A Student’s Guide to SEVIS
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s)

What is SEVIS?

SEVIS stands for the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. It is a secure internet-based system operated by the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (BICE), part of the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This monitoring system allows schools and BICE to exchange data on the visa status of international students and scholars. Universities, DHS, consulates and ports of entry (POEs) all have access to SEVIS. Accurate and current information is transmitted electronically between these offices prior to and throughout an F-1 or J-1 student/scholar's academic program in the United States.

Is SEVIS new?

Yes and no. Schools have always been required to keep the information that will be reported in SEVIS in an immigration file. SEVIS is now collecting all of this information in an electronic database that will be more accessible to government agencies. In 1996, Congress passed legislation directing the INS to move to an electronic data collection system. Technical challenges and lack of funding delayed the program for several years. However, in October 2001, Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act (due to the events of 9/11) that authorized additional SEVIS funding and required nationwide compliance by January 30, 2003.

How does SEVIS work?

- After Pace University admits an international student, SEVIS is notified and BICE approves the University’s request to issue a Form I-20 or DS-2019. The Office of Admissions prints and issues the Form I-20 or DS-2019 to the student.
- The student visits the U.S. Consulate abroad, and the Consulate verifies through SEVIS that the student’s I-20 is a valid document. If everything is in order, the Consulate issues the F-1 or J-1 visa.
- An Immigration Officer at the port of entry inspects the student’s documents and reports to SEVIS the student’s entry to the U.S. The SEVIS system, in turn, notifies Pace that the student has entered the country.
- When the student arrives on campus, he/she reports to the Office of International Programs & Services (OIPS) and registers for classes. The OIPS then verifies the student's enrollment through SEVIS.
- The OIPS continues to provide regular electronic reports to SEVIS throughout the student's academic career.
- Finally, SEVIS records the student's departure from the United States.
What data does SEVIS collect?

Pace University must report:

- Full-time enrollment.
- Authorization to have a less than full-time course load.
- A student who does not have authorization to register for a less than full-time course load.
- A change of the student or dependent's legal name or address.
- A change to a student's academic program: change of major, program extension, change of academic level.
- Student's graduation date.
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken due to criminal conviction.
- Employment authorization, including Curricular Practical Training and Optional Practical Training.
- Transfers to another school.
- Any student who fails to maintain status or complete his or her program.
- Termination date and reason for termination.
- Applications for reinstatement of a terminated record.

What does "fail to maintain status" mean?

A student is failing to maintain status when s/he violated the regulations for the respective visa type. (See Handbook for International Students and Scholars for details on maintaining your status.) Some examples of failure to maintain status include dropping from full-time to part-time enrollment without prior approval from the DSO, attending a school other than the one a student is authorized to attend, failure to apply for a timely transfer from another U.S. school to Pace University, failure to apply for an I-20 extension or change in level of study, unauthorized employment, and failure to report a change of address.

What are the consequences if a student fails to maintain status?

The student's record in SEVIS will be updated every semester. Students who fail to maintain status lose the privileges of their student status and become subject to deportation. Specific consequences may include denial of re-entry to the U.S., inability to move from undergraduate to graduate status, denial of requests for Practical Training, denial of requests to change visa status, and possible denial of future visa applications.

Can a student who is "out of status" regain legal status?

If a student drops below a full course of study without prior approval from the DSO, that "event" would be reported to the immigration service, via SEVIS, and he or she would be out of status. The student may apply to the immigration service for reinstatement if the violation resulted from circumstances beyond his or her control. Reinstatement is intended to be a rare benefit for exceptional cases. If BCIS does not reinstate the student, he or she may not appeal that decision.
How does Pace University help students comply with the immigration laws?

The University is committed to assisting students in ways that will prevent status violations from ever occurring. **Effective Fall 2003 Semester, these policies will take effect:**

1. Throughout the registration period, the Office of International Programs & Services (OIPS) will monitor the enrollment of international students. **Students who register part-time must bring a Deviation Form to the OIPS before classes begin.** Part-time students are invited to meet with an International Student Advisor to discuss any problems registering full-time. The OIPS is responsible for reporting full-and part-time registration to SEVIS.

2. **International students must not drop below a full course of study after classes have begun without prior authorization from an International Student Advisor.** "Full-time" means 12 credits per semester for undergraduates and 9 credits for graduate students. **A student who is authorized for a reduced course load must enroll in at least 6 credits.**

Acceptable reasons for reduced credit load include:

- Students who experience academic difficulties (for example, unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or English language difficulties) may take a reduced credit load. A student is allowed to drop below full-time for academic difficulties only once during their entire degree program. Documentation from the academic advisor is required.
- Graduate students who have completed required coursework may register for thesis or dissertation credit only. Graduate Assistants may register for six credits instead of nine. Documentation from the appropriate supervisor is required.
- Students in their final term of study need only register for the credit hours required to complete the degree. Documentation from the academic advisor is required.
- A student with a serious medical condition may be able to reduce his/her credit load or take the semester off. Written documentation from a licensed medical doctor or psychologist is required. However, a student who is allowed a reduced course load due to a medical condition may only do so for a total of 12 months during his/her academic program.

**Remember, only the Designated School Officials in the Office of International Programs & Services have the authority to authorize a reduced credit load!**

**This approval must be obtained before dropping below full-time status or the OIPS will be required by law to report this to SEVIS!**
Will SEVIS benefit students in any way?

Data moves more efficiently through an electronic system than through a paper system. Once the transition to SEVIS has fully taken place and the system is running smoothly, students can expect that forms will be produced faster, applications for benefits such as Practical Training will be approved more quickly, and visas will be granted without long delays.

What do students need to do to maintain their status in a SEVIS world?

- Read any email updates from the University or the OIPS, and periodically check for updates on the OIPS web page (go to http://www.pace.edu/international). Changes in immigration regulations or visa procedures sometimes happen quickly. Information is posted as soon as we have reliable facts. You should subscribe to the International Student Listserv if you have not already done so (this can be done from our web page).
- Understand the immigration regulations and learn how to maintain lawful status in the U.S., and refer any questions or problems immediately to the experts in the OIPS. Always come to the OIPS for assistance concerning your immigration status. Rumors frequently circulate about the regulations and requirements. Always come to speak with an advisor for the most current information.
- Be proactive. Students should plan their course schedules carefully so that they are always able to maintain full-time enrollment.
- Be sure that your finances are in order. You will not be able to register for classes if you have an outstanding tuition balance.
- Registrations are cancelled by SARS if the balance is not paid by the third week of the semester. If your registration is cancelled, you will fall out of status.
- Beware of expiration dates your documents and authorizations. SEVIS automatically makes changes to records based on the dates reported in SEVIS. It also limits our ability to make changes once a date has passed. Changes in degree level, extensions, travel validations, and employment authorizations must be done in a timely manner and on SEVIS documents. Allow the OIPS sufficient time for processing new forms.
- Make travel arrangements early, and anticipate delays at Consulates and border crossings.
- If you do not register for classes for a fall or spring semester (summer registration is optional), you are required by the immigration regulations to depart the United States. Always inform the OIPS if you will not register for any semester to discuss the effects on your immigration status.
- Report any change of address to the OIPS and SARS within 10 days of moving. OIPS staff will update your SEVIS record and report your new address to DHS in accordance with the regulations.

Pace University is a better place because you are here, and we are committed to your success!