U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

May 15, 2006

Fact Sheet

J Nonimmigrants: Getting a Social Security Number

The Social Security Administration (SSA) uses the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program's Verification Information System (VIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) 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 can a Department of State (DoS)-designated Exchange Visitor Program sponsor do to assist an exchange visitor in acquiring a Social Security number?

Responsible Officers (ROs), Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs) and other sponsor employees or representatives who come in contact with the exchange visitors can promote a few simple steps that will raise the awareness that reporting to their sponsors upon arrival in the United States is not only the law, but is an important step in acquiring a benefit [i.e., applying for and obtaining a Social Security number (SSN)].

Entering the participant's name in SEVIS exactly as it appears on the passport is extremely important. In addition, the Form I-94 should also reflect the name as it appears on the passport and in SEVIS. It is critical that all immigration documents match. When applying for a Social Security card, the Social Security Administration (SSA) considers the Form I-94 to be the primary immigration and identity document. If the name that appears on the Form I-94 does not match the name on the passport, the exchange visitor may need to go to the nearest DHS office to have the Form I-94 information corrected before SSA can accept it. This will cause longer delays in getting an SSN. The same holds true for the names of the participant's dependents (if any). Ensuring the correct spelling of the name of the participant will reduce the amount of time required to update SEVIS and the number of Forms DS-2019 that the participant must carry with him/her.

Remind all participants to:

- Carry all immigration documents with them on the plane as they will need to present them at the port-of-entry;

  - Not pack the documentation in their luggage, as they will not be able to get to the luggage before coming in contact with the inspectors.

  - That not being able to provide the documentation to the inspectors upon arrival will delay their processing at the port-of-entry.

- Enter their name carefully and legibly exactly as it is contained on the passport when completing the Form I-94.

- Be careful to enter their date of birth as requested on the Form I-94 in day, month and year order (dd/mm/yy).

You (RO/ARO) should familiarize yourself (as well as all employees who come in contact with your exchange visitor participants) with the process, procedures and requirements for obtaining a Social Security number set forth below.

How should exchange visitors apply for a Social Security number?

The following questions and answers from Social Security Administration are provided to assist in applying for a Social Security number.

1. What is a Social Security number (SSN) and card? Do I need to get an SSN?

A Social Security number (SSN) is a type of identification number used for Social Security. It is a nine digit number resembling "123-00-1234" which is issued to an individual by the United States Federal Government. An SSN is intended to accurately record the earnings of the individual to whom it is issued. SSNs also function as a general identification number in many situations. The identification number (SSN) assigned to the individual is then issued to the individual on a card. This card is referred to as the "Social Security card."

As an exchange visitor, you may need an SSN and card if you plan to work in the United States. Your sponsor or third party placement organization may require it for payroll records. This number also may be requested if you open bank accounts, rent an apartment or apply for a driver's license.

Recent provisions in U.S. law have changed the rules for assigning a SSN and issuing a Social Security card. Review the *New Rules for Getting A Social Security Number and Card* at http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10120.pdf. Also, see *Foreign Workers and Social Security Numbers* at http://www.socialsecurity.gov/pubs/10107.html.

2. How do I apply for a Social Security number?

To apply for a Social Security number (SSN), you must:

- Report to your sponsor upon arrival in the United States to let them know that you are here.

- Wait at least 10 days from your arrival date in the United States before applying for your SSN. Doing this helps ensure that the Social Security Administration (SSA) can verify your immigration information with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

- Complete an *Application For A Social Security Card* (Form SS-5).

- You must take the completed application and original documents (listed below) to the nearest SSA office:

  - Original Form DS-2019;

  - Passport; and,

  - Form I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record,* with the J-1 visa stamp.

3. Things to remember when completing the *Application for a Social Security Card* (Form SS-5):

- Fill in your name *exactly* as it is shown on your Form I-94 and passport. The name on your passport, Form DS-2019 and Form I-94 should all be the same.

- Check "Legal Alien Allowed to Work"

- Enter your date of birth in the following manner: month, day, year (MM/DD/YYYY).

- Enter your mother's birth surname (maiden name).

4. How do I locate the nearest Social Security Administration office?

To locate the Social Security office nearest you, go to: https://s044a90.ssa.gov/apps6z/FOLO/fo001.jsp and enter the zip code for your area.

5. What documents do I need to provide to Social Security Administration (SSA) officials to prove my immigration status?

To prove your U.S. immigration status, you must show the original copies of current Form I-94, *Arrival/Departure Record*, issued to you when you arrived in the United States; your passport; and Form DS-2019, *Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status*.

6. How long will it take to get a Social Security number?

The Social Security Administration (SSA) must verify your documents with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) before a Social Security number (SSN) can be assigned to you. After receiving the verification from DHS, a SSN will be issued to you and the Social Security card (containing the assigned SSN) will be mailed to the address provided on the application (Form SS-5). Most of the time, documents can be verified quickly with DHS, online. If the documents cannot be verified online, it may take DHS several weeks to respond to the request. The SSA works closely with DHS to reduce these delays.

7. What do I do if I don't receive my Social Security number (SSN) right away?

If there are delays in receiving a Social Security number (SSN), you can still begin participation in the program activity for which you are sponsored. The Social Security Administration (SSA) does not require you to have a SSN before you begin participation in the program for which you were issued a J-1 visa. However, the Internal Revenue Service requires employers to report wages using a SSN. While you wait for your SSN, your employer can use a letter from SSA stating that you applied for a number. When you apply for a SSN, make sure you ask for a letter acknowledging you have filed an application (Form SS-5). This letter can be printed and given to you immediately as part of the application process. Your employer may use your immigration documents as proof of your authorization to work in the United States. Employers can find more

information on the Internet at www.socialsecurity.gov/employer/hiring.htm. Also, the Internal Revenue Service Web site contains information on what employers can do if a worker experiences delays in getting a Social Security number at http://www.irs.gov/businesses/small/international/article/0,,id=129227,00.html

8. How do I contact the Social Security Administration (SSA)?

For more information and to find copies of Social Security Administration (SSA) publications, visit their Web site at *www.socialsecurity.gov* **or call toll-free, 1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call their TTY number, 1-800-325-0778). The SSA representatives can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. Information is also provided by automated phone service 24 hours a day. *All calls are treated confidentially.*