

On July 17, 2026, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security published a final rule to end duration of status (D/S) for F visa holders: [Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedure for Nonimmigrant Academic Students](#).

There are major changes to F-1 status duration and maintenance of status requirements that will be effective September 15, 2026 which are outlined briefly in this guide.

Although these changes are significant, many current students will not need to take immediate action. We are currently reviewing how the new rules may affect students in different situations.

The information in this guide is intended to be a helpful overview of the new rules and regulatory changes included in the final rule but is not legal advice.

Chart of the overview of the rules

	Current Rule	New Rule (Effective September 15, 2026)
Fixed period of stay replaces D/S	<i>F-1 students are allowed to study for “duration of status” (D/S).</i>	F-1 students have a fixed period of stay in the U.S., up to 4 years or duration of program (I-20), <i>whichever is shorter</i> .
Extension of Stay (EOS) procedure	<i>F-1 students may obtain program extensions approved by P/DSO with valid academic or medical reason, start new programs, and transfer without requests to USCIS.</i>	F-1 students will need to apply for an extension of stay by filing Form I-539 with USCIS . Students with a valid F-1 visa may travel and re-enter to obtain a new period of admission instead.
Restrictions on academic changes and mobility	<i>F-1 students are allowed to earn two or more degrees at the same or lower education level.</i> <i>F-1 students can freely change major, school, and program level.</i>	F-1 students will be prohibited from earning more than one degree at the same or lower education level, if the program is completed after September 15, 2026 . F-1 undergraduate students will be prohibited from



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Restrictions on academic changes and mobility cont.		changing major, school or program level within <u>the first academic year.</u> F-1 graduate students will be prohibited from changing major or school at <u>anytime</u> during their program.
Shortened grace period	<i>F-1 students have a 60-day grace period after program completion.</i>	F-1 students will have a 30-day grace period after program completion.

Fixed Period of Stay Replaces D/S

New students or current students entering or re-entering the U.S. on or after September 15, 2026:

- Any F-1 or F-2 nonimmigrant entering the U.S. on or after September 15, 2026 will receive a specific “Admit Until Date” (AUD) on their I-94 instead of D/S (duration of status).
- The AUD will be the program end date on a student’s I-20 plus the 30-day grace period, not to exceed four years.
- Forward facing: the time toward the 4-year maximum begins counting on 9/15/26. Time spent in the US prior to the effective date of the new rule is not calculated.

Current students inside the U.S. on or after September 15, 2026, who were previously admitted for D/S:

- Your D/S admission will expire on the program end date listed on your Form I-20 that is valid on September 15, 2026, plus the currently permitted 60-day grace period.
- If you need additional time after this expiration, you will need to apply for an extension of stay (EOS) (*see below*).



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- If you travel outside the U.S. after September 15, 2026, you will receive a new I-94 with an AUD based on the above and you will no longer retain the 60-day grace period (see *above*).

I-539 Extension of Stay

After, September 15, 2026, if you need additional time in F-1 status beyond your AUD (admit until date), you must apply to USCIS to extend your stay by filing [Form I-539](#).

This means you may need to file an I-539 extension of stay application with USCIS in any of these scenarios:

- Needing additional time to complete your program (including due to authorized academic or medical reduced course loads)
- Transferring schools
- Starting a new program or changing degree levels
- Applying for post-completion Optional Practical Training (OPT)

It's important to note academic probation, suspension, or a pattern of failing classes is not an acceptable reason students can request an extension from USCIS.

The cost for filing Form I-539 is likely to be \$420 for the filing fee and \$85 for the biometrics fee. DHS has indicated that premium processing will not be available for this application.

It may be in your best interest to do some planning ahead to see if you will need more time to finish your degree than your program end date listed on your I-20. If so, reach out the International Program Center to get the extension started and processed before September 15th, 2026. You'll need to plan ahead to gather documents and signatures required for extensions.

Another option:

Students with valid (not expired) F-1 visas may depart the U.S. and re-enter to obtain a new AUD from CBP as an alternative to filing Form I-539.



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Restrictions on Academic Changes and Mobility

Restrictions on academic changes:

- Undergraduate students may change majors or transfer schools **only after completing one academic year in F-1 status**
- Graduate students **cannot change majors or transfer schools at any time during program**

SEVP (Student & Exchange Visitor Program) may grant exceptions for extenuating circumstances such as school closure or natural disaster.

