Student and Exchange Visitor Program

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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INFORMATION FOR: Designated School Officials

FROM: SEVIS II Team

SUBJECT: SEVIS II Anxieties, Concerns, and Misconceptions

Purpose: The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is developing the next generation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The new system, known as SEVIS II, will introduce a number of changes affecting the work of designated school officials (DSOs).

During our outreach efforts, a number of DSOs have expressed some anxieties and concerns regarding SEVIS II. We have also identified some misconceptions about SEVIS II and its functionality.

This document addresses those issues. We have used actual questions gathered during our outreach activities and present them here as asked by a DSO.

Members of the SEVIS II local user group have contributed to the development of this document by providing practice tips. The following icon identifies local user group practice tips:

Tip = Local User Group Practice Tip

Comments: To comment on this SEVIS II information document or suggest a change, please e-mail sevp@dhs.gov with "SEVIS II Information 1011-06 Comment" in the subject line.

Table of Contents

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

1. KEY TERMS

1.1. Certificate of Eligibility (COE)

SEVIS II will support a paperless process for immigration purposes. This eliminates the need for paper Forms I-20, Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status. Using the term COE rather that the form number reflects the electronic process and elimination of paper forms that SEVIS II will bring.

1.2. Initial Operating Capability (IOC)

The initial release of SEVIS II will have limited functionality. During IOC, we will migrate records from SEVIS I to SEVIS II. Public users will use this time to create their own customer accounts.

During IOC, school officials will review school data migrated from SEVIS I and update this information with additional data elements for SEVIS II.

1.3. Full Operating Capability

Full deployment of SEVIS II; when it is the system of record.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

2. GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT SEVIS II

2.1. Why is SEVIS II necessary?

SEVIS II is necessary for a number of reasons. The project started with an assessment of SEVIS to determine whether the existing system could meet the needs of its users and support national security. Through a number of studies as well as input from stakeholders, we concluded SEVIS has certain vulnerabilities and architectural limitations that patches and upgrades cannot overcome. Based on this assessment, we determined a new system is necessary and identified areas for improvement.

During planning and development, we are focusing on national security and improved usability. In order for the system to work as it should, we rely on you for feedback. We are developing a user friendly system with increased functionality to make it easier to input, validate and search for data. This minimizes the chance for user error and results in better data.

2.2. Will SEVIS II have some of the same performance issues as SEVIS?

Performance will improve in SEVIS II. Developers are building the system with more flexible architecture and to handle more records, solving problems in today's SEVIS.

2.3. **Are you receiving input from SEVIS users in the development process?**

Yes. From the initial stages of development through today, we have sought the feedback of the people who know SEVIS best – its users.

We maintain active SEVIS II user groups on Yahoo, attend numerous conferences throughout the year, and meet with a group of experienced DSOs from the Washington DC area on a monthly basis. Our partners at the Department of State (DoS) also work closely with senior practitioners from the exchange visitor community.

Also, the SEVP local user group has contributed to this document by providing practice pointers to help their colleagues prepare for SEVIS II.

2.4. **Are you considering some of the problems associated with SEVIS implementation as you plan for SEVIS II?**

Yes. We rely on the lessons learned from SEVIS implementation, both good and bad, in planning and developing SEVIS II. One of the foundational internal documents used in development, the SEVIS II Vision Document, details the issues associated with SEVIS implementation. The recognition of these experiences allows us to avoid them in SEVIS II implementation.

2.5. **Given the delay in the planned release of SEVIS II, I am concerned that you are shifting focus to other projects. Is this the case?**

No. We remain dedicated to SEVIS II and continue to work on its development. We refocused our efforts and improved certain processes based on lessons from our previous work.

2.6. **There is going to be a lot more information in SEVIS II. Will the system be user friendly?**

One of our goals in developing SEVIS II is to make the system easy to use. The local user group emphasized the need for a user friendly system and they will continue to be advocates as development moves forward.

2.7. **Will SEVIS II take up more of my time, leaving me less time for other student services?**

We are developing SEVIS II with this in mind. While there will be additional information in the system, we anticipate that improved business rules and overall functionality should actually decrease the time you spend in the system. After the initial transition, we believe you will spend less time on data entry, which will provide you with more time to advise students.

