

Chair Dembrow, members of the committee

For the record, my name is Christina Luther. I am the Associate Director of the Office of International Student and Scholar Services at Portland State University. Thank you for inviting me to provide some information about the student visa process. I am quite familiar with the process as this has been my primary work at Portland State for 15 years. There has been quite a bit of misinformation in the press lately about students and their visas, so I am glad to be here to help clarify some of that information.

I'd like to begin by clarifying the process by which international students gain admission to the United States.

Once a U.S. institution has found an international applicant to be admissible and to have sufficient funding for a year of study, a record is created in the Department of Homeland Security database, SEVIS. This document is called an I-20. A prospective international student uses the I-20 to apply for an F1 student visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. ("F" refers to the section of the Code of Federal Regulations pertaining to international students [8 CFR 214.2(f)]). The visa is an entry document. It allows the holder to request entry to the United States in a particular classification. If the applicant is given an F1 visa, the prospective student may travel to the United States. At the border, the prospective student is required to present Customs and Border Protection officers a valid passport, an I-20 and the F1 visa. CBP officers review these documents and, if they find the individual to be a bona fide student, the individual is admitted to the United States in the F1, or student, classification. At this point the validity of the visa is no longer relevant as it is only an entry document. At the border immigration status is conferred. If an individual is properly admitted to the U.S. in student status, they may remain here as long as they maintain that student status.

F1 students are required to report to their schools within 30 days of the start of their programs of study. At that time, we review their immigration documents to make sure they've been properly adjudicated and we collect students' local addresses. School officials then are required to report to the federal government that students have arrived on campus, have registered for classes and have established a local residence. If a student enters the U.S. using our documentation but fails to report to campus in a timely manner, we are obliged to report that student to the government as a "no-show." This reporting will likely alert Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to a problem and the student's whereabouts will be sought.

After the initial registration of our new students in SEVIS, we are required to report each academic term whether or not each student has registered and if so, to report that they are enrolled full time. In Oregon, this reporting happens at least three times a year at the beginning of each academic quarter. At some schools the reporting happens 4 times a year. At language schools this reporting may happen as frequently as monthly.

If students are enrolled part-time, there must be a documented reason for the PT enrollment or we are required to report a status violation to the government. Additionally, we are required to report such events as changes of major or level of study, transfer to a new institution, failure to register, failure to complete a full course of study and many other occurrences.

If a student changes his place of residence, he is required to report the new address to his international office w/in 10 days of moving. International student advisors are obliged to report any of these changes to the federal government, via SEVIS, within 21 days of learning of them. In most instances we are much quicker with our reporting.

At the beginning of my statement, I mentioned the misinformation that has abounded in the media since Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's friends were arrested. The media has made reference to individuals entering the U.S. with expired visas or being allowed to remain here long after their visas had expired. In the 15 years I've been doing this work, I've seen a lot, but I have never seen a student admitted with an expired visa. I have, however, seen many students admitted who have valid visas and I-20s which appear to be valid, but SEVIS records which indicate a status violation. This is because CBP officers have, until very recently, not had sufficient access to SEVIS. They have not been able at primary inspection, to see if a student's immigration record is still active or has been terminated. I understand that in the last two weeks, this has changed. Officers at primary inspection can now determine if a student's record is active or terminated and, if it is terminated, I understand the individual will be directed to secondary inspection for closer review.

I have been working in international education for 16 years, all of them in the state of Oregon. In that time I have gotten to know thousands of international students. I believe strongly in the power of educational diplomacy. While these students contribute massively to our economy – international students and their families are estimated to have contributed more than \$300 million to the Oregon economy in 2011/12* – I know their contributions are far more immeasurable. They bring global perspectives to our campuses. They provide us with an opportunity to get to know perceived enemies and to realize that we frequently have the same hopes and dreams for our futures and our families. These young people are the most highly scrutinized population of non-immigrants in the United States. I fear that if they come under much more scrutiny, we run the risk of losing them and all that they contribute to our world.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.

*NAFSA: Association of International Educators Economic Impact Statement for Oregon:
<http://www.nafsa.org/File/eis2012/Oregon.pdf>