

To: All SEVIS Users

Date: January 17, 2012

Re: Timing is Everything: Getting Your Driver's License or Social Security Number

Number: 1112-05

Comments

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Background

New F, M and J nonimmigrants often apply for a driver's license or Social Security number (SSN) either too early after entering the United States or without the proper documentation. The purpose of the following information is to highlight best practices for incoming F, M and J nonimmigrants.¹

Purpose

One of the first things a new F, M or J nonimmigrant typically wants to do after entering the United States is get a driver's license or, where appropriate, an SSN. Like many things, however, correct timing is everything. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program wants all F, M or J nonimmigrants eligible for a driver's license or an SSN to have the easiest experience possible. Following these six simple tips makes the process go much smoother and saves a lot of time in the end:

1. **Wait 10 days after you arrive in the United States.** You may want to apply for a driver's license or SSN right away, but be patient. The 10-day wait allows time for all the government databases to update with your arrival information.
2. **Know what you are applying for and if you are eligible.** While you are waiting, talk with your school's designated school official (DSO) or sponsor's responsible officer (RO) or alternate responsible officer (ARO) to learn more about your state's driving rules and regulations. If you want an SSN, have your DSO or RO/ARO confirm that you are eligible before you apply.
3. **Make sure your record in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is up-to-date and in *Active* status.** SEVIS is the database that contains information for all F, M and J nonimmigrants in the United States. A DSO manages an F or M nonimmigrant's SEVIS record. An RO/ARO manages an exchange visitor's SEVIS record. The DSO or RO/ARO (whichever applies to you) must place your record in *Active* status when you report to the school or program. Talk with your DSO or RO/ARO before you apply for a license or SSN to make sure your record is *Active* in SEVIS. If your record is not *Active* when you apply, your application will be rejected.

¹ F-1 and M-1 students, J-1 exchange visitors, and accompanying F-2, M-2 or J-2 dependents

4. **Check your forms.** Check all your forms to make sure your information is correct. This is data integrity. Data integrity is very important because if you have different information on different forms, it will cause delays. Specifically, check your Form I-94, “Arrival/Departure Record,” for handwritten information. If the information on your Form I-94 is different than on your passport or Form I-20, “Certificate of Eligibility for Nonimmigrant Student Status,” or Form DS-2019, “Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor (J-1) Status,” please see the [DMV Fact Sheet](#) for more information.
5. **Wait two days after your DSO or RO/ARO activates your record in SEVIS.** After your DSO or RO/ARO activates your record in SEVIS, you should wait at least two federal business days before you apply for a driver’s license or SSN. This gives all the databases time to update with your new information.
6. **Bring all your paperwork.** When you go to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) – the common name for a state government office that issues driver’s licenses – or to the Social Security office, remember to bring all your paperwork. For most states, the paperwork includes these documents:
 - Form I-20 **or** Form DS-2019
 - Form I-94, “Arrival/Departure Record”
 - Passport (with visa, if applicable)
 - Proof of legal presence or residence (ask your DSO or RO/ARO what your state requires)

For an SSN, you must also bring a letter of employment and an endorsed Form I-20 (for F students). Exchange visitors should consult with their RO/ARO first to make sure the Social Security Administration requires a letter of employment for the J category.

These six tips should help you get your driver’s license or SSN without having any major problems. If you are interested in specific details about F-2, M-2 or J-2 dependents, please see page 8 of the [DMV Fact Sheet](#). Always talk with your DSO or RO/ARO before you try to apply. Your DSO or RO/ARO may have more information about your particular state. Safe travels!

Learn More

Driving in the United States

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/resources/driving/>

Obtaining a Social Security Number (SSN)

<http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/resources/social-security-number/>

DMV Fact Sheet

http://www.ice.gov/doclib/sevis/pdf/dmv_factsheet.pdf