SEVIS: Student Exchange Visitor Information System

What is SEVIS?

SEVIS (pronounced seevis) is an internet-based system that is designed to provide federal agencies, U.S. educational institutions and exchange program sponsors with an automated means to share information about international students, exchange visitors and their dependents. The visa categories that are required to be reported into SEVIS are F-1 (student) and their dependents M-1 (vocational student) and their dependents, and J-1 Exchange Visitors (students, scholars, researchers, professors) and their dependents.

What is the History/Background of SEVIS?

U. S. schools have been required to collect and report data on F-1 students to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) since the early 1980s. In 1988, the INS requested that schools cease reporting annually as there was no method available to accurately collect and store the data. Thus, no systemized reporting by schools to the INS has taken place in 14 years.

The 1993 World Trade Center bombing led to passage of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996. This law mandated the development of a tracking system for F, M and J students and scholars using available technology, and added some new reporting requirements to those that had been in effect since the early 1980s.

In 1997 a pilot tracking program know as CIPRIS was developed. The pilot program ended in 1999 and the program was renamed SEVIS. The attacks of September 11, 2001 led to congressional legislation requiring that SEVIS be implemented and included additional data collection requirements. The passage of the Enhanced Border Security Act added still more data collection requirements.

On July 1, 2002, INS began implementation of SEVIS on a voluntary basis with U. S. institutions. Under the proposed rule, participation will become mandatory by January 30, 2003.

What are the Compliance Issues in SEVIS?

SEVIS requires schools and program sponsors to transmit electronic information and event notifications via the Internet to the INS and the Department of State throughout a student or exchange visitor's stay in the United States. Under the proposed SEVIS regulations, schools will be notified by the INS when a F-1 or M-1 student or J-1 exchange visitor arrives at a port of entry, and schools will be required to report to the INS if the student fails to appear for enrollment. Schools will be required to use SEVIS for the purpose of issuing I-20s and DS-2019s (formerly IAP-66s) to students and exchange visitors, and for maintaining up-to-date records on their statuses.

What are the consequences of non-compliance?

Non-compliance of SEVIS can result in a range of negative outcomes for the university and its officials/employees. These outcomes include civil penalties, loss or denial to issue I-20s and DS-2019s and approve other related paperwork, withdrawal of grant funding, and civil liability for the effects of errors in reporting the true status of students or exchange visitors as required under SEVIS.

What are some challenges with SEVIS?

One challenge will be to design informational programs so international students and scholars will understand their responsibilities (and the potential risks and rewards) of the SEVIS system.

A second challenge will be to examine our internal business practices for the collection and sharing of student and scholar data on campus.

A final challenge for the Office of International Affairs will be to maintain a balance between serving as a liaison and advocate for international students and scholars while at the same time fulfilling institutional requirements mandated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The good news is the vast majority of international students and exchange visitors do an excellent job of complying with INS regulations.

Information compiled from article: "SEVIS" by Ellen Badger, INS Proposed Regulations Implementing SEVIS, SEVIS Workshop held on November 11, 2002 in Raleigh.