

WELCOME!

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) School Certification Branch (SCB) is responsible for evaluating [Form I-17](#), Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student, to determine whether educational institutions meet the minimum eligibility requirements to be approved by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). When a school's petition is approved, the school can issue [Forms I-20](#), Certificate for Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status in order to enroll nonimmigrant students in an F (academic) and/or M (vocational) visa classification. While a school's certification is pending, it may not issue I-20s nor enroll nonimmigrant students on an F and/or M student visa.

[The Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs](#), adjudicates applications of sponsors who wish to issue Form DS-2019 for the J-1 exchange visitor (EV) program, a different designation from SEVP certification. Exchange Visitors are nonimmigrants issued a J visa classification in order to participate in programs offering the opportunity for visitors to participate in cultural exchange as au pairs, researchers, teachers, etc.

Certification entails a great deal of responsibility for monitoring, tracking, reporting, and recordkeeping of nonimmigrant foreign students. Certified schools are responsible for ensuring international students are maintaining lawful nonimmigrant status and reporting information on those students to SEVP, through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), when they are not maintaining lawful nonimmigrant status.

It is imperative the school understands the resources, roles, and responsibilities required for being a certified school. After reviewing all information on the website, if you still have questions on the certification process, send an email to the SCB at schoolcert.sevis@dhs.gov.

Does my school qualify for certification?

[8 CFR 214.3](#) defines the criteria for consideration for approval of any school applying for certification. To be *considered* for approval, a school must be:

- A bona fide school;
- An established institution of learning or other recognized place of study;
- In possession of the necessary facilities, personnel, and finances to conduct instruction in recognized courses; and
- Engaged in instruction of those courses.

This means before a school applies, it:

- Must have already opened its doors and begun instructing students in the courses/programs for which it is seeking approval;
- Must have the necessary facilities conducive to teaching and educating, have qualified personnel, and adequate finances to operate;
- Must meet all state requirements to operate as an institution of learning or be exempt from all such state requirements;
- Must provide instruction to students to fulfill a professional, educational, or vocational objective, or pursuing a degree; and
- Will have had to graduate students before applying or be accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency (recognized by the U.S. Department of Education).

Certain schools are not eligible for approval:

- Home schools;
- Pre-school (Pre-K) and/or day care institutions;
- Public elementary or junior high schools (grades K-8);
- Schools whose programs are primarily distance education or online (i.e. Internet based);
- Adult education program, if the adult education program is funded in whole or in part by a grant under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, or by any other federal, state, county or municipal funding;
- Flight schools not Part 141 or Part 142 certified by the Federal Aviation Administration;
- Programs that are recreational and/or avocational in nature; and
- Short-term programs, weekend programs, or summer programs.

The Certification Process

Certification is a process consisting of a series of steps that require very specific understanding of all applicable federal regulations. Certification is achieved through an adjudicative process that includes a review of the application, site visit inspection, research, review of supporting documentation, and adjudication of the entire submitted package. The certification process takes a minimum of 16 weeks before a decision is reached and SCB processes petitions on a first-in, first-served basis. (This time-frame does not include delays that result when a certification package is incomplete and additional requests for evidence are required.) The steps in this process are detailed in the web pages that follow.

Steps in the Certification Process

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Step 2. Roles and Responsibilities

Step 3. Application Process

I-17 Online
Pay fee at
egov

Step 4. Verification

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Site
Visit

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Certified

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Or
Not
Certified

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STEP 1

Is Certification the Right Choice?

Immigration law and regulations provide for non-immigrant visitors to attend school in the United States. Individuals entering the United States for the sole purpose of attending school on a full-time basis must enter the U.S. on a student visa (F or M), must attend a school/campus certified by SEVP, and must either pursue a degree program or attend a program for the attainment a specific educational, professional, or vocational objective.

SEVP certification/approval conveys no other recognition or endorsement of a particular school or institution.

Non-immigrant students who come to the United States to pursue full-time academic or vocational/ technical training are usually admitted in one of two non-immigrant categories.

- The F-1 category includes academic students in colleges, universities, seminaries, conservatories, academic high schools, other academic institutions, Fine Arts, and language training. For Federal regulations concerning F-1 students visit [8 CFR 214.2 \(f\) Academic and Language Students](#)
- The M-1 category includes vocational, technical training, flight schools, and non-academic schools. For Federal regulations concerning M-1 students visit [8 CFR 214.2 \(m\) Vocational Students](#)

Schools should carefully consider the decision to petition for certification. It is a business decision that requires a financial commitment, significant personnel commitment, and strict reporting and recordkeeping requirements, and should be considered within the context of the schools strategic direction and planning, and ability to conform to regulatory requirements.

