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News Release

DHS OFFERS TRAVEL TIPS FOR ARRIVING FOREIGN STUDENTS AND EXCHANGE VISITORS

200,000 Foreign Students And Exchange Visitors Expected For Spring Semester

WASHINGTON, D.C.– The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today issued important reminders to assist the estimated 200,000 foreign students and exchange visitors expected to arrive in the United States for the spring semester.

These reminders for foreign students and exchange visitors registered in the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) are intended to ensure that legitimate students are quickly processed at ports of entry. A comprehensive list of answers to frequently asked SEVIS questions has also been posted online at www.ice.gov and www.cbp.gov.

The SEVIS system was implemented after the 9/11 terrorist attacks as part of the federal government's effort to restore integrity to the nation's immigration system. SEVIS is a web-based program that maintains information on international students (F/M visas) and exchange visitors (J visas) and their dependents residing in the United States. It is administered by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) and used by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers at ports of entry. SEVIS has simplified what was once a manual process, resulting in more accurate and timely data, faster processing and fewer delays.

"The SEVIS program is a successful homeland security initiative due in large part to the cooperation we have received from all of the program's stakeholders," said Michael J. Garcia, DHS Assistant Secretary for ICE. "As the new 2005 semester starts, we encourage all SEVIS participants -- including students, exchange visitors, and school and program administrators -- to review the program requirements and take responsibility for making sure their records are updated and correct. By making these efforts now, our academic and exchange program partners can help to ensure that legitimate students don't experience unnecessary delays when they enter the country."

"We are a welcoming nation, and our doors of opportunity and education are open. We must ensure that those presenting themselves for entry are legitimate. SEVIS is the program that helps U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers to quickly verify that students presenting themselves at our borders are actual students and exchange visitors," said U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Robert C. Bonner.

ICE and CBP offer the following recommendations for students and exchange visitors:

Travel Tips for Students and Exchange Visitors

1. Hand carry (do not check) the following documents:
 - a. Your passport;
 - b. Your SEVIS form I-20 or DS-2019;
 - c. Evidence of financial resources;
 - d. Evidence of student or exchange visitor status, such as tuition receipts, transcripts or letter of acceptance;
 - e. Paper receipt for the SEVIS fee; and
 - f. The name and contact information of your designated school official or sponsor

Important Note: *If you are a new student, remember to carry with you the sealed envelope given to you by the U.S. Department of State's Consular Officer -- attached to your passport. It is important that you do not open this envelope.*

2. Inform the CBP Officer at the port of entry as soon as possible that you will be a new or returning student or exchange visitor in the United States.
3. Report to your school or program upon arrival so that your school official can validate your participation in SEVIS.
4. Maintain contact with your designated school or sponsor official throughout your stay to ensure your SEVIS data is updated and accurate.

Important Note: *If you are a new exchange visitor participant, remember to carry with you the sealed envelope given to you by the U.S. Department of State's Consular Officer -- attached to your passport. It is important that you do not open this envelope.*

The Department of Homeland Security also reminds SEVIS registered schools and exchange visitor programs of their responsibility to maintain up-to-date records on all of their foreign students and exchange visitors.

As of December 2004, about 725,000 students and exchange visitors (F-1, M-1 and J-1 visa categories), along with 120,000 dependents, were registered in SEVIS. More than 7,800 schools and 1,400 exchange programs are active in SEVIS. From September 2003, when all foreign students, exchange visitors and their academic or cultural programs were required to register with SEVIS, through September 2004, SEVIS recorded a slight increase in the foreign student (F/M visa) population from approximately 605,000 to 640,000.

To date, ICE's Compliance Enforcement Unit, responsible for identifying individuals who attempt to abuse the student immigration system, has sent 3,342 investigative leads on potential SEVIS violations to the field, resulting in 558 arrests.

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