



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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Frequently Asked Questions

Student Exchange Visitor Program

Q. Why is the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) necessary?

- SEVP enables millions of students around the world to take advantage of the U.S. educational system. The majority of students who come to the United States are seeking a quality education and meaningful cultural exchange. Unfortunately, there have been instances in which the system was exploited by those who would seek to do harm.
- We cannot forget that a significant number of the terrorists involved in the 1993 World Trade Center attack and September 11th attack got into the country by exploiting our student visa system.
- After the events of September 11, 2001, Congress directed the Department of Homeland Security to implement a better way of keeping track of international students and exchange visitors.

Q. What is the goal of SEVP?

- To eliminate border vulnerabilities while protecting America's open-door policy of welcoming students from around the globe.
- To partner with the educational community.
- To replace the old outdated paper-driven system of tracking international students with a more efficient online system.

Q. How is SEVP Funded?

- Congress mandated that the program be funded through student and university fees.

Q. Why is the fee increase necessary?

- This proposed fee increase is the first since the program was launched back in 2003. The original fees have not kept pace with the number of investigations into possible violations. In addition, end-users have requested enhancements to the system which require more resources to upgrade. Finally, the recertification of schools, which is mandated by Congress, will require additional funding and enhanced technologies.
- The average yearly cost for a private four year education is \$23,712. The proposed fee increase for international students is 0.002% of these overall costs.

Q. What is SEVIS?

- The Student Exchange and Visitor Information System is the database that allows SEVP to track international students and visitors and ensure that they are in the United States for the purposes they stated in applying to come.

Q. What do the proposed increased fees fund that is new?

- Efficiency: The enhanced SEVIS system which will include improved interactive feature for school administrators as well as a simplified application process.

- Customer Service: Field liaisons who can provide local customized and one-on-one support.
- National Security: More agents to follow up on alerts submitted by school administrators.
- Re-certification: Will maintain the integrity and reputations of participating schools.

Q. Why is re-certification necessary?

- The process is necessary to ensure that schools continue to meet the standards for hosting international students and properly maintaining records.
- It prevents those few unscrupulous schools from abusing the system and tainting the reputations of all.

Q. What are the current fees?

- The current fee for nonimmigrant students, referred to as the I-901 fee is currently \$100.
- The current fee for school certification is \$350, with a site visit fee of \$230.
- The current fee of \$35 for au pairs, camp counselors and summer work/travel program participants will remain unchanged.
- There is no fee for government sponsored exchange visitors.

Q. What are the proposed fees?

- The proposed fee rule affects both students and schools.
- The proposed rule would set the fee for F and M (nonimmigrant students) at \$200.
- The proposed rule would set the fee for most J exchange visitors at \$180.
- For au pairs, camp counselors, and summer work/travel program participants, the fee remains the current \$35.
- There is still no fee for government sponsored exchange visitors.
- The proposed rule would set the fee for school certification at \$1700, plus \$655 for each site visit.

Q. What is the fee impact on schools currently participating in the program?

- As those institutions currently participating have already paid a certification fee and as there is no charge for recertification, schools currently in the program will not be directly impacted by the proposed new fees.

Q. When will the fees take effect?

- The fees will take effect 30 days after the final fee rule is published.

Q. What will the fees fund?

- The fees will fund four significant enhancements including: SEVIS II, recertification, regional liaisons, and additional law enforcement resources.

Q. How were the fees calculated?

- SEVP is required to recoup the full cost associated with SEVIS. Modeling software was used to determine the full cost associated with: updating and maintaining the information on participating students; certifying and recertifying schools; overseeing school compliance; adjudicating appeals; investigating possible law violations and other threats to national security; providing outreach and education to users; and performing regulatory and policy analysis. The model was also used to identify management and overhead cost associated with the program.

Q. Is there a fee for recertification?

- No. There is no separate fee for school recertification.

Q. Why are some exchange visitors exempt from the fee increase?

- Statute prohibits increases in the fees charged to summer work students and government sponsored exchange visitors, two categories in the Exchange Visitor Program.

Q. Can't SEVP find alternate sources of funding to reduce the impact on students and schools?

- No. Congress mandated that SEVP was to be fully funded through user fees.

Q. If schools elect not to recertify what happens to the international students who are in good standing and attending that school?

- These instructions are posted on the SEVP website, www.ice.gov/sevis. SEVP will work with these schools and their students to ensure that the students are aware of their options and that these options are implemented without undue inconvenience to the student.

Q. What is the role of the new regional liaisons?

- SEVP envisions that these field liaisons will assist schools in a variety of tasks including the initial school site visit and a range of training initiatives.

Q. Why are more special agents necessary?

- The number of leads and alerts being provided are increasing and more agents are required to follow up. By increasing the number of investigators, ICE will not only increase the protection of the American public and the students who come to American to live and study; it will also increase confidence among the public, the Congress and policymakers that our educational institutions are more secure and less susceptible to exploitation.

Q. Will the increased fees deter students from selecting the United States to study?

- We don't believe so. In addition to implementing common sense security measures, all of the enhancements, from the more user-friendly online system to the personalized service of field liaisons, will underscore the image of America as a welcoming country offering valuable educational opportunities.
- The proposed new student fee is miniscule – less than one half of one percent (0.002% to be precise) of the average tuition costs for a four-year college education.
- As long as the student remains enrolled and in status the fee is only required the first time they apply.

Q. How many nonimmigrant students are currently enrolled in SEVIS?

- SEVIS currently monitors the active records of more than 1 million F, M, and J nonimmigrants and their dependents.

Q. Do these nonimmigrants come from particular countries?

- The country with the highest number of active students with 103,394 is South Korea, followed by India, China, Japan, Taiwan, Canada, Mexico, Turkey, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia.

Q. Where do these nonimmigrants study in the United States?

- California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, Illinois and Florida host 51% of all active nonimmigrant students. 35% of all SEVP certified schools are located in the states of California, New York, Florida, Texas, and Pennsylvania.

Q. Where can I get more information on SEVIS?

In anticipation of these rules, information has been placed on the website to assist stakeholders. See the SEVP website at: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/index.htm>

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.