

SEVP FACT SHEET - Documents Accepted in Lieu of Accreditation

Instructions for Submitting Additional Documentation for Unaccredited Vocational Schools, Higher-Education Institutions, Seminaries, Elementary and Secondary Schools, and English Language Schools

This document will clarify some of the evidentiary requirements in Title 8, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 214.3(c) for adjudication of Form I-17, *Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student*.

- I. **Vocational Schools - Employment Letters, Professional Licenses, or Credentials**
- II. **Higher Education Institutions (College/University) – Letters From Other Institutions or Articulation Agreements**
- III. **Seminaries – Higher Education Letters or Articulation Agreements and / or Employment Letters**
- IV. **Elementary and Secondary Schools (Grades K-12) – Letters From Schools of a Higher Educational Level**
- V. **English Language Schools – Letters From Higher Education Institutions**

Refer to the section appropriate for your institution in order to correctly submit required documentation for the adjudication of your petition.

I. Vocational Schools - Employment Letters, Professional Licenses, or Credentials:

Pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(c), a petitioning vocational, business, or language school must submit evidence that its courses of study are accepted as fulfilling the requirements for the attainment of an educational, professional, or vocational objective, and are not avocational or recreational in character.

This evidence can take the form of employment letters, professional licenses, or credentials for graduates of your institution. To satisfy the above requirement, your institution must provide three (3) letters, professional licenses (photocopies), credentials (photocopies), or a combination thereof for a total of three (3) documents.

A. Employment Letters

Employment letters for your graduates must be written and signed by employers attesting that those graduates are fully qualified in their field of study as a result of the training they gained at your institution. Letters must be prepared and signed by the employers' management and are subject to verification by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP).

Submit three (3) original letters on professional company letterhead from three (3) different employers that have hired recent graduates from your school. **Recent graduates**, as defined by SEVP, are those who have completed your program of study within the past two (2) years. SEVP will not consider letters from self-employed graduates. If your graduates were hired through a recruiting firm, the company name should be listed where the person was/is employed.

Employment letters must include the following:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Date graduated (must be within the last two (2) years)
- Field of study/mastery
- Dates of employment
- Position hired for
- State that employee completed training for the position filled, within the last two (2) years

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- State that the training the employee received at your institution meets the employer's requirements and was a determining factor in the employment of your graduate
- State that the graduate was hired in a position directly related to the training

You must include evidence that the students named in the letters actually completed a program of study at your institution (i.e., a certificate of completion or diploma). If such evidence is not available, you must provide other evidence with the following information:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Date graduated (must be within the last two (2) years)
- Field of study/mastery

In addition, you may also provide evidence of stated employment, including, but not limited to pay-stubs for employment verification.

B. Professional License or Credentials

Professional licenses or credentials are issued for recognizing a graduate as having met special qualifications within a field of study/training. To meet SEVP requirements, only those licenses or credentials that are issued by either a governmental agency or a professional board, within the past two (2) years, will be acceptable. Submit photocopies of three (3) such professional licenses or credentials in the name of those students who have completed a program of study at your institution within said time frame.

In addition, you must include evidence that the students named actually completed a program of study at your institution (i.e., a certificate of completion or diploma). If such evidence is not available, you must provide other evidence with the following information:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Date graduated (must be within the last two (2) years)
- Field of study/mastery

If you wish to submit other evidence to meet these criteria, you may do so. SEVP will consider all submitted evidence in adjudication of your petition.

II. Higher Education Institutions (College/University) – Letters From Other Institutions or Articulation Agreements:

Pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(c), an institution of higher education which does not confer recognized degrees must submit evidence that its credits have been and are accepted unconditionally by at least three (3) accredited or public institutions of higher learning.

This evidence can take the form of letters from nationally accredited or public institutions of higher education or articulation agreements with said institutions. Your institution must provide three (3) letters or articulation agreements or a combination of the two (2), for a total of three (3) documents.

A. Higher Education Letters

Letters from accredited or public institutions of higher education must attest that transfer credits have been and are accepted unconditionally from the petitioning institution. **Accredited institutions** are those that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association. For a complete listing of nationally recognized accrediting

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associations, refer to the Department of Education website at www.ed.gov. Letters must be prepared and signed by a school official on institutional letterhead and are subject to verification by SEVP.