2.8. **I am concerned that SEVIS II will change the way we interact with students. Will we lose our connection with them if they don't need to come to the office for travel signatures on their Forms I-20?**

SEVIS II will change the way you do business but we do not believe it has to change your connection with students. The new system presents an opportunity to examine your processes and find new ways to interact with students.

Tip *This is where we as practitioners need to re-envision our own processes and interactions with students. SEVIS II will make the students more accountable for the maintenance of their own status. Since they will have access to view their information in SEVIS II, perhaps instead of email messages asking all students to come in for travel signatures, DSOs could send an email instructing them to access their SEVIS record to view their admissibility indicators and encourage those whose indicators are yellow or red to come in for a travel advising. This could allow for more targeted, effective advising.*

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

3. Transition Issues

3.1. **Will you be providing us with notice before beginning IOC?**

Yes. We will continue to provide updates on the SEVIS II timeline as we have information to share. Additionally, we will notify the user community at least six months prior to the start of IOC to help you prepare for the transition.

3.2. **How long will IOC last?**

IOC will last six months. The user community assisted us making this decision. At the 2010 NAFSA National Conference, we conducted a poll on the desired length of IOC. A majority of the respondents preferred a period less than one year but greater than three months. The six month period should provide sufficient time for IOC activities and limits the time SEVIS and SEVIS II will be running concurrently.

3.3. **Will we have to update both systems during IOC?**

No. During IOC, SEVIS I will continue to be the system of record. You will continue to maintain school and student information in SEVIS I during IOC.

However, as we are transitioning during IOC, you will need to create SEVIS II accounts and provide updated school information.

3.4. **How can DSOs keep up, especially during the transition from SEVIS to SEVIS II, with resources already stretched?**

We understand there will be additional work during the transition. While each office will prepare in its own way, we can tell you we will assist you.

The delay in implementation of SEVIS II provides all of us with additional time to prepare for the transition.

We will use this time to provide additional guidance, training, and job aids. By providing you with this information well in advance of the transition, we hope it will help you plan and prepare for IOC.

Tip *This is where it is critically important to develop campus implementation partners to help with some of this work. For small offices additional manpower can be temporarily solicited from other offices to focus on specific tasks relating to implementation. This is where developing a good implementation plan comes into play. By working with your institutional implementation partners now, you can assess the current state of affairs at your institution, identify how changes may affect current business processes and create a rough plan – think of it as an outline for a research paper – that articulates in general terms what policies, procedures and information is affected, and what needs to be done, by when and by whom to accommodate the changes needed. Over time, as more details become available, the outline will become increasingly fleshed out with more specifics tasks and assignments. For now, though, a general plan is a good start.*

3.5. How do we communicate SEVIS II changes to our internal partners?

This is a challenge we all face. Because each institution is unique, you are in the best position to determine how and when to communicate with your internal partners.

Based on our own experiences, we recommend staying as current as possible on SEVIS II through our updates and guidance. Once you have this information, you can determine how it will affect your institution and who you need to inform.

Tip *The first thing you need to do is to figure out what is fact versus what is still speculation and rumor. Once you are sure of what you know, then you can figure out what sort of communication can be done right now. Take a few moments to think about how you do business now. With whom do you interact on a regular basis? These individuals could form part of your implementation team. What do you know about SEVIS II right now? Now is the time to give them an idea of the government's vision for how SEVIS II will work, emphasizing that the details are yet to come. Have them help you brainstorm how these changes could affect their operations as well as yours. Does the fact that the student must create their own customer account and provide you with an IIN before you can create a record for them mean anything to the Admissions office? To the Registrar? How about the need to have each academic program defined in SEVIS prior to creating a record for an international student?*

3.6. What will happen to the paper Forms I-20 after SEVIS II is implemented?

There will be a transition period during which students will still be able to use the paper Forms I-20. The length of the transition period has not been defined. We will address this and other issues in a transition plan, which we will develop over the next year.

As we develop the transition plan, we will be reaching out to you to receive input on your concerns with the transition so that we can all be better prepared.

Students should retain their historical paper Forms I-20.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

4. TRAINING

4.1. Will you be providing training on SEVIS II and the changes in the new system?

Yes. We started training through our participation at various conferences and through the materials we have provided on the SEVP Web site.

