

SUNYUlster

URGENT INFORMATION

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE

to the

Student and Exchange Visitor

Information System

(SEVIS)

of the

***U.S. Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration
Service (BCIS)***

formerly known as

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)

URGENT INFORMATION:

Please read this information carefully and contact your Foreign Student Advisor, James Quirk (845) 687-5041 if you need any assistance.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE
to Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services
(BCIS)

Student and Exchange Visitor
Information System
(SEVIS)

This document is designed to assist the international students at SUNY Ulster to gain a better understanding of SEVIS. It addresses many of the common questions and concerns about the SEVIS program. If you have additional questions about SEVIS, please refer to the website of the US Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) at <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm>.

• **What is SEVIS and how does it work?**

SEVIS, the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System, is a new and complex database controlled by the Bureau of Citizenship & Immigration Services (BCIS). SEVIS is designed to collect information from schools, BCIS ports of entry, and even the U.S. State Department relating to foreign students and scholars. SEVIS tracks and monitors the movement of F-1, M-1 and J-1 international students and scholars and their dependents.

• **What information does SEVIS track and monitor?**

SUNY Ulster must report to SEVIS all the information found on an I-20 form (F-1), including personal data, program of study, funding information, certification for travel abroad, and information on accompanying F-2 or J-2 spouses or children etc. (Under SEVIS, each dependent will have his or her own visa form.)

Additionally, SEVIS requires that every semester SUNY Ulster must report students enrolled full-time as well as those that are not enrolled full-time. A student registering for a reduced course load must receive advance permission from Student Services and must report the reason for reduced course load from a short list of acceptable reasons, and also report the return to full-time load in a subsequent academic session. Additionally, all students who were expected to register but who did not register must be reported to SEVIS.

- SEVIS requires reporting when a student completes a program, is terminated or withdraws from a program, transfers in and out of the College, receives a program extension, or address change.
- SEVIS requires reporting off-campus employment permissions authorized or recommended.
- SEVIS requires reporting of any academic or disciplinary action taken due to a criminal conviction.

Finally, for all enrolled international students, SEVIS requires a permanent home address abroad and a current residence address. The current residence address MAY NOT be a post office box; it must be a street address.

• **When will SEVIS be implemented at SUNY Ulster?**

All schools enrolling international students must be certified in SEVIS by January 30, 2003. SUNY Ulster will be ready by mid to late January start date.

The BCIS made a site visit to SUNY Ulster. After a thorough inspection SUNY Ulster has been re-certified to offer both academic and ESL programs to international students.

- **What is SUNY Ulster doing to get ready for SEVIS?**

SEVIS will have a dramatic impact on the business processes of several offices at SUNY Ulster. Student Services, the Registrar's Office and others across the campus have been working together to develop an effective and timely technology-based SEVIS compliance system. SEVIS implementation requires use of entirely new technologies and procedures and therefore collaboration with and support from the information technology office is critical. SEVIS users will need training. Although there sure to be both electronic and human system "glitches" in the first weeks and months we will try to make the transition as smooth as possible and we believe that many changes will be invisible to international students.

- **What are some changes that students will notice in SEVIS?**

One change beginning about January 30, 2003 is that I-20s produced in SEVIS will look a little different than the "old" I-20s. **The new SEVIS I-20 makes use of a bar code in the upper right corner of the form. This is a security and information feature.**

- **Will students need a new I-20 for SEVIS?**

Yes, but not immediately for most students. We anticipate using the "old" I-20 form for all continuing and new students traveling to the U.S. prior to the Spring 2003 semester, since students will arrive and classes will start prior to the national SEVIS implementation date.

However, after January 30, any I-20 issued will be SEVIS I-20s. During the Spring 2003 semester, we will gradually replace ALL "old" I-20s with SEVIS I-20s, completing this task prior to the summer break. Please wait for new instructions from your advisor and stay in touch with Student Services prior to any travel outside USA.

- **Will student visa regulations change under SEVIS?**

Yes! Actually, the regulations are changing and are being more strictly implemented. We will inform you when these regulations are finalized. We will post new regulatory information on our website. Again, please note that the new F and J regulations will, in general, be stricter than the current regulations. Thus, it is important that you understand and comply with the regulations so that you do not lose your legal status. Additional information is available at the BCIS web page at <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm>.

- **What if I lose my status under SEVIS?**

Students who lose their status will continue to have the option to apply for reinstatement with the BCIS (F-1) or State Department (J-1). However, there may be very few students who qualify for reinstatement under the new and stricter standards for reinstatement as described in the proposed regulations. **International educators agree that losing student status under SEVIS should be avoided if at all possible, since the consequences may be very severe.**

- **What are the main reasons that students lose student status?**

The two most important keys to maintaining student status is to enroll full time and to work only incidental to study and with specific employment authorization. Thus, the two major ways that students lose status are 1) enrolling in less than a full-time course load without valid reason and/or advance permission, and 2) unauthorized employment.

