

DHS Ends Student Visa ‘Duration of Status’ – Key Changes and How Universities Can Prepare

August 10, 2026

On July 17, 2026, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a [final rule that eliminates the long-standing practice of Duration of Status \(D/S\)](#) and replaces it with a fixed period of admission for F and J visa holders. The rule, which takes effect September 15, 2026, will impact hundreds of thousands of F-1 students, J-1 exchange visitors, their dependents, and the institutions and employers that support them. Institutions need to be prepared to assist students and handle the new administrative demands. Here is what schools need to know and what they should be doing right now.

Duration of Status and how we got here

Since the early 1990s, the United States has admitted F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors under D/S, an admission policy that allowed visa holders to remain in the country as long as they were making normal progress toward completing their academic or research objectives, including any authorized Optional Practical Training (OPT). DHS published a notice of proposed rulemaking on August 28, 2025, and opened a 30-day public comment period.

The proposed rule drew nearly 22,000 public comments, including [a formal comment in opposition submitted by 35 members of Congress](#), but the final rule published on July 17, 2026, was largely unchanged from the original proposal. The rule has been classified as a “major rule,” making it subject to review under the Congressional Review Act, meaning Congress retains the authority to delay or overturn it before its September 15, 2026, effective date, though it is rare for Congress to take this type of action.

Key changes in the final rule

- **End of D/S and fixed-date admissions:** The new rule replaces D/S with a fixed visa term of no more than four years, listed as the “Admit Until Date” (AUD) on the Form I-94. DHS will allow for a transition period for F and J nonimmigrants already in the United States under D/S on September 15, 2026. These individuals will be allowed to remain in the United States until the earlier of their program end date on their applicable forms, or four years from the effective date of the rule, plus an applicable departure period. Importantly, any individual in this transition group who departs and reenters the United States on or after September 15, 2026, will be readmitted with a fixed AUD on their I-94, immediately placing them under the new framework.
- **Formal Extension of Stay (EOS) process.** Under the new rule, Designated School Officials (DSOs) and Responsible Officers (ROs) no longer have the authority to automatically extend end dates on F-1 or J-1 visas. Instead, they can only recommend an extension, and F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors who need to remain in the United States beyond their AUD must file an application with US Citizenship and Immigration Services before their AUD expires. Individuals filing for an EOS must ensure they meet the rule's extension eligibility requirements, including demonstrating “compelling” circumstances that justify the stay.
- **Cap on ESL duration of admission:** Under the current D/S framework, there is no hard cap on how long an F-1 student can remain enrolled in English as a second language (ESL) training. Under the new rule, F-1 students enrolled in ESL or English language training programs will now face a lifetime cap of 24 months on their period of admission for that purpose. DHS has clarified that time spent in English language training before the September 15, 2026, effective date will not count toward this limit.
- **Restrictions on transfers and changes of educational objective:** The new rule places limits on F-1 students' abilities to transfer schools or change their educational objectives. Students below the graduate level may not transfer schools or change their educational objective, such as switching majors, during their first year of study, unless the Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) approves an exception based on extenuating circumstances. Graduate students are prohibited from changing their educational objective or transferring at any point during their program unless SEVP approves a transfer due to extenuating circumstances. This SEVP exception for graduate transfers was not included in the proposed rule and was added in the final rule in response to public comments.

- **Prohibition on lateral or reverse matriculation:** Under the new rule, once an F-1 student completes a program at a given educational level, the student is barred from pursuing a subsequent program at the same or a lower level. For example, a student who earns a bachelor's degree may not return to pursue another undergraduate degree or an associate's degree. DHS has clarified in the final rule that this restriction applies only to programs completed on or after the September 15, 2026, effective date.

Next steps and how to prepare

The new rule changes how institutions support international students and fundamentally reshapes the role of DSOs and ROs. In addition to the changes in process noted above, both DSOs and ROs will now be responsible for actively tracking I-94 expiration dates across their entire populations and advising students and scholars accordingly – a significantly expanded operational obligation. Institutions also face new liability exposure. Incorrect program end dates on a Form I-20 or DS-2019, or a failure to advise students of filing deadlines, can now produce serious immigration consequences, including unlawful presence and bars to reentry. Institutions should also prepare for increased student advising needs, changing compliance costs, new workload for international office staff, and potential enrollment and research declines.

With the September 15, 2026, effective date approaching, institutions should start the implementation process now, including the following:

- **Audit your population.** Identify students who will need to file an extension of stay soon after the effective date.
- **Update your documents.** Review materials and disclosures for outdated immigration language and confirm program lengths.
- **Align internal roles.** Establish protocols and train staff on the rule's core changes.
- **Communicate with students.** Update student communications to explain current requirements. SEVP has specifically advised DSOs to monitor approaching AUDs in SEVIS, recommend students for extensions when needed, and remind students that they may not work while an extension of stay is pending if filed during the 30-day grace period.

If you have questions or would like assistance preparing for these changes, please reach out.

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