Submit three (3) original letters from accredited or public institutions of higher education that *have accepted and will continue to accept* your transfer credits unconditionally.

Letters must include the following:

- Complete name of transfer student
- Name of your institution
- Program of study enrolled in at your institution
- Date of transfer/enrollment
- Program of study enrolled in at accredited institution
- Attest that transfer credits from your school have been accepted in the past at the accredited institution
- Attest that your transfer credits will continue to be accepted at the accredited institution
- Specify transfer credits accepted unconditionally (i.e., elective/general courses/required for degree program)
- Field of study to which transfer credits applied
- State that the institution is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association and name the association

You must include evidence that the students named in the letters actually pursued a program of study at your institution. Such evidence should include the following information:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Dates enrolled at your institution
- Field of study pursued at your institution
- List of classes completed at your institution

B. Articulation Agreements

Articulation Agreements with accredited or public higher education institutions must detail credits accepted for transfer from the petitioning institution and be signed by all parties involved. Articulation agreements should comply with state and/or federal requirements where applicable. For guidance on articulation agreements, you may refer to your state department of education or the U. S. Department of Education website(s).

SEVP will accept only those articulation agreements, which include the following information:

- Attest that transfer credits from your school have been accepted in the past at the accredited institution
- Attest that your transfer credits will continue to be accepted at the accredited institution at least for the duration of the agreement
- Specify transfer credits accepted unconditionally (i.e., elective, general courses, or required for degree program)
- Field of study/degree programs to which transfer credits apply
- State duration of agreement
- State that the institution is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association and name the association

If any of this information is not included in the articulation agreement, then you must provide a separate statement and/or other evidence detailing the above.

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If you wish to submit other evidence to meet these criteria, you may do so. SEVP will consider all submitted evidence in adjudication of your petition.

III. Seminaries – Higher Education Letters, Articulation Agreements and / or Employment Letters:

Pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(c), an institution of higher education which does not confer recognized degrees must submit evidence that its credits have been and are accepted unconditionally by at least three (3) accredited or public institutions of higher learning.

A seminary is a higher education institution and as such must meet the requirements for an unaccredited higher education institution described above. However, most seminarians finish their education at the institution/seminary and devote their lives to a religious vocation and work in places of worship as priests, ministers, rabbis, etc. Very few seminary students ever transfer to other institutions of higher education prior to completion of their program of study. This reality poses great difficulties for seminaries to meet the documentary requirements set forth in 8 CFR 214.3 for a traditional institution of higher education that is unaccredited. SEVP acknowledges the uniqueness of seminaries and has established a policy to accept letters from higher education, articulation agreements, employment letters, or a combination thereof, to meet the aforementioned requirements for participation in the Program.

A. Higher Education Letters and/or Articulation Agreements

Letters from accredited or public institutions of higher education must attest that transfer credits have been and are accepted unconditionally from the petitioning institution. **Accredited institutions** are those that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association. For a complete listing of nationally recognized accrediting associations, refer to the Department of Education website at www.ed.gov. Letters must be prepared and signed by a school official on institutional letterhead and are subject to verification by SEVP.

Submit three (3) original letters from accredited or public institutions of higher education that have accepted and will continue to accept your transfer credits unconditionally.

Letters must include the following:

- Complete name of transfer student
- Name of your institution
- Program of study enrolled in at your institution
- Date of transfer/enrollment
- Program of study enrolled in at accredited institution
- Attest that transfer credits from your school have been accepted in the past at the accredited institution
- Attest that your transfer credits will continue to be accepted at the accredited institution
- Specify transfer credits accepted unconditionally (i.e., elective/general courses/required for degree program)
- Field of study to which transfer credits applied
- State that the institution is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association and name the association

You must include evidence that the students named in the letters actually pursued a program of study at your institution. Such evidence should include the following information:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Dates enrolled at your institution
- Field of study pursued at your institution
- List of classes completed at your institution

B. Articulation Agreements

Articulation Agreements with accredited or public higher education institutions must detail credits accepted for transfer from the petitioning institution and be signed by all parties involved. Articulation agreements should comply with state and/or federal requirements where applicable. For guidance on articulation agreements, you may refer to your state department of education or the U. S. Department of Education website(s).

