



News Releases

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Improvements to Student and Exchange Visitor Program Announced

Proposed increase in fees will support enhancements to Homeland Security's critical system

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, announced today that it has significantly enhanced the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) and, for the first time, is proposing to raise fees to support the improvements.

Millions of students from around the world seek to come to the U.S. to take advantage of our renowned educational system and engage in meaningful cultural exchange. Unfortunately, there have been instances in which individuals have exploited this educational opportunity by overstaying their visas, or using the process as an entry mechanism with no intention of attending classes. After the events of September 11, 2001, Congress required the Department of Homeland Security to implement a better way of keeping track of international students and exchange visitors.

SEVP was the Department's response to that mandate, and for several years has successfully filled that role. However, the ever-increasing number of students and exchange visitors coming to our country has necessitated several upgrades to the program's systems and technologies. Dramatic improvements to the current SEVP program are proposed for implementation in fall 2008.

"U.S. colleges and universities are the envy of the world and accordingly attract as many as a million individuals from overseas who wish to attend," said Julie L. Myers, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for ICE. "Validating the identity of foreign students, verifying their intentions for entering our country and knowing where they are while they are here is critically important to the security of our country. Today's proposed new rule ensures that America remains a welcoming place for foreign students to study, while enhancing our abilities to protect our national security."

The four major enhancements to SEVP:

- The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), the database used to track visiting students, will include improved interactive features for school administrators as

well as a simplified application process for foreign students hoping to receive an American education;

- Local, customized, one-on-one customer support will be provided by new field liaisons;
- Additional ICE agents will be assigned to follow up on alerts submitted by school administrators; and
- A new recertification process, as mandated by Congress, will maintain the integrity and reputations of participating schools

SEVP proposes to increase its fees to comply with regulatory requirements to periodically review its fee structure and ensure its costs are fully covered; and to enhance its capability to improve national security and counter immigration fraud.

Schools currently participating in the program will not be required to pay any additional fees to recertify under the new rule. The proposed fee increases will affect both students and schools:

- The rule would double the fee for nonimmigrant students to \$200
- Most exchange visitor fees would rise from \$100 to \$180
- The fee for au pairs, camp counselors and summer work/travel program participants remains \$35
- There is no fee for government sponsored exchange visitors
- Fee for school certification would rise from \$350 to \$1,700
- Site visit charges would increase from \$230 to \$655 for each site visit

These changes will ensure that America continues to welcome increasing numbers of international students and exchange visitors while maintaining the integrity of its immigration system and the security of its borders.

Over the course of the next two weeks, ICE will be meeting with members of the academic community to highlight program improvements and explain the new fee structure. The first of these meetings took place today in Washington, D.C.

For more information see the SEVP website at: <http://www.ice.gov/sevis/index.htm>

-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) 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.

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