Other ways to fall out of status include remaining in the U.S. past the time you are authorized to stay, and attending school without the appropriate visa/status.

- **How can I be sure I am in status?**

Student Services can provide you with information that will help you understand options and choose actions to maintain your status. If you have any doubt about the rules and regulations with respect to your personal, study and employment plans, check with the International Student Advisor.

Please do not depend on academic faculty, departmental advisers or friends to assist you with questions related to your F-1 status in the USA. Although they may advise you on matters related to their field of expertise, they may not advise you on legal matters related to your F-1 student status in the USA. For questions related to your legal standing, you must seek the advice of the International Student Advisor.

- **How can continuing students prepare for SEVIS/new regulations?**

Communication:

Student Services will be the primary source of reliable, factual and timely information about SEVIS and about college policy relating to visa issues. Thus, it will be the responsibility of students to read the information posted on this topic and be knowledgeable of it. Again, students are cautioned to be wary of information from unofficial sources!

Enrollment issues:

Be proactive with respect to maintaining full-time enrollment. When necessary, request permission for reduced course load in a timely manner. Students planning to take less than the required full-time course load must discuss their plans with the International Student Advisor prior to registering. In addition, please note that the proposed regulations provide specific limits on Distance Education, including on-line courses.

Travel and Transfer:

Make travel arrangements early and anticipate delays at consulates if your visa has expired and you will need to apply for a new visa to return to the U.S. New SEVIS regulations for students transferring from another U.S. institution may also result in delays in issuance of visa eligibility forms from the college, as well as visa issuance abroad. Speak with the International Student Advisor well in advance of any multi-country travel.

Document validity and Safekeeping:

Keep all documents safe and up to date. Report, in a timely manner, changes in degree level; changes in primary and secondary majors, and minors; requests for program extensions, for travel validations, and for applications for employment authorization. Please allow sufficient time for processing new forms.

- **What happens if SUNY Ulster fails to comply with the monitoring and reporting requirements per SEVIS?**

SUNY Ulster is currently authorized by BCIS to enroll international students, on the condition that the College participates and complies with SEVIS. The BCIS will audit the College's compliance every two years. Inadequate compliance may result in the loss of the College's authorization to admit and enroll international students.

The Student and Exchange Information System (SEVIS) may present a number of new challenges for international students, as well as colleges and universities in the United States. In an age where information is key, SEVIS is a source of timely and accurate information for educational institutions and government agencies, which are tasked with assisting the many international visitors who have chosen to pursue their education in this country. The Student and Exchange Visitors Program is directed by the BCIS in partnership with the Department of State and the Department of Education.

These challenges provide us with the opportunity to work together in a collaborative effort to meet the needs and requirements of the SEVIS system, while assisting students to remain in valid legal status until graduation and beyond. SUNY Ulster would like to wish each & every international student and their families the best of luck in their studies.

Know your Immigration Documents

Make photocopies of your travel documents and keep copies in a safe place. Keep the copies in a separate place than the originals.

• Passport

You must keep your passport valid at all times. Your passport is issued by your own government and serves as a permit for you to leave and re-enter your own country. Passports typically have an expiration date. Make arrangements to renew your passport before it expires!

• Renewing your passport:

Consult your country's consulate or embassy in the U.S. to renew your passport. The officials there will advise you as to what forms and fees, if any, are required to renew your passport. Information regarding your country's embassy in the USA is available at www.travel.state.gov.

• Visa

The visa stamp/sticker was placed in your passport by the U.S. Consulate. A visa is a document, which shows you were authorized to **enter** the U.S. A visa also indicates the purpose for which you were authorized to enter the USA, i.e. a person with an F-1 visa is authorized to enter the USA for the purpose of pursuing academic study.

Renewing your U.S. visa for re-entry:

Please note that it is not possible to renew an F-1 visa while you are within the borders of the U.S. You must plan to renew your visa while abroad if you intend to return to the USA to continue your program of study. Some international students may benefit from the "automatic revalidation of visa" whereby such students may re-enter the U.S. after a 30-day or less visit to "contiguous territory" (=Canada and Mexico) without having to obtain a new visa prior to re-entry to the U.S. There are some exceptions however:

1. International students who are citizens of countries designated by the U.S. Department of State as "state sponsors of terrorism, are not eligible for the automatic revalidation of visa benefit. A list of the countries designated as such is available at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000/2441pf.htm>. Such students must apply for a new visa while abroad, wait until the visa is granted, and may then re-enter the U.S. with the new visa.
2. International students, although otherwise eligible for "automatic revalidation" of an expired visa, who choose to apply for a new visa while in contiguous territory are **not** eligible for the "automatic revalidation" *while they are awaiting* a new visa. Such students will need to wait until the visa is granted in order to re-enter the U.S.

