



SEVP Policy Guidance S7.2: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency

Issue Date: October 28, 2016

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Supersedes: N/A

Status: Final

Applicable to: N/A

Purpose/Background: This guidance provides information for Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) adjudicators regarding pathway programs for F-1 postsecondary students¹ who fail to meet the English proficiency requirements for admission into a certified degree program of study, or need to improve English competencies for that program.

This guidance does NOT address the following topics:

- Pathway programs unrelated to English proficiency
- Reduced course load for academic difficulties
- Concurrent enrollment
- Developmental English as a Second Language (ESL) coursework during a student's orientation period

Attachments: [SEVP Fact Sheet S7.2.1: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency](#)

Note: In September 2014, SEVP released Draft Policy Guidance 1210-03: Pathway Programs and accompanying Draft Bridge Programs Fact Sheet for public comment. SEVP received and reviewed a total of 37 comments from stakeholders on the documents. Frequently voiced concerns included the amount of manpower involved by international student service offices, the specificity and rigidity of remedial and nonremedial coursework, and the impact on schools' current English proficiency testing policies.

SEVP is releasing Policy Guidance S7.2 – Pathway Programs to meet majority of stakeholders' concerns, including focusing on English language training components of pathway programs, requirements for credit-bearing courses, and simplifying terminology by removing use of “bridge” and “bridged degree” when referring to programs. Additionally, accompanying this guidance is Fact Sheet FS S7.2 – Pathway Programs, which outlines how a school should input pathway program information onto the school's Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student,” and how to properly issue a Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” for a pathway program.

¹ All use of the term “student(s)” in the guidance refers to F-1 postsecondary students, unless otherwise indicated.

Definitions:

1. **Pathway program² for reason of English proficiency.** A postsecondary program of study combining credit-bearing and developmental ESL coursework to prepare a student who is unable to meet the English proficiency standards for admission. Such a program leads into an SEVP-certified degree program.³
2. **Credit-bearing course.** A course that counts toward the curricular requirements of an SEVP-certified degree program. This includes meeting core, general education, major, minor, or any other coursework which can be credited toward completion of the curricular requirements of a certified degree program of study.
3. **Developmental ESL course.** A course that addresses one or more deficiencies in general competencies in reading, writing, speaking, or understanding the English language necessary for a regular postsecondary curriculum and educational setting. This course does not count towards completion of the curricular requirements of a certified degree program of study.⁴

Acronyms:

1. **DSO.** Designated school official
2. **ED.** U.S. Department of Education
3. **ESL.** English as a Second Language
4. **SEVIS.** Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
5. **SEVP.** Student and Exchange Visitor Program

Policy:

1. **Pathway program certification.** SEVP may certify a school to enroll students in pathway programs that meet the following minimum requirements:
 - SEVP must certify a school's pathway program prior to school issuance of the Form I-20 for the program.
 - SEVP must review the pathway program on the basis of the petitioning school's

² International educators use several terms interchangeably to describe these programs including pathways, foundation year, bridge, bridged degree and others. For adjudications, SEVP has chosen to use the term "pathway programs" to encompass the generalities of these multiple terms. All use of the term "pathway program" in this guidance refers to "pathway program for reason of English proficiency," unless otherwise indicated.

³ SEVP considers admission to an SEVP-certified degree program as the only acceptable educational objective for a pathway program as required by 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i) and 8 U.S.C. 1101(f)(i).

⁴ See the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) [definition](#) of "Remedial Courses" as part of its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

qualifications for SEVP certification.⁵

- Like all other programs at SEVP-certified schools, a pathway program must have stated standards for admission that a student must meet before a designated school official (DSO) issues a Form I-20 for enrollment in the program.⁶ If the pathway program includes English proficiency requirements for admission, the student must meet those standards before the DSO issues a Form I-20.
- SEVP must verify that the school guarantees admission to one of its degree programs for participants that successfully complete the pathway program.
- A pathway program must have stated policies regarding normal academic progress and program completion.

2. Credit-bearing coursework. All pathway programs must contain credit-bearing coursework that is transferrable to the curricular requirements of a certified degree program at the school.

