Needs About Nonimmigrants During Their Visit*.