• Form I-94 (Arrival/Departure Record)

Form I-94 shows that you were legally admitted to the U.S. and that you are authorized to remain in the U.S. for a definite period of time. For an F-1 status holder the period of time is D/S (or: authorized to stay as long as the student is in valid F-1 status). The I-94 is usually stapled onto the U.S. visa page of your passport. It contains an eleven-digit identifying number (called your departure number) the BCIS uses to keep track of your arrival and departure from the United States. The BCIS sometimes refers to the "departure" number as the "admission" number.

Expiration of I-94:

The date stamped on the I-94 indicates the date that you arrived in the U.S. "D/S" is written below the date stamp. "D/S" indicates "duration of status". This means that you are admitted to the U.S. for the length of your program of study, plus any period of BCIS authorized Optional Practical Training, plus a 60-day grace period. If you graduate before the completion date indicated on your I-20, you are considered to have completed your program of study. Other than participating in BCIS authorized Optional Practical Training and having the 60 day grace period, your authorization to remain in the U.S. will be expired., i.e. your I-20 is no longer valid and your Form I-94 is expired. In turn, this means that you must depart from the USA.

• Form I-20 ID

The I-20 ID (Student) copy is the F-1 student's copy of the I-20 issued for the program and level of study the student is presently pursuing. The back page of the I-20 ID contains lines for an endorsement by a Designated

School Official (DSO) affirming that the information on the front of the I-20 ID is correct. There are spaces for information about the F-1 student's dependents, employment authorization, and notations by a BCIS official. Students who plan to travel outside of the USA temporarily, and who intend to re-enter the U.S. to continue their academic studies, must obtain a signature on their I-20 ID from the International Student Advisor **before** leaving the United States.

Remember that:

- Your passport must be valid beyond the date on which you plan to re-enter the U.S.
- If the visa is valid for only one entry, or has expired, a new visa can be obtained from the U.S. Consulate in your home country or in the country you are visiting. You will need to present evidence of sufficient financial support to cover the expense of your studies, as well as your current I-20 ID (or a new I-20 if appropriate), passport and (expired) visa. Check with the embassy at which you will apply for a new F-1 visa for specific requirement and fees. You should allow enough time during your trip to apply and obtain a new visa.
- You should consult the embassy of the country you are planning to visit to find out whether or not you need a visitor's visa for that country.

Remember to maintain your F-1 Student Status, you must...

• **Be full-time enrolled:**

F-1 students must maintain full-time student status each semester until they receive their degrees. Enrollment for 12 credits or more constitutes full-time enrollment in the undergraduate program at SUNY Ulster. You may check with your academic advisor to understand what is considered full-time for your specific department. At SUNY Ulster, full-time enrollment is required during the Fall (late August-mid December) and Spring (late January-mid May) semesters. You are not required to be enrolled during the Summer (mid May-late August) and Winter sessions (mid December-late January).

• **Obtain authorization before starting any employment – including off-campus internships:**

Employment opportunities are limited for international students in the U.S. On-campus employment is allowed for F-1 visa holders only with authorization through Student Services. On-campus employment is limited to 20 hours per week during the academic session and 40 hours per week during the vacation periods. Off-campus employment is available only with authorization through Student Services and/or the BCIS. You must be in valid F-1 status to enjoy the privilege of on- or off-campus employment.

• **Report address changes immediately:**

Please update immediately, with Student Services, any changes in your name, address and/or phone number.

• **Request an Extension for your Stay:**

If the date on your I-20 ID is going to expire and you need time in the U.S. beyond the expiration date, in order to continue and complete your program, you must request an extension for your stay. You should apply for an extension at Student Services at least 30 days before the expiration date noted on your Form I-20.

If you fall out of status, you must apply for a Reinstatement of F-1 Status

Students who fall out of F-1 status may apply for a reinstatement of F-1 student status provided that the student has not been out of status for more than 5 months. Please make an appointment with an International Student Advisor to learn more about this process.

The reinstatement process includes the following procedures:

- Apply for re-admission to SUNY Ulster. (This requirement may be waived in certain circumstances)
- Complete Form I-539.
- Write a letter to BCIS requesting reinstatement, explaining the reasons for falling out of status and stating that you have not engaged in unauthorized employment
- Provide documentation from your department to support your reinstatement to student status. This letter must include the expected degree completion date
- Provide a photocopy of the original I-20 ID
- Obtain a new Form I-20. Provide proof of financial support in order to get new I-20.
- Provide the original I-94, and a photocopy of your visa and passport ID page(s).
- Provide a check or money order for \$120.00 made payable to "BCIS". (Fees are subject to change).
- **Please note: You are not allowed to work, on or off-campus, until a BCIS decision has been made about your application for reinstatement to student status.**