Dependents of nonimmigrant visa holders in categories other than F, M or J may attend school incidental to their derivative visa status. If you are considering certification because of a specific student or have questions on what type of a visa a student may attend school, review the [Who Can Study](#) document to determine if the school needs to apply. Dependents of certain visa classification may attend on the visa they entered and do not have to be registered in SEVIS.

STEP 2

Roles and Responsibilities

What are the Responsibilities of a PDSO?

A principal designated school official (PDSO) performs the recordkeeping and reporting requirements outlined in [8 CFR 214.3\(g\)](#). A PDSO submits Form I-17A with name, title, and sample signature of P/DSOs for each campus, whenever a change occurs and submits name and title of new officials within 21 days of a change. The specific functions for a PDSO include:

- Amend the Form I-17 to add and delete campuses;
- Add, delete, update, save and submit DSO information;
- Register a school to use batch interface;
- Initiate, save, complete, and submit a school recertification petition; and
- Act as liaison between SEVP and the school.

Note: PDSOs should not be deans, principals, or operating officials.

What are the Responsibilities of a DSO?

A designated school official (DSO) creates and updates SEVIS records, and issues and signs the Forms I-20. A DSO typically issues and signs Forms I-20 and registers students in SEVIS; confirms the arrival of the student on campus by updating SEVIS; assists a student with school transfers and updates SEVIS. Upon completion of course work, they assist students with transfers (if applicable) and update SEVIS records accordingly.

The specific functions for a DSO include:

- View all student and dependent records for their school/campus;
- Create, save, update, and submit Form I-20 records for students and their dependents;
- Print and submit student and dependent draft Forms I-20;
- Print student and dependent Forms I-20;
- Receive and act upon SEVIS alerts; and
- View and Print Records.

Note: DSOs do not have to be high-level administrators of the school.

Certified schools may have up to nine designated school officials. However, only one PDSO is authorized for each certified school/campus.

Who can be a PDSO or DSO?

A regular employee of the school, nominated by the president, owner or head of school or school system, who must meet the following criteria:

- A US citizen or lawful permanent resident {Green card holder} of the United States.
- Cannot be responsible for recruitment of foreign students or receive any compensation for the recruitment of foreign students.
- The PDSO does not have to be located at the physical location of the school, but at least one DSO must have an office at the physical location of each campus site.
- Each campus location within the school must have a separate DSO (the PDSO can be the same).

STEP 3

Application Process

Schools must complete the Form I-17 petition online and pay all required fees at www.pay.gov. SEVP will not schedule your institution for the required site visit until proper payment has been verified. [A fee is required for this filing.](#)

To complete the online petition, the school must register for a temporary userID at <https://egov.ice.gov/sevis>. SEVP recommends printing the [I-17 job aid](#) while completing the online petition.

After completing the online I-17, click SUBMIT on Screen 5. If you fail to click SUBMIT, SEVP will not receive your petition and it will be automatically deleted from the system after 30 days of inactivity.

To remit payment, go to <https://www.pay.gov>. In the yellow Search Public Forms box, type SEVIS and click Go. Click on "I 17 SEVIS School Certification" and fill out the appropriate form. If you have difficulty using this website, please contact the Pay.Gov helpdesk at 800-624-1373.

Once payment has been made, send an email to the School Certification Branch (SCB) at schoolcert.sevis@dhs.gov with the following information:

1. Name of the School;
2. State in which the actual campus is located;
3. Pay.gov tracking ID number;
4. Date payment was made; and
5. Subject line: New Petition Payment.

The term 'filing date' is the submission of the I-17 and the payment date of the proper fee.

**Failure to remit payment and notify SEVP may result in the deletion of the petition.*

*** All locations which will enroll F/M non-immigrants must be listed on the I-17 petition as a separate campus. Each campus will require a site visit with an accompanying fee of \$350.00.*

STEP 4

Verification

Once a school submits the Form I-17 electronically and makes the payment, SCB receives the Form I-17 and verifies the payment. When the petition is received and the payment information is verified, SEVP will consider the petition filed.

SEVP reviews the petition for completeness. There may be an occasion where an SEVP Case Analyst will contact you prior to the site visit being scheduled. If you receive a Request for Evidence (RFE) electronically or telephonically, the on-site visit will not be scheduled until the RFE is satisfied.

STEP 5

The Site Visit

SEVP will schedule a site visit with a contracted site inspector within thirty days of the filing date. The site visit inspector schedules and conducts the site visit to gather evidence on eligibility, review the facilities, and to interview personnel identified on the petition as a PDSO or DSO. The site inspector will identify himself/herself with an authorized letter of introduction.