Additionally, we are planning an extensive outreach and training program for school officials and students. This training will include continued participation at conferences, teleconferences, and webinars. We will also work with our colleagues at EducationUSA to assist in training prospective students who are outside of the United States.

4.2. Will SEVP provide training for students?

SEVP will provide, as part of a training plan, training specifically for students.

SEVP works with EducationUSA on a regular basis to discuss their role in training students. Through their advising centers around the world, EducationUSA can reach a large number of students. We will also work with other government partners to assist in training students.

Tip *Even though the government will provide training, DSOs will still need to be involved in this – either by getting the word out to people or by taking the materials SEVP provided and scheduling trainings for students on the U.S. campus.*

4.3. How do we inform and train students on the new system?

We will work together to educate students on the new system. We will provide training for students and will also provide you with information and guidance that you can use to help train students at your institution.

Tip *Each school operates differently and communicates differently with its students. The schools are in the best position to communicate and assist in training of students who will need to transition from SEVIS into SEVIS II. When SEVIS II IOC gets closer, it might be a good idea to recruit some international students into brainstorming methods for effectively reaching out to their colleagues. Assess the resources available to you (space, technology, manpower, etc). What type of outreach makes sense? Is it feasible to offer customer account creation sessions on your campus by reserving a computer lab for certain period of time? Or maybe host a Customer Account Creation coffee hour/café? Or work with IT to create a training video?*

4.4. Will the government provide training for students?

Yes. As part of our training plan, we will provide training specifically for students.

We will also work with other government partners to assist in training students. We work with EducationUSA on a regular basis to discuss their role in training students. Through their advising centers around the world, EducationUSA can reach a large number of students.

Tip *Even though the government will provide training, DSOs will still need to be involved in this -- either by getting the word out to people or by taking the materials provided by the government and scheduling trainings for students on the U.S. campus*

4.5. Are you going to provide us with any resources or other assistance for training students?

Yes. We will provide information and guidance for you to leverage in training students.

Tip *Regardless of the training tools developed by the government, it is important to recognize that schools will need to develop in-house training plan for its students. How will you reach out to continuing students to inform them of the need to create new accounts? You will need to assess what makes sense for your institution. Can you do a mass customer account creation session by taking over a computer lab somewhere? Maybe something on-line? Or are you small enough where a more personalized approach is feasible? We would recommend collaborating with colleagues in developing a plan. Use the resources that will become available.*

4.6. What steps are you going to take to train other agencies about SEVIS II?

We are working closely with the agencies that will be affected by the transition to SEVIS II. This includes other DHS components, Department of State, the Social Security Administration, and state agencies.

As we develop the paper form for domestic use, we will work with officials at various state departments of motor vehicles to solicit feedback on the form and train their decision makers.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

5. Customer Accounts

5.1. Why will customer accounts be necessary?

Customer accounts are a DHS initiative to create a one person, one record system for people dealing with the immigration line of business. It will make it easier to do business and streamline application processes.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) transformation project will initiate the customer account. SEVP works closely with USCIS to coordinate efforts on the establishment of the customer accounts.

5.2. **Who will need a customer account?**

Any member of the public who needs to access SEVIS II as either a school official or a nonimmigrant needs a customer account. This includes all school officials listed on the Form I-17, students, spouses and dependent children.

5.3. **Why will the head of school need a customer account?**

The head of school is required to have a customer account because s/he is the signature authority when certain changes are made to the I-17.

5.4. **Will the head of school be able to transfer his or her account to another head of school?**

No. Individuals will have unique customer accounts. They will not be transferable.

5.5. **Will spouses and dependent children have to create their own accounts?**

Yes. However, students under the age of 14 must have a parent or guardian take all actions on their behalf.

5.6. **What will the customer account allow someone to do?**

If you are a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, you will be able to do the following with a customer account:

- Self-identify as a head of school or program
- Be appointed as a principal designated school official (PDSO) or responsible officer (RO) by a head of school or program
- Be appointed as a DSO by a PDSO or a head of school or program
- Request/permit appointment as an alternate responsible officer (ARO) by an RO or a head of school or program

A foreign national who wishes to attend school in the United States will provide their account information to a PDSO/DSO and request a COE for an F or M program of study.

