

Understanding the New Duration of Status Rule

International Student FAQ Guide

Overview: Effective September 15, 2026, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is eliminating "Duration of Status" (D/S) for F-1 and J-1 international students. Instead of an unspecified stay, students will be admitted for a fixed period linked to their I-20 or DS-2019 end dates, up to a maximum of 4 years at a time. The standard post-program departure grace period is also being reduced from 60 days to 30 days.

Understanding the New Duration of Status (D/S) Rule

Beginning September 15, 2026, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) will replace the long-standing "Duration of Status (D/S)" admission policy for F-1 and J-1 students with a fixed period of admission. Instead of being admitted for "D/S," students will generally receive an Admit Until Date (AUD) on their Form I-94 that corresponds to the end date of their Form I-20 or DS-2019, up to the maximum period allowed under the new regulations. This change affects how long students may remain in the United States, how program extensions are requested, and what happens after international travel.

Important: This FAQ summarizes the current DHS regulations regarding Duration of Status (D/S). Immigration regulations and agency guidance may change, and individual circumstances vary. Students should consult the Center for International Education (CIE) before making travel or immigration decisions. For regulatory information and guidance, please see the [FAQ's from the Department of Homeland Security Study in the States](#) webpage.

This FAQ is intended for informational purposes only and is not legal advice.

Key Changes at a Glance

Previous Rule	New Rule
Admission under Duration of Status (D/S)	Admission until a fixed Admit Until Date (AUD)
No fixed admission period	Admission generally limited to I-20/DS-2019 end date (up to applicable maximums)
Program extension approved by the school DSO	Many extensions require a USCIS Extension of Stay (Form I-539)
Change of major: Generally permitted with DSO approval and an updated Form I-20, provided the student maintained F-1 status.	Undergraduate: No major changes during the first year (unless SEVP approves an exception). Graduate: No major changes during the program.
60-day grace period	30-day grace period for students admitted under the new framework

1. Before September 15, 2026

Re-entry and Free Program Adjustments

Q: I am entering the U.S. for the first time before September 15, 2026. Will I get a fixed expiration date at the border?

A: No. F-1 and J-1 visa students are not yet supposed to be subject to the AUD (Admit Until Date) and are supposed to be admitted under the traditional Duration of Status (D/S) framework until the official changeover date.

Q: Can I transfer schools or change my degree program freely right now?

A: Yes. Before September 15, 2026, you may transfer in and out of CSULB and change your academic programs without the strict legal limitations introduced by the new rule.

Urgent Actions Required Before the Deadline

Q: I already know I need more time to finish my degree. What should I do?

A: If you know right now that your program needs to be extended, you must contact cie-student@csulb.edu to request an extension of your current I-20 end date before August 31, 2026. This allows you to secure an extension under the easier, legacy rules.

2. After September 15, 2026

For Currently Enrolled & Continuing U.S. Students

Q: I am entering the U.S. before September 15, 2026. What admission will I receive?

A: If you enter the United States before September 15, 2026, you should generally be admitted under the current Duration of Status (D/S) policy rather than receive a fixed Admit Until Date.

Q: What is the new process if I need to extend my degree program after the deadline?

A: Your school can no longer simply update your form. You must first get an official extension recommendation from a CIE advisor (DSO or ARO). Then, you must formally file an Extension of Stay (EOS) application via Form I-539 with USCIS, pay the required application fee, and submit your biometrics (fingerprints). CIE will provide instruction and assistance to file extensions.

Q: Can I change my major or transfer schools under the new rule?

A: **Undergraduate Level:** You cannot change your major, or transfer to another school during your first year of study unless an exception applies.

A: **Graduate Level & Above (Master's/Ph.D.):** You cannot transfer or change majors during your program.

Q: Can I pursue another degree after completing my current program?

A: The new rule generally prohibits: Moving to a lower educational level, or beginning another program at the same educational level after completing a degree unless otherwise permitted under DHS regulations

International Travel and Re-entry

Q: What happens if I leave the U.S. for a vacation or brief trip after the rule takes effect?

A: The moment you depart the U.S., you permanently lose your grandfathered D/S status. When you re-enter, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) will admit you under the new framework, giving you a fixed-date I-94 that matches your I-20/DS-2019 end date (maximum of 4 years) plus a shortened 30-day departure window.

OPT, STEM OPT, and H-1B Cap-Gap Rules

Q: I am already on approved post-completion OPT or STEM OPT. Do I need to apply for an extension?

A: No, as long as you stay inside the country, you can continue working until the exact expiration date printed on your current Employment Authorization Document (EAD) card (up to the November 14, 2030 cap).

Q: I need to apply for OPT or STEM OPT soon. How does the new timeline work?

- **If you stay in the U.S. continuously:** If you file for your post-completion OPT or STEM OPT by March 18, 2027, you do not need to file a separate, costly Extension of Stay application. However, your grace period is reduced to the 30 days if you file your OPT/STEM OPT after September 15, 2026.
- **If you travel or file late:** If you travel outside the U.S. before filing, or if you apply for a STEM extension after March 18, 2027, you will be forced to submit formal Form I-539 Extension of Stay (EOS) at the same time alongside your work application.

Q: How long do I have to leave the U.S. once my OPT or STEM OPT ends?

- **60 Days:** If you remain in the U.S. continuously and never travel across the border, you get to keep the traditional 60-day grace period to leave, change status, or transfer levels.
- **30 Days:** If you travel outside the U.S. and re-enter after September 15, 2026, your grace period is permanently shortened to exactly 30 days following your EAD card expiration.

Q: I am an H-1B Cap-Gap beneficiary. Do I have to file an Extension of Stay?

A: No. F-1 students who qualify for a 'cap-gap' extension are exempt from filing an EOS. You can legally stay in the U.S. until your H-1B petition is approved or until April 1st of the requested fiscal year (whichever comes first).

New Admissions & Changing Status Inside the U.S.

Q: I am changing to F-1 or J-1 status from another visa type from inside the U.S. How long will my status last?

A: Upon approval, you will be given a fixed period of stay that matches your Form I-20 or DS-2019 length, up to a strict maximum cap of 4 years.

Q: What if my degree program naturally takes more than 4 years (like a Ph.D.)?

A: Your initial admission period is strictly capped at 4 years, regardless of your degree length. Before those initial 4 years run out, you must formally apply for an Extension of Stay (Form I-539) with USCIS, pay the fees, and submit your biometrics to cover the remainder of your program.

New International Students Arriving From Abroad

Q: I am entering the U.S. for the first time after September 15, 2026. How early can I arrive?

A: You are still permitted to arrive up to 30 days prior to the Program Start Date listed on your Form I-20 or DS-2019.

Q: What date will be stamped on my electronic Form I-94 when I cross the border?

A: You will be issued a specific Admit Until Date (AUD) on your I-94. This will match your program end date up to a maximum of 4 years, plus an extra 30 days to prepare for departure.

Q: What happens if I am coming to the U.S. specifically for an English Language Training program?

A: Your fixed period of admission is legally restricted to a maximum time period of 24 months total, plus a 30-day departure period.

Q: If my F or J visa stamp in my passport is valid for 5 years, does that mean I can stay for 5 years?

A: No. A visa stamp is strictly an entry document, not a permission of stay. Your legal stay is governed entirely by the Admit Until Date (AUD) on your electronic Form I-94 issued at the border, which will never exceed 4 years at a time.

Q: How does this affect F-2 and J-2 dependents?

A: All of the rules that apply to the principal F-1 and J-1 visa holders also apply to their F-2 and J-2 dependents.