SEVP will accept only those articulation agreements, which include the following information:

- Attest that transfer credits from your school have been accepted in the past at the accredited institution
- Attest that your transfer credits will continue to be accepted at the accredited institution at least for the duration of the agreement
- Specify transfer credits accepted unconditionally (i.e., elective, general courses, or required for degree program)
- Field of study/degree programs to which transfer credits apply
- State duration of agreement
- State that the institution is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association and name the association

If any of this information is not included in the articulation agreement, then you must provide a separate statement and/or other evidence detailing the above.

C. Employment Letters

For employment letters, only letters from places of worship, (e.g., churches and synagogues) attesting that your recent graduates were hired as or are currently working as religious ministers, (e.g., priests, pastors, rabbis) will be accepted. Letters must be prepared and signed by the highest religious official, on institutional letterhead and are subject to verification by SEVP. The letters must attest that those graduates are fully qualified in their field of study as a result of completing a program of study/degree at your institution. SEVP will not consider letters from self-employed graduates.

Submit three (3) original letters from *three (3) different places of worship* that have hired/employed three (3) recent graduates from your school along with evidence that those named actually completed a program of study at your institution. **Recent graduates**, as defined by SEVP, are those who have completed your program of study within the past two (2) years.

Employment letters must include the following:

- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Date graduated (must be within the last two (2) years)
- Field of study/degree completed
- Dates of employment
- Position hired for
- State that employee completed degree/training for the position filled
- State that the degree/training the employee received at your institution meets the employer's requirements and was a determining factor in the employment of your graduate

You must include evidence that the students named in the letters actually completed a program of study/degree at your institution, (i.e., a diploma). If such evidence is not available, you must provide other evidence with the following information:

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- Complete name of the graduate
- Name of your school
- Date graduated (must be within the last two (2) years)
- Field of study/Major
- Degree received

If you wish to submit other evidence to meet these criteria, you may do so. SEVP will consider all submitted evidence in adjudication of your petition.

IV. Elementary and Secondary Schools (Grades K-12) – Letters From Schools of a Higher Educational Level:

Pursuant to 8 CFR 214.3(c), if the petitioner is an elementary or secondary school that is not public or accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association, it must submit evidence that attendance at the petitioning institution satisfies the compulsory attendance requirements of the state in which it is located and that the petitioning school qualifies its graduates for acceptance by schools of a higher educational level.

Part A: Provide evidence that attendance at your school meets the compulsory attendance requirements of the state in which your school is located. This could take the form of a state license to operate a school or a letter/statement from your state department of education attesting that your school does comply with the compulsory attendance requirements for the state.

Part B: To satisfy the latter portion of the above regulation, provide letters from accredited or public schools of a higher educational level that have accepted graduates from your school at the next higher level. **Accredited schools** are those that are accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association. Letters must be prepared and signed by a school official on institutional letterhead and are subject to verification by SEVP. Acceptance letters from accredited colleges/universities are sufficient to meet this requirement for petitioning high schools only, and must be accompanied by evidence of nationally recognized accreditation.

Submit three (3) original letters either from institutions of a higher educational level that have accepted graduates from your school at the next higher level, or from accredited colleges/universities that have accepted your high school graduates upon graduation.

Letters must include the following:

- Complete name of student/graduate
- Name of your school
- Last grade level completed at your school
- Date student transferred or completed study at your school
- Date enrolled at new school, college, or university
- Grade level enrolled in at the new school or degree program enrolled in at college or university
- Demonstrate a willingness to accept your students or graduates at the next higher level
- State that the institution is accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting association and name the association

You must include evidence that the students named in the letters actually completed the grade level stated or graduated from your institution, (i.e., a diploma). If such evidence is not available, you must provide other evidence with the following information:

- Complete name of the student/graduate
- Name of your school
- Highest grade completed at your school

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- Date graduated or dates enrolled

If you wish to submit other evidence to meet these criteria, you may do so. SEVP will consider all submitted evidence in adjudication of your petition.

V. English Language Schools are required to be nationally accredited.