A foreign national who wishes to participate in an exchange visitor program in the United States will provide their account information to RO/ARO and request a COE for an exchange visitor program.

5.7. **If I leave my position with my current school, will I still have access to my customer account?**

Yes, you will have access to your customer account. However, when you leave the school, the PDSO will disassociate you from the school.

You will no longer be able to access the information related to your former school. If you take a position at another school, the PDSO at the new school will associate your account with that school. This is different from the current system where a DSO obtains a new SEVIS user name at the new school.

5.8. **How will students know about the customer accounts?**

As part of our training and outreach, we will work with you and colleagues in other parts of the government to reach out to students to provide them with information regarding the customer accounts. This will include information on when the accounts need to be created and step-by-step instructions for the account setup process.

For incoming students, schools will need to modify some of the preliminary information they make available to prospective students to advise them of the need to set up a customer account, should they wish to study in the U.S. During IOC, websites and written materials provided prospective international students should be modified to reflect the requirement, how to establish an account and how and by when an international student must provide his or her IIN to the school for use in the immigration sponsorship process.

5.9. **How can students with limited or no Internet access create accounts?**

We understand that all students do not have easy access to the Internet. In some cases, students will have to travel.

We are working with EducationUSA and other programs within the Department of State to leverage their services in aiding students with account setup. We anticipate that students will be able to go to EducationUSA advising centers in their home country to work with their advisors in creating accounts.

5.10. **How will students with limited English language skills create and maintain customer accounts?**

Students with limited English language skills, particularly those coming to study English as a second language, can have a customer account representative assist them with customer account creation and maintenance.

5.11. **How will students with disabilities create and maintain customer accounts?**

If students have a mental or physical disability that impedes their ability to create and/or maintain a customer account, they can have a customer account representative.

5.12. **What happens if a current student does not create an account during IOC?**

A student's failure to create a customer account before SEVIS II goes live will affect that student's status. Without an active certificate of eligibility, the student cannot apply for benefits, cannot travel and would be missing a required document for visa applications. It is important that SEVP and DSOs work together to ensure all students create accounts.

During IOC, you will be able to see which students have created accounts, allowing you to also work with those students who have not done so.

Tip *When we get closer to IOC, try using student social networks in getting the word out about the need to create accounts. Maybe think about have a student or two on your SEVIS II implementation planning team. Don't use them to identify individual students who haven't created accounts, but rather to help send out more generic reminders.*

5.13. **When creating an account, students have to associate old records. What if a student does not want to associate an old record because it may contain history the student does not want connected to the record?**

Students will not be able to disassociate records on their own. SEVP will have to approve requests to disassociate records.

5.14. **What happens if I lose my account login information?**

When you create your customer account, you will create "golden" questions. You will use the responses you provide to these questions to retrieve your login information if it is lost or forgotten.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

6. PAPERLESS PROCESS

6.1. **In the paperless environment, what happens if SEVIS II is slow or not working?**

This is a legitimate concern. We can say that it is a priority for us and we are working to identify ways to avoid or mitigate problems associated with system performance.

6.2. **Will Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers only look at the SEVIS II admissibility indicator when a student arrives at the port of entry?**

The SEVIS II admissibility indicator will be one point of reference for CBP officers at the port of entry. It is not our intent for CBP to rely solely on the SEVIS II admissibility indicator in making admissibility decisions but, instead, to use it as an element in the decision-making process. Accordingly, it will be important that a nonimmigrant checks the account before traveling to the United States in F, M or J status.

6.3. **If SEVP plans to make SEVIS II paperless, why do we need paper forms for domestic purposes?**

SEVIS II will only remove paper for immigration purposes. Students, exchange visitors and dependents will no longer take paper forms with them to U.S. consulates or the port of entry.

SEVP is unable, however, to implement a paperless process for all domestic purposes such as driver's licenses, which involve state agencies. Because state systems don't always interface with federal systems, we must provide a way for students to show proof of status and benefits to these agencies.

