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. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS), formerly the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), and American Embassies and Consulates overseas also have access to SEVIS. Accurate and current information is transmitted electronically 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. The requirement that schools provide the federal government with information about each student’s status is not new. The INS had required most of the information that will be reported to SEVIS for many years, but the previous paper-based system did not allow widespread coordination between schools and governmental 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 the BICE approves the University’s request to issue a Form I-20. The Office of Admissions prints and issues the new bar-coded 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 if a student is already enrolled and has an old I-20, not a SEVIS I-20?

The Government has given schools a period of time in which to enter all currently enrolled students and issue them SEVIS I-20’s. That is the reason we are requiring you to submit the enclosed questionnaire – so that we can enter you into SEVIS and print your SEVIS I-20 before the deadline. Although schools have the deadline of August 1, 2003 to enter all current students, we plan to enter our students before the end of the Spring 2003 semester and/or in early summer to accommodate those students traveling abroad during the summer break.

What data does SEVIS collect?

Pace University must report:

- Whether the student has enrolled at the school or failed to enroll.
- A change of the student or dependent's legal name or address.
- Any student who graduates prior to the end date listed on the Form I-20.
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken due to criminal conviction.
- When a student drops below full-time and whether the less-than-full-time study is authorized by the DSO (immigration regulations refer to international student advisers as "Designated School Officials" or DSO's).
- Any form of employment authorization, including Curricular Practical Training and Optional Practical Training.
- Other data generated by standard procedures such as program extensions, school transfers, changes in level of study, and reinstatement.
- Any student who fails to maintain status or complete his or her program.
- Termination date and reason for termination.

What does "fail to maintain status" mean?

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 BICE/BCIS, via SEVIS, and he or she would be out of status. The student may apply to BICE/BCIS 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 will 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 should students do to prepare for SEVIS?

- Read any email updates from the University or the OIPS, and periodically check for updates on the OIPS web page (go to www.pace.edu, then click on International Programs at the bottom of the green box). 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. The four words we hate to hear are: "But my friend said..."
- 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.
- Keep all documents up-to-date. Changes in degree level, extensions, and travel validations 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.

Office of International Programs & Services, Pace University 28 March 2003
Have their been any changes regarding eligibility and application procedures for Curricular and/or Optional Practical Training?

- Students must be enrolled full-time for a full academic year before they become eligible for either curricular or optional practical training. Students starting in September would be eligible by the following May, and students starting in January would be eligible by the following December.
- Students applying for Curricular Practical Training must obtain work authorization from the OIPS before starting to work.
- Students applying for post completion Optional Practical Training must file their application with BICE/BCIS before completion of studies (there is no longer a 60 day grace period after completion of studies in which to apply).

What’s the new requirement for F-2 dependents?

- The new immigration regulations no longer allow those in F-2 status to engage in any degree-seeking program, either full-time or part-time. They are required to apply to change their immigration status to F-1 and receive approval for the new F-1 status before they may begin studies.

We appreciate your cooperation as we undergo this transition to SEVIS.

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