**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT’S GUIDE TO SEVIS**

**WHAT IS IT?**

“SEVIS” stands for the *Student and Exchange Visitor Information System*. It is a secure internet-based system that allows schools and the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, formerly INS) to exchange data on the visa status of international students. Accurate and current information is transmitted electronically throughout an F-1 student’s academic career in the United States. The International Student Advisor, known to USCIS as the Designated School Official (and referred to in this memo as the DSO) is responsible for reporting this information in SEVIS. United States embassies and consulates also have access to SEVIS.

**IS SEVIS NEW?**

Yes and no. The requirement that schools provide the federal government with information about each student’s status is not new. The INS (now USCIS) has for many years required most of the information that will be reported to SEVIS. But the existing paper-based system did not allow widespread coordination between schools and governmental agencies. In 1996, Congress passed legislation directing the INS to move to an electronic data collection system. Technical challenges and lack of funding delayed the program for several years. However, in October of 2001 Congress passed the USA Patriot Act that authorized additional SEVIS funding and required nationwide compliance by January 30, 2003.

**HOW DOES SEVIS WORK?**

- After Wagner College admits an international student, SEVIS is notified and USCIS approves the College’s request to issue an I-20. The Wagner College Admissions Office prints and issues the new bar-coded I-20 form to the student. Students already attending Wagner have been issued new I-20s by the DSO.
- The student visits the U.S. consulate abroad, and the consulate confirms that the I-20 the student is carrying is a valid document. If everything is in order, the consulate issues the visa.
- A USCIS officer at the airport reports to SEVIS the student’s entry into the U.S. When the student arrives on campus, he/she reports to the International Student Advisor, (DSO) who confirms through SEVIS the student’s enrollment.
- The College continues to provide regular electronic reports to USCIS throughout the student’s academic career.
- Finally, SEVIS records the student’s departure from the United States.
WHAT DATA DOES SEVIS COLLECT?

Wagner College must report:

- Whether the student has enrolled at the school or failed to enroll.
- A change of the student’s or dependent’s legal name or address.
- Any student who graduates prior to the end date listed on the I-20.
- Academic or disciplinary actions taken due to criminal conviction.
- Whether the student drops below a full course of study and the authorization for it from the DSO.
- Termination date and reason for termination.
- Other data generated by standard procedures such as program extensions, school transfers, changes in level of study, employment authorizations, and reinstatement.
- Any student who fails to maintain status or complete his or her program.

WHAT DOES “FAIL TO MAINTAIN STATUS” MEAN?

Some examples of failure to maintain status include dropping from full-time to part-time enrollment without prior approval from the DSO, attending a school other than the one a student is authorized to attend, failure to apply for a timely transfer from another U.S. school to Wagner College, failure to apply for an I-20 extension or change in level of study, unauthorized employment, and failure to report a change of address.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILING TO MAINTAIN STATUS?

The student’s record will be updated in SEVIS every semester. Students who fail to maintain status lose the privileges of their student visa and become subject to deportation. Specific consequences may include denial of re-entry to the U.S., inability to move from undergraduate to graduate status, denial of requests for Optional Practical Training (OPT), denial of requests to change visa status, and possible denial of future visa applications.

CAN A STUDENT WHO IS “OUT OF STATUS” REGAIN LEGAL STATUS?

If a student drops below a full course of study without prior approval from the DSO, that “event” would be reported to USCIS via SEVIS, and he or she would be out of status. The student may apply to USCIS for reinstatement if the violation resulted from circumstances beyond his or her control. Reinstatement is intended to be a rare benefit for exceptional cases. If USCIS does not reinstate the student, he or she may not appeal that decision.
HOW WILL WAGNER COLLEGE HELP STUDENTS COMPLY WITH IMMIGRATION LAWS?

Wagner College is committed to assisting students in ways that prevent status violations from occurring. Accordingly, these policies are in effect:

1. Throughout the registration period, the DSO will monitor the enrollment of international students. “Full time” means 4 units per semester for undergraduates, and 9 credits for graduate students. International students may not register for less than full time without approval from the DSO.

2. International students must not drop below a full course of study after classes have begun without prior authorization from the DSO. A student who is authorized for a reduced course load must enroll in at least 2 units. Acceptable reasons for a reduced credit load include:

   • Students who experience academic difficulties (for example, unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or English language difficulties) may take a reduced course load. Students are allowed to drop below full time for academic difficulties only once during their degree program. Documentation from the faculty advisor is required.

   • Graduate students who have completed required coursework may register for thesis or dissertation credit only. Graduate assistants may register for six credits instead of nine. Documentation from the appropriate supervisor is required.

   • Students in their final term of study need only to register for the course hours required to complete the degree. Documentation from the faculty advisor is required.

   • Students who have a medical problem can reduce their course load. Documentation from a licensed physician or psychologist is required.

Remember: only the DSO has the authority to approve a reduced course load. This approval must be obtained before dropping below full time status.

WHAT HAPPENS IF WAGNER COLLEGE FAILS TO COMPLY WITH SEVIS REGULATIONS?

The USCIS is required to audit the College’s compliance with these new requirements every two years. Failure to comply with the federal regulations could result in the loss of the College’s ability to accept international students.
DOES SEVIS BENEFIT STUDENTS IN ANY WAY?

Data moves faster through an electronic system than through a paper system. Students can expect that USCIS forms will be produced faster, applications for benefits such as Optional Practical Training will be approved more quickly, and visas will be granted without long delays.

WHAT SHOULD STUDENTS DO TO HELP MAKE SEVIS AT WAGNER RUN SMOOTHLY?

• Check your Wagner email account, voicemail and mailbox regularly
• Understand the immigration regulations and learn how to maintain lawful status in the U.S., and refer any questions or problems immediately to the DSO
• Be proactive---plan your course schedule carefully and make an appointment with your faculty advisor in order to register during the proper registration period
• Make travel arrangements early and be sure you have a current, valid signature on page 3 of your I-20. Come to the DSO a week before traveling if a new signature is needed.
• Keep all documents up-to-date. Changes in program level or major, extension of program, change of address and other authorizations must be made in a timely manner and on SEVIS documents. Allow time for processing new forms.
• Be sure that your finances are in order. You will not be able to register for classes if you have an outstanding tuition balance.
• If you do not register for classes for a fall or spring semester, you are required by USCIS regulations to depart the United States.

Thank you for your cooperation regarding these regulations.
You are a valuable asset to the Wagner Community!

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