3. Language training program considerations.

3.1. ESL Accreditation Act. SEVP considers a pathway program to be a language training program and subject to the requirements of the Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act.⁷ The petitioning school must possess institutional or programmatic accreditation for the pathway program by an ED-recognized accrediting agency.⁸

3.2. Limitations on online/distance coursework and practical training. A pathway program is subject to the following limitations:

Topic	Considerations
Online/distance education	No online or distance education classes may count toward the student's full course of study. ⁹
Practical training	A student is ineligible for practical training. ¹⁰

3.3. Form I-20 issuance considerations. A DSO must only issue a Form I-20 to a student who has met all standards for admission into a program of study (whether it is a degree program or a pathway program), including any English proficiency requirements.

⁵ 8 CFR 214.3(a)(3)

⁶ For further information on conditional admission issues, see 8 CFR 214.3(k) and [SEVP Policy Guidance S13.1: Conditional Admission](#).

⁷ Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act, *Pub. L. 111-306, 124 Stat. 3280 (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(52))*.

⁸ See ED's [Regional and National Institutional Accrediting Agencies](#) and [Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act Frequently Asked Questions](#) for further information.

⁹ 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G)

¹⁰ 8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)

Note: There are instances where the school may determine that a student needs additional English support after admission. In such instances, the student may enroll in a pathway program or ESL program, transfer to another program or school, or depart the United States. In such cases, a DSO must update the student's Form I-20 to reflect the school and student decisions.¹¹ At no time should a DSO issue or maintain a Form I-20 for a program in which the student is no longer enrolled.

3.4. Full course of study. All pathway programs must meet full course of study requirements as they apply to credit or clock hour programs.¹²

4. Adjudication.

4.1. Location. The school must list any location where a student may receive any portion of the pathway program as an instructional site in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). SEVP has discretion to require schools to list all instructional sites in SEVIS and may conduct site visits or on-site reviews of any instructional site.¹³

4.2. Pathway program updates.¹⁴ SEVP requires notification within 21 days¹⁵ and adjudication of updates regarding changes to certain items in a certified pathway program, including but not limited to:

- Material changes to the program such as, course/program structure changes, significant new program elements
- Termination of the program
- Instructional sites
- Time necessary to complete the program
- Change in accreditation status
- Change in an status to the certification, licensure, or approval of a school by a state, local or other official

4.3. Compliance. As part of an initial or subsequent review of a school's pathway program, if SEVP determines that remedial or corrective action is necessary, such action may include but is not limited to:

- Issuance of a remedial action plan

¹¹ See section 3 of SEVP Fact Sheet FS7.2: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency for more information on reflecting enrollment in a pathway program on the student's Form I-20.

¹² 8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)

¹³ 8 CFR 214.3(h)(1)(ii), 8 CFR 214.3(h)(ii)-(iv)

¹⁴ 8 CFR 214.3(h)(3) and 8 CFR 214.4(a)(2)(xix)

¹⁵ 8 CFR 214.3(g)(2)(i)

- Denial or removal of a school's pathway program(s)
- Withdrawal of a school's SEVP certification

4.4. Fact sheet. The attached fact sheet describes the appropriate process for using the Form I-17 and Form I-20 with ESL pathway programs. Adjudicators must use the attached fact sheet with this guidance in accordance with the following requirements:

- A school's failure to submit the pathway program appropriately for adjudication on the school's Form I-17 per [section 1](#) of SEVP Fact Sheet FS7.2 will result in the program being ineligible for certification.
- A DSO's failure to appropriately annotate the student's Form I-20 per [section 3](#) of SEVP Fact Sheet FS7.2 is a failure to provide notification of the current status of the student.¹⁶

4.5. Effective date considerations. SEVP notes the following:

- This guidance applies immediately as of the effective date for all pathway programs started on or after that date.
- An SEVP-certified school with pathway programs must comply with the standards of this policy guidance within one year of the effective date.

