



Homeland  
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# FACT SHEET

## *SEVIS: One Year Of Success*

The **Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)** is a web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States. Administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the two Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agencies with primary responsibility for border security. SEVIS is designed to keep our nation safe while facilitating the entry and exit process for foreign students in the United States and for students seeking to study in the United States.

In the SEVIS program's first year, 8,737 schools and exchange visitor programs, representing more than 9,500 campuses, have been certified to participate in the program. As of July 2004, there are more than 770,000 students and exchange visitors (F-1, M-1, and J-1 visa categories) approved to study in the United States whose data is being managed by SEVIS. In addition, SEVIS maintains records on more than 100,000 dependents of students and exchange visitors.

The process for ensuring compliance once individuals have arrived in the United States is streamlined and timely. Of those foreign students and exchange visitors studying in the United States, there were 36,600 potential student violators reported to the ICE Compliance Enforcement Unit (CEU). Reasons for an individual being considered in violation include a school reporting an individual a 'no show' (more than 2,900 students were reported as 'no-shows'), expulsion, suspension, and failure to maintain a full course of study. The CEU examined the violations using law enforcement databases and referred 1,591 to the field for further investigation. These investigations resulted in 155 arrests.

### SEVIS OUTREACH

The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) made a significant effort to reach out to all stakeholders in the international student and exchange visitor communities. The program is designed to keep our nation safe while facilitating the international learning process for foreign students and exchange visitors in the United States. To this end, SEVP not only holds bi-weekly stakeholder conference calls to provide an update on the system, but also proactively solicits feedback and suggestions from these stakeholders on ways to improve SEVIS. A number of these suggestions have been implemented into the program.

DHS also makes an effort to hold outreach events, attend academic conferences, and meet with stakeholders to address any issues that may arise and to keep the public informed of SEVIS progress.

DHS has also worked with the State Department to develop informational brochures for international students and exchange visitors on the SEVIS system.

### SEVIS PROGRESS

SEVIS allows the United States to collect and manage information on foreign students and exchange visitors by maintaining up-to-date data that can be accessed electronically. SEVIS has simplified what was once a manual process, resulting in more accurate and timely data, faster processing, and fewer delays for student and exchange visitors. SEVIS, fully implemented shortly after the creation of DHS, was the first automated system in the nation that created this management capability for visiting students.

In June 2004, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congress's investigative arm, issued a report on the performance of SEVIS and concluded the system performance has improved. Even before the GAO report was completed, SEVIS had taken the initiative to make eight process improvements. SEVIS has also updated its reporting databases to ensure improved access to information and better service this fall when processing numbers are expected to increase.

Furthermore, the E-Gov Institute awarded SEVIS a Pioneer Award in recognition of the program's improved operations and streamlined processes. SEVIS was one of only 15 government entities recognized for this achievement, out of more than 150 government agencies.

### SEVIS FEES

The implementation of a \$100 fee for international students, exchange visitors and scholars attending school or conducting research in the United States will take effect September 1, 2004. Students, scholars and exchange visitors from abroad whose schools or programs are approved in SEVIS will be required to pay the appropriate fee – in most cases, \$100 -- prior to obtaining their visas.

The purpose of the fee is to cover the costs for the continued operation of the SEVP, including the administration and maintenance of SEVIS. The 1996 law that mandated the establishment of SEVP also required the program be funded through the payment of fees. The fee applies to F, J and M nonimmigrant classifications; however, participants in certain J-1 exchange visitor programs will pay a reduced fee of \$35 or be fee-exempt. The fee will also fund the establishment of a cadre of liaison officers to help school administrators and students use SEVIS more effectively.

### SEVIS RESPONSE TEAM (SRT)

Congress mandated that all non-immigrant students and exchange visitors attending SEVIS-approved schools and programs be required to register with the SEVIS system by August 1, 2003. Anticipating that many schools, individual students and exchange visitors might have difficulty meeting this compliance date, ICE created a special SEVIS Response Team (SRT) to assist students and exchange visitors who may not have been registered in the SEVIS system by the deadline.

The SRT worked with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers, adjudicators, investigators, schools, and individual students and exchange visitors to resolve issues related to admission into the United States. Between August 2003 and February 2004, the SRT experienced a dramatic decline in the volume of cases and calls – an indication that CBP officers at ports of entry have become much more proficient in using SEVIS to determine the admission eligibility of international students arriving to the United States. This is also an indication that schools and programs were successful in ensuring that students and exchange visitors have the SEVIS documentation required for entry into the United States.

SEVIS improvements, including a 24-hour-a-day SEVIS Help Desk, have rendered these teams unnecessary this fall. However, the SEVP will have resources dedicated during this period to assist CBP and universities in addressing any issues regarding SEVIS and the admission of students and exchange visitors.

### ENFORCEMENT SUCCESSES

- ICE agents completed two investigations, one involving a student and the other an exchange visitor, in which both had fraudulently applied for SEVIS certification for schools that were already SEVIS-certified. A prospective J-1 student to a university in Florida submitted a duplicate Form I-17, listing a different first name for the school's Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) and a different telephone number. The "error" was reported to the SEVIS Help Desk and an investigation was initiated.

The prospective student's name and e-mail address were listed on the Form I-17 application. The information was forwarded to the ICE Cyber Crimes unit for further investigation. The information was also forwarded to the State Department, as the issuing and approving authority for J-1 exchange visitors. Had the Form I-17 been approved, the SEVIS system would have sent a user ID and password to the applicant, allowing the user to generate fraudulent Forms I-20.

- ICE agents completed several investigations of corrupt school officials selling fraudulent Forms I-20 and transcripts. One of these investigations resulted from an anonymous lead alleging a PDSO at a university in Texas was selling Forms I-20 and fraudulent transcripts. The fraudulent documents were being sold for \$150-\$400 each. One of the individuals in question has wired in excess of \$40,000 out of the United States, despite working at a restaurant in Texas.

ICE Compliance Enforcement Unit (CEU) was notified and has initiated actions to pursue the case as a criminal investigation. An ICE Financial Crime Unit is also investigating the wire transfer overseas. CBP is also on the lookout for all Forms I-20 issued by the university, to students from Countries of Interest.

- ICE agents initiated an investigation involving an aeronautical university in Arizona. The CEU received a complaint from Citizenship and Immigration Services that a duplicate form requesting approval of school was filed in SEVIS.

An investigation followed, and determined this petition to be fraudulent. It is suspected this fraudulent request may have been initiated from Nigeria. Had this request been approved, the SEVIS system would have sent a user ID and password to the applicant, allowing the user to generate fraudulent Forms I-20.

These investigation examples demonstrate that SEVIS not only secures the admission process for foreign students and exchange visitors, but also provides an enhanced investigative tool to identify participating schools and school officials who may be attempting to issue fraudulent school documentation to support visa issuance. SEVIS is one of the pillars of ICE's mission of restoring integrity to the immigration system.

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), responsible for the enforcement of border, economic, infrastructure, and transportation security laws. ICE seeks to prevent acts of terrorism by targeting the people, money, and materials that support terror and criminal networks.*