

DATE: March 16, 2020

SUBJECT: SEVIS guidance during COVID-19

Dear Sponsors,

The Department appreciates your efforts in addressing the cares and concerns of your exchange visitors during this challenging time. This email contains important updates regarding SEVIS records for current exchange visitor programs during the COVID-19 situation.

Per the Department's most recent guidance (dated March 13, 2020) regarding travel bans, sponsors need to determine the best course of action for the health, safety and welfare of the exchange visitors that are either in Initial status or Active status. If the exchange visitor's SEVIS status is:

- INITIAL – The Department urges sponsors to either cancel the programs altogether or defer the start dates to a date past the current recommended 60-day suspension period and issue new DS2019s. These actions update SEVIS with the information to inform consular officers of what appropriate action to take.
- ACTIVE - If the person is in the United States but must go home or is stuck outside of the country and cannot return because the visa is expired, sponsors can use the shorten program function. This ends the program in SEVIS preventing the exchange visitor from traveling until the sponsor is able to re-issue a new DS-2019 for travel purposes. Should sponsors determine that it is necessary to shorten an exchange visitor's program, the Department requires the sponsor to select "Other" as the reason. In addition, insert the following specific reason: *Exchange visitor's program is shortened due to emergent COVID-19 reasons.*
- Sponsors may also keep an exchange visitor's SEVIS record active until the exchange visitor is able to return to the United States to continue with his or her original program objectives. Exchange visitors should be mindful of the validity dates of their J-1 visas; they may need to renew their visas before they return to the United States.

Again, we appreciate your efforts in safeguarding your exchange visitors and yourselves. Your commitment to the Exchange Visitor Program does not go unnoticed, and particularly at a time like this we are very grateful for your partnership.

Sincerely,
Office of Private Sector Exchange