If you have not been contacted within this thirty-day (30) period, send an email to schoolcert.SEVIS@dhs.gov.

The site inspection is **NOT** a pass/fail situation and the site inspector does not have the authority to pass or fail the school. All school officials should complete the web-based DSO training course available at [DSO Training Course](#) prior to the on-site visit.

A SEVIS generated email will be sent to a petitioning school prior to the site inspection outlining the site visit process. To prepare for the site visit, a school should review and prepare the documents listed in the SEVIS generated email prior to the site visit. Schools are encouraged to review the [How to Prepare for a Site Visit prior to the site inspection](#).

During the site inspection, the school will be required to submit all supporting evidence per 8 CFR 214.3. These documents are identified in the SEVIS generated email and outlined in [How to Prepare for a Site Visit](#). To avoid an RFE, be sure all documentation required is submitted to the site inspector.

STEP 6

Review of the Petition

The site inspector has twenty calendar days to submit all information from the site visit to the SCB. A school will not receive notification SCB received the site visit information.

Once the information is submitted, SEVP will review the package for completeness. If any required evidence is missing or clarification is needed, SEVP will send a RFE. By regulation, a school has 12 weeks to comply with the RFE; no additional time will be granted. All evidence must be submitted at one time. If the school fails to respond to the RFE within 12 weeks, the petition will be denied for abandonment.

Once the school responds to any portion of the RFE, or if the petition is initially considered complete, the petition is forwarded to an adjudicating official. The adjudicator will review the petition and supporting documentation and will make a decision based on the record.

STEP 7

Adjudication

Adjudication is more than just a formality it is a legal requirement. Adjudicators rely upon the United States Code (USC), 8 CFR 214.3, and may draw upon guidelines from [8 CFR 214.2\(f\)](#) and [8 CFR 214.2\(m\)](#) for the basis of their decision. Information used for adjudication includes evidence submitted by the petitioner and verifying the information submitted is correct.

Adjudication takes a minimum of sixteen weeks from the date the petition enters the adjudication queue. (This time-frame does not include delays that result when a certification package is incomplete and additional requests for evidence are required.) Petitions are adjudicated on a first in, first served basis.

The PDSO is notified via SEVIS, via the email address listed on the I-17 petition, of the adjudicated decision. Schools approved to enroll non-immigrant students will receive a permanent user ID and password, via email, within 7 business days. The permanent ID and password will allow the school full access to SEVIS. An approval letter is not mailed.

If you do not receive a permanent userID and password within 7 business days of approval, contact the SEVIS Helpdesk at 800-892-4829. If you need assistance navigating through SEVIS, contact the SEVIS Helpdesk at sevishelpdesk@eds.com.

Once a school is approved, it is included on the list of approved schools within four weeks of approval. This list is updated bi-weekly and does not list individual campus locations. If after 4 weeks your school does not appear on the approved school list, contact sevis.source@dhs.gov for further assistance.

STEP 8

The Appeals Process

Schools denied certification are notified via SEVIS and through certified mail. The denial letter will outline specific reasons for denial. **Do not contact SEVP if your school has been denied. You must follow the instructions in the denial letter to file an appeal.**

Certain denials may be appealed. The denial letter will detail the reasons for the denial, indicate if the denial can be appealed, and describes the steps the school must follow to file an appeal. To appeal, the petitioner must complete a Form 1-290B, return it to SEVP, and remit the appropriate appeal fee online, within the allotted timeframe of thirty days.

Denied schools may reapply at any time. However, it is strongly suggested the school correct all identified deficiencies outlined in the denial, before submitting a new petition.

Appeals are processed in accordance with [8 CFR 103.3](#). Appeals processing is not bound by a regulatory imposed processing times. Inquiries from petitioners, their attorneys or through their elected officials for status can only verify that the appeals package had been received. Any decision regarding an appeal will be made in writing by the Administrative Appeals Unit pursuant to 8 C.F.R. § 103.3(a)(2)(x) (2006).

STEP 9

Maintaining Certification

As a SEVP certified school, Federal law and regulations require you to update and maintain SEVIS records of non-immigrant students in F and M visa categories and maintain these changes with hard copy information. Review the regulations at [8 CFR 214.3\(g\)](#) for reporting responsibilities.

Automatic SEVIS functions occur after the legal time limits to update student records have expired. They do not extend the legal time limits and are not intended to replace timely action by a P/DSO to comply with reporting responsibilities. Timely correction of student records by a P/DSO avoids manual corrections.

