

## SEVIS

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stipulate that colleges and universities must electronically notify the State Department and Immigration and Naturalization Service when a student has been accepted, registers for classes, drops out or graduates. The database will go online in early July, and colleges and universities must connect to it by Jan. 30, 2003.

However, Ginny Stark, University associate director of international programs, said the rules do not provide enough concrete details of the database, such as the specific student information it will keep. Until the INS or the Justice Department can provide more details, she said,

the University cannot begin to build an interface to the database.

"Until (the details) are in place, we don't know what we are going to do," she said.

The proposed rules also stipulate that individual schools must pay for the interface to the new database, train their employees to use it and log current international students into it.

International educators at Oregon State University and Lane Community College worry that paying for a new system without any financial compensation from the government will be difficult.

"We can do it, but I don't think it will be easy," said Christine Strahan, international student adviser at LCC. She said that while her of-

fice is small, she and one other employee will begin entering the nearly 300 names during the summer and work throughout the fall. That task may be more daunting for universities with larger international student enrollments, like Oregon State University and the University of Oregon, she said.

The database is the first piece of major legislation affecting international students since investigators discovered that Hani Hanjour, one of the suspected terrorists in the Sept. 11 attacks, entered the country on a student visa but never showed up to classes. Congress first proposed SEVIS in 1996 but never provided funds for the database. The database became part of the Enhanced Border

Security Act, which the Senate recently passed on a 97-0 vote and President Bush signed into law in mid-May. Lawmakers hope the database will replace the mostly-paper bureaucracy at the INS, which will allow the agency to keep better tabs on international students and educators.

There is a chance that not all colleges and universities will be ready, said Paul Hassen, assistant director of public affairs for the American Council on Education. He said international student admission and enrollment could be affected for fall 2003 if many colleges are not online by the deadline.

Valerie Rosenberg, associate director of international education at Oregon State University, worries that with the deadline so close for

SEVIS to be up and running, and so many questions left unanswered, the INS may not have enough time to test the entire database.

"We are all going to be trying to access the database on the same time. What if the system crashes?" she said.

Rosenberg said the speed of overhauling a huge bureaucracy that has only worked on paper until recently may be a daunting task. Also, the proposed system promises a lot of functionality that officials are not certain it can deliver.

"Our concern is some things seem to be asked for, and we don't know how that's going to work," she said.

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## Challenges

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Exchange Visitor Information System, or SEVIS, that will connect colleges and universities electronically with the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

However, international educators and student groups fear a new set of proposed visa restrictions could be just the beginning of a harsher climate that makes it extremely difficult for the more than 500,000 international students who study in the United States.

"We definitely understand the need to provide greater protection," said Julie Suchanek, legislative director for the Oregon Student Association. "But students should not be turned away or jump through a bunch of hoops to get an education."

International educators had to defend student visa requirements after investigators found that Hani Hanjour, one of the suspected terrorists of the Sept. 11 attacks, entered the country with a student visa but failed to attend classes.

In the months since Sept. 11, other agencies have proposed rules regarding international students. Some of the most recent proposals include:

- Students from Mexico or Canada will no longer be able to enroll part time at colleges in the United States.

- Students from the seven countries the State Department suspects of sponsoring terrorism will face more background checks before they can be issued student visas or other nonimmigrant visas. Those seven countries are Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, North Korea and Cuba.

- This scrutiny will become more strict when students from these countries sign up for "sensitive courses," which administration officials said includes classes that have a direct application to the development and use of weapons of mass destruction.

Advocacy groups like the Oregon Student Association argue that the heart of this debate is student access to colleges and universities. Suchanek feels that the increased rules could deter international students from applying for schools in the United States.

"Coming to school abroad is stressful enough, and this just exacerbates this unnecessarily," Suchanek said.

Administrators also think the myriad new rules and restrictions may make recruiting international students much more difficult. With competing institutions in Europe, Australia and Canada ready and willing to accept students — without the visa restrictions proposed in the U.S. — many international students could settle elsewhere.

"I think everyone in the field generally agrees that the new rules creates a negative effect for students to come to the U.S.," said Jack Van de Water, director of international programs at Oregon State University.

Both the University of Oregon and Oregon State University have seen an increase in international student applications for fall 2002, which is a trend many schools are seeing across the country. However, those short-term gains could disappear. Van de

Water said, if prospective international students hear or perceive that the new rules will make it more difficult to obtain a student visa.

Regardless of perceptions, the more visa restrictions, the more difficult it will be for students to enter the country, said Christine Strahan, international student adviser at Lane Community College.

"They may apply, we may admit

them, but they may not be able to get into the country," she said.

One problem administrators see is the unclear message the federal government is sending colleges and universities regarding issues surrounding international students.

Shortly after the Sept. 11 attacks, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., proposed legislation to place a six-month moratorium on new international

students. After meeting with higher education officials, Feinstein backed off the proposal. However, some international educators said the damage was already done and the wrong message had already been sent.

Since Feinstein's proposal, neither Congress nor the Bush administration has been able to provide a comprehensive list of changes to international student visas. As the different propos-

als trickle in, many educators worry the students may get lost in the minutiae of paperwork and proposals.

"We feel the effect that requirements are changing constantly," said Valerie Rosenberg, associate director of the office of international education at Oregon State University.

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