6.4. **If there are no paper Forms I-20, how will a student with on-campus employment or curricular practical training (CPT) prove employment authorization to potential employers?**

These types of employment authorization will be available in a student's account. The domestic form will also show all employment authorizations. In lieu of an employment authorization document, students will provide that form to employers as proof of employment authorization.

6.5. **How will it work with USCIS benefit applications without paper Forms I-20 to submit as supporting documents?**

We are working closely with USCIS, which is also in the process of updating its systems and processes, to ensure a seamless transition from the paper environment to the new electronic process.

Through improved interfaces and the unique identifier associated with customer accounts, USCIS adjudicators will be able to access all of the information they now receive on the paper Form I-20.

6.6. **Do you really have to change the name "Form I-20" to "Certificate of Eligibility?"**

Yes, the change is necessary because the system change will shift the focus to the actions that constitute a certification of eligibility. It is important to differentiate between the certification of eligibility and the student's record.

6.7. **If SEVP is going paperless, can I make my records paperless?**

Yes. You can maintain electronic records and you do not have to wait until SEVIS II.

6.8. **If there are no paper forms, what will we put in student files?**

You can enter any information that supports an action you will take in SEVIS II. For example, you will need to keep a doctor's recommendation used as the basis for approved a reduced course load for medical reasons.

SEVIS II affords us the opportunity to examine all aspects of how we do business and make improvements. It's important to remember that SEVIS II is a database, and the government cannot tell us how to do business. The decision to go paperless or exactly what to keep in our files is an individual business decision of the academic institution.

6.9. **Many students use the Form I-20 to receive a student loan in the home country. What will they use if there is no longer a Form I-20?**

This is a valid concern, but SEVIS II will allow you to print a draft of the COE, which it will also send electronically to students.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

7. Student Access

7.1. **Can students be trusted to enter accurate information?**

We understand this is a major concern for many DSOs, but we believe students can be trusted to enter this information. Students enter personal information on admissions applications, rental applications, applications for driver's licenses and social security cards and when opening bank accounts every day without problems.

SEVP will have a process to change information if a student enters it incorrectly. Additionally, you will have opportunities to check the information students enter. For instance, when creating a COE for a new student, you can review spelling of names, dates of birth, etc.

This shift from total control to shared control of the SEVIS record is something that DSOs are going to have to find a way to come to terms with. Our challenge will be to find ways to enable the students to responsibly manage their immigration records. This includes making sure that the information we make available to them on how to create their accounts, how to report address changes, and how to understand the information they see in SEVIS II is as clear and simple as possible.

7.2. **What information will students be allowed to add or edit in SEVIS II?**

Students will only enter biographic information, addresses, and certain employment information in their accounts. You will continue to enter program information as you do now.

7.3. **Will students be able to change information on their program of study?**

No, students will not be able to change program of study information.

7.4. **Will students be able to recommend their own employment or practical training such as optional practical training (OPT), CPT, or off-campus employment?**

No. Students will have the option to use SEVIS II to send requests for OPT, CPT or off-campus employment to you. You will continue to make the recommendation/authorization as you do now.

7.5. **Will I know when student changes account information?**

Yes, you will have this information. If a student has a current relationship with the school, SEVIS II will notify you when a student updates this information.

7.6. **What will students be able to see in their accounts?**

Students will be able to view their historical information and current certificates of eligibility, along with all associated requests.

7.7. **Am I responsible if a student enters incorrect information?**

No. Students will be responsible for the information they enter. As DSOs, you may review the information and suggest corrections, but this is not a requirement.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

8. THE UPDATED I-17

8.1. **What new information will SEVIS II require on the Form I-17 in SEVIS II?**

The updated SEVIS II I-17 will include more detailed information regarding your programs of study and academic calendars. We developed a table listing the Form I-17 information for SEVIS II that allows you to identify all fields (new and old) on the updated I-17.

Tip *Take this chart and share it with your campus partners. Brainstorm with them on what it will take for the institution to collect this information. While you're at it, find out who owns which parts of the process and see if you can partner with those individuals to create a plan for how to collect and report that information. You may find that the other office might have people willing to assist in this.*

8.2. **When will we have to provide this information?**

You will initially provide this information during IOC for SEVIS II Form I-17 completion. You will then maintain the information as it changes through petition updates.