A SEVP approved school must also maintain the school's information in SEVIS. [8 CFR 214.4](#) requires SEVP certified schools to immediately update SEVIS to reflect any material changes to its name, address or curriculum for a determination of continued eligibility for approval. This requires an I-17 edit. Any changes made to the petition may require the school to submit supporting documentation.

[An update to the school's I-17 petition](#) requires changing the currently approved I-17 petition in SEVIS. For further assistance with making edits/updates, contact the SEVIS Helpdesk at 800-892-4829.

As a best management practice, schools should consider reviewing their school's information after each student registration period to ensure P/DSO names and contact information, particularly email addresses and PDSO phone numbers are accurate and to ensure all other information on the I-17 is current and accurate.

Failure to submit the necessary documentation will result in a Notice of Intent to Withdraw (certification). A school may lose their SEVP certification for a period of up to one year. Periodic reviews may be conducted at the discretion of SEVP.

SEVP Certification Process

Step 10

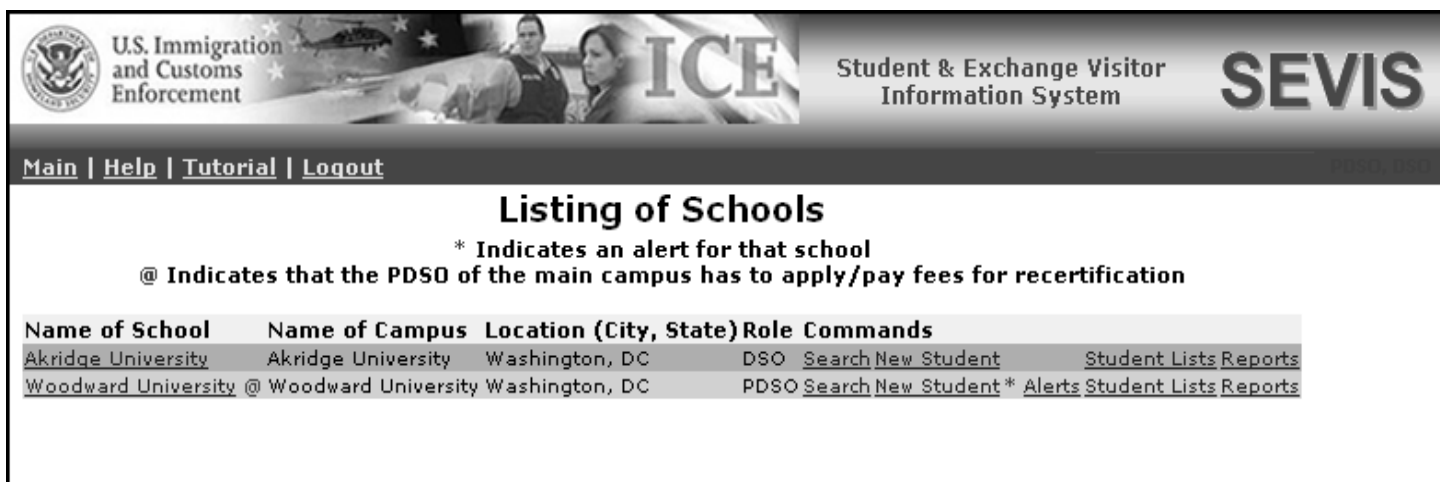
Recertification

The Border Security Act of 2002 requires all SEVP certified schools undergo a review process every two years to ensure schools are still eligible. The proposed recertification rule is pending review within the Department of Homeland Security. Once SEVP publishes this rule, the public will have an opportunity to comment. In the interim, as long as the school remains in good standing with SEVP, it will retain full SEVIS access.

Recertification is the term used to describe this regulatory two-year review process for schools approved to issue the Form I-20 to an F/M student. It will include a review of the school's compliance with the federal regulations for maintaining both school and student records. Recertification is different from a periodic review.

SEVIS has been modified in preparation for recertification and reflects a legend that is identified below. This legend is a placeholder for future recertification emails/alerts. Once the rule is published, a school will see the @ symbol next to the school name to indicate it is time for the school to apply for recertification. Do not confuse this with the legend that is currently in SEVIS (see example below). Once recertification has started, you will receive an alert. Recertification is a fee-based service.

SEVP will conduct periodic data reviews in lieu of recertification during this pre-recertification stage.



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

ICE

Student & Exchange Visitor Information System

SEVIS

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Listing of Schools

* Indicates an alert for that school
@ Indicates that the PDSO of the main campus has to apply/pay fees for recertification

Name of School	Name of Campus	Location (City, State)	Role	Commands
Akridge University	Akridge University	Washington, DC	DSO	Search New Student Student Lists Reports
Woodward University @	Woodward University	Washington, DC	PDSO	Search New Student * Alerts Student Lists Reports