References:

1. *8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i) and (G)*
2. *8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)*
3. *8 CFR 214.3(a)(3)*
4. *8 CFR 214.3(g)(2)(i)*
5. *8 CFR 214.3(g)(2)(ii)(E), (h) and (k)*
6. *8 CFR 214.3(h)(3)*
7. *8 CFR 214.3(k)*
8. *8 CFR 214.4(a)(2)(ii), (vi) and (xix)*
9. *8 U.S.C. 1101(f)(i)*
10. *8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(52)*

¹⁶ *8 CFR 214.3(g)(2)(ii)(E), (h) and (k); 8 CFR 214.4(a)(2)(ii) and (vi)*

11. *Pub. L. 111-306, 124 Stat. 3280*

Limits of use – no private right of action: This SEVP Policy Guidance applies to and is binding on all SEVP employees unless specifically exempt. Its intention is solely for the guidance of SEVP personnel in the performance of their official duties. Nothing in this guidance limits SEVP’s authority or discretion to interpret, administer or enforce any statute, regulation, policy or guidance related to SEVP certification. This guidance may be modified, superseded or withdrawn at any time. It is not intended to, does not, and may not be relied upon to create or confer any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any person, individual or other party, public or private, in any administrative, civil or criminal matter.

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Purpose/Background: This fact sheet is an attachment to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) Policy Guidance S7.2: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency.¹

Attachments: [SEVP Policy Guidance S7.2: Pathway Programs for Reasons of English Proficiency](#).

Definitions: None.

Acronyms:

1. **CIP.** Classification of Instructional Program
2. **DSO.** Designated school official
3. **SEVP.** Student and Exchange Visitor Program

Procedures/Requirements:

1. **Form I-17, “Petition for Approval of School for Attendance by Nonimmigrant Student,” instructions.** In the following fields, a school must make these entries:

SEVIS Field #	Text in Field	Entry Information
2.2	Areas of study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select “English Language Training”
2.3	Degrees available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select “Other – ESL Pathway Program”
2.4	Courses of study and time necessary to complete each	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List time necessary to complete each pathway program in days, months, weeks, years and credit or clock hours required.
4.9	Requirements for admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List all requirements for admission
5	Campus and Instructional Sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter all instructional sites at which students may receive any portion of a pathway program²

¹ All use of the term “pathway program” in this fact sheet refers to “pathway program for reason of English proficiency,” unless otherwise indicated

² See [SEVP Policy Guidance for Adjudicators 1003-03: Reporting Instructional Sites](#).

2. Pathway program evidence requirements. A school must provide the following evidence:

- Program information including the following:
 - Program name
 - Degree level(s) for which the program is preparing students
 - Unit(s) of measure used in program (i.e., credit hours or clock hours)
 - Number of credit or clock hours required per term (a school must list clock hour programs, lecture hours and lab hours separately)
 - Program length (number of weeks it takes to complete the program)
 - Date on which instruction in the program originally began at the school
 - Mode of delivery (in person, online, distance, hybrid, etc.)
 - Location(s) where the program will be taught
 - Standards for admission and enrollment criteria
 - Full course of study requirements
- Proof of pathway program accreditation. Provide evidence from a U.S. Department of Education-recognized accrediting agency confirming accreditation covers pathway program(s) listed on the Form I-17

Note: SEVP may request additional evidence regarding pathway programs at any time.

3. Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” instructions. In addition to completing all other relevant portions of the Form I-20, a school must complete the following items:

SEVIS Field	Entry Information
Education Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select “Other” • Enter “Pathway Program”
Major Code 1/Major Code 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter 32.0109, “Second Language Learning,” as the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code under “Primary Major Code.” • Enter the CIP code under “Secondary Major Code” as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The CIP code of the degree program in which the student is enrolled. This CIP code cannot be for an English as a Second Language program of study. It must be for a degree program.
Normal Length of Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter the period of time it would normally take a student to complete the pathway program under “Normal Length of Study.”
Program Start and End Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enter the program start date for the date on which the student is expected to begin the pathway program. • Enter the program end date for the date on which the student is expected to complete the pathway program.

4. Form I-20 maintenance. As stated above, the designated school official (DSO) must issue the student’s Form I-20 at the “Other” education level and for the duration the student is in the pathway program. Upon completion of the pathway program and updating all other appropriate items, a DSO must update the student’s information in the following Student and Exchange Visitor Information System fields:

- Education Level
- Primary and Secondary Major Codes
- Normal Length of Study
- Program Start and End Dates

References: None.