8.3. **What is the purpose of having academic calendars on the Form I-17?**

There are three purposes to the academic calendars:

- To put default values in student records. You will be able to edit those default values where allowed by regulation

- To assist our School Certification Branch in adjudicating new programs of study by providing them with a full understanding of the program

- To aid our compliance team by providing them with a point of reference when they are reviewing enrollment data to ensure students are meeting full course of study requirements

8.4. **The updated Form I-17 requires a lot of information. How do we get that from campus partners?**

We understand the challenges you face in receiving information from campus partners. Because of this, we have provided information related to the updated Form I-17 as early as possible to allow you to begin working with those partners now, well before SEVIS II implementation.

Tip *This is where having good, collaborative relationships with your campus partners is very important. It might be a good idea to share with them now so they also have some time to think about the issues surrounding the new I-17 during the IOC. Strategize with them on an initial plan for tackling this once SEVP releases their implementation tools and the IOC guidelines. The Registrar will be critical in providing this information.*

8.5. **Will we have to manually enter all of the new information?**

We are developing a process that will allow you to gather the information and upload it into SEVIS II so that you do not have to manually enter everything during IOC. Check the SEVP website for updates on this job aid.

Tip *It's important to note that you will still need to collaborate with other offices to get that information entered into whatever tool SEVP makes available.*

8.6. **Will SEVP provide any type of guidance to assist school officials gather this new information?**

Yes. We are working on additional guidance for the Form I-17 that provides a list of all fields with associated help text and business rules. We hope this guidance will allow you to better identify the information you have to gather so you can start the process early.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

9. SECURITY

9.1. Will the student access and increased interfaces make the system more vulnerable to hackers?

ICE is an extremely security-conscious agency. The security architecture for SEVIS II will be considerably different than that for SEVIS. There will be additional buffers and firewalls that will help mitigate the threat against hackers.

Only the batch interface will come through the Internet. Every batch user will be subject to a verification process. Part of that verification process is presenting a valid security certificate. SEVIS II will verify every batch transaction against that certificate.

9.2. Will SEVIS II be vulnerable to someone using students' passwords and accessing their accounts?

Yes. As with any password protected system, SEVIS II users will need to protect their passwords.

Tip *This is no different than it is now. The same vulnerability could be said to exist now with PDSO/DSO user IDs and passwords.*

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

10. HELP DESK

10.1. Will SEVIS II lead to more help desk tickets?

SEVIS II will lead to different types of help desk tickets while eliminating some of the issues that now require help desk tickets. SEVIS II will allow DSOs more opportunities to make corrections directly. These corrections will take effect immediately after your action.

SEVIS II will allow you to request standard data corrections through the system, which will generate a help desk ticket for you. You will still be able to call SEVP to request a data fix in those circumstances where a standard fix is not available.

10.2. Will students be able to call the help desk?

Yes, students will be able to call the help desk if the issue involves information they are responsible for maintaining. Otherwise, if the issue involves a DSO action, the help desk will refer students back to you.

10.3. Will SEVP have the resources to handle the increased call volume?

Yes. We have conducted studies to determine the necessary resources. Based on these studies, we are planning to ensure that we meet these we will have the resources in place to meet these needs.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary

11. Batch Concerns

11.1. Will batch vendors be prepared for SEVIS II?

We will provide the batch schema to vendors at least 12 months before the start of IOC. This should provide them the time they need to update systems.

11.2. What is the difference between batch and mass updates?

Batch processing is completed through an interface with a system outside of SEVIS. Many larger institutions currently use batch processing to update records in SEVIS. This will continue to be an option in SEVIS II.

Mass updates, which are a new concept in SEVIS II, will allow school officials to take actions, such as registration, for multiple student records. This will happen within SEVIS II, rather than through an interface with an outside system.

11.3. I am concerned about the two way exchange between SEVIS II and my school system. Will there be problems when I enter the same data differently, such as names?

Unlike the current batch process, which relies on names for matching, SEVIS II will be able to match using numeric identifiers. For instance, SEVIS II will have an optional School ID field, which you will be able to insert when creating a COE. We believe this will significantly improve matching between SEVIS and batch systems.

➢Top ➢Table of Contents ➢SEVP Home Page ➢Glossary