Restrictions on academic mobility:

After completing a program, F-1 students cannot begin a new program at the same or lower education level. For example:

- A student who has completed an Associate's degree would not be able to complete a second Associate's degree.
- A student who has completed a Bachelor's degree would not be able to complete a second Bachelor's degree, or an Associate's degree.
- A student who has completed a Master's degree would not be able to complete a second Master's degree, a Bachelor's degree, or an Associate's degree.

This applies only to programs completed in the United States and programs completed on or after September 15, 2026.

Shortened Grace Period

The 60-day grace period that F-1 students have historically been afforded after completion of a program or post-completion OPT is **shortened to 30 days**.

- Students previously admitted for D/S who do not depart the U.S. on or after September 15, 2026 will retain the 60-day grace period until they obtain a new AUD either through the I-539 extension process or re-entry to the U.S.
- The grace period does not apply to students who do not complete their program or who fall out of F-1 status. This was the case prior to the new rule and the new rule has not changed this.



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OPT and STEM OPT Application Transition

Students that will graduate in December 2026 and May 2027 may have different OPT application processes.

- December 2026 Graduates - If you have not departed and reentered the US after September 15, 2026, you will only be required to file the I-765 form (employment) with USCIS and pay the respective fees.
- May 2027 Graduates
 - Students completing degree requirements by May 2027, may apply for OPT with no extension of stay application required if they meet these criteria
 - Student remained in the US since September 15, 2026
 - USCIS receives the student's complete OPT application by March 18, 2026
 - You may apply for OPT up to 90 days in advance of your I-20 program end date.
 - After March 18, 2027, all OPT and STEM OPT applications must include an extension of stay filing.

Additional Resources

Additional external resources on the changes that will take effect on September 15, 2026 can be found below.

- [Student & Exchange Visitor Program \(SEVP\) Study in the States Final Rule Overview](#)
- [Student & Exchange Visitor Program \(SEVP\) Study in the States Final Rule FAQ](#)
- [International Student Resource Center \(ISRC\) Review of Final DHS Rule](#)
- [International Student Resource Center \(ISRC\) Final DHS Rule FAQ](#)

The Final Rule from the Department of Homeland Security in the Federal Register: [*Federal Register: Establishing a Fixed Time Period of Admission and an Extension of Stay Procedure for Nonimmigrant Academic Students, Exchange Visitors, and Representatives of Foreign Information Media*](#)



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Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Do these changes affect current students already in the U.S.?

Yes. Starting September 15, all F-1 students and F-2 dependents in the U.S. will need to apply to extend their stay once their D/S or AUD (admit until date) expires.

When does this take effect?

September 15, 2026. Until then, current rules apply and DSOs can still process:

- *I-20 extensions*
- *Transfers*
- *Changes of level*

My F-1 visa is expired. Does this matter?

These changes are about status – not visa. Your visa is only required for entry to the U.S. Your ability to stay in the U.S. is governed by your status. Starting September 15, your ability to remain in the U.S. will no longer be based on D/S (duration of status) and will have a fixed end date.

I am currently on OPT. What does this mean for me?

Your D/S will expire on the last day of your OPT plus a 60-day grace period, if you do not depart the U.S. after September 15. Once your D/S expires, you will need to file an I-539 Extension of Stay (EOS) to start a new program or depart and re-enter with a new I-20 and a valid F-1 visa.

What about F-2 dependents?

F-2 dependents typically follow the principal's (F-1) status, including AUD. They will need to either be included in the principal's I-539 filing for EOS or file separately.

Will all students get a 4 year admission period?

*No. The AUD or expiration of D/S is governed by your I-20 program end date OR 4 years, whichever is **shorter**.*



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My visa is valid until 2030. Does that mean I don't need to apply to extend my stay until then?

No, you still need to extend your stay. As mentioned above, your visa is only an entry document and has nothing to do with your ability to remain in the U.S. Your authorized stay in the U.S. is governed by your AUD.

Can I study while my I-539 Extension of Stay (EOS) is pending?

Yes. If you timely file your I-539 before your AUD, you may continue studying.

Can I continue working (on-campus, CPT, pre-OPT or economic hardship) while my I-539 EOS is pending?

Yes, for up to 240 days after filing, if your I-539 was filed timely before your AUD, you may continue working on-campus or under authorized CPT, pre-completion OPT, or economic hardship work authorization.

Can I still pursue a second bachelor's degree at Bemidji State University?

Starting September 15, 2026, you will not be able to enroll in any degree program if you have already completed a degree at that same level after September 15. If you have completed a certain level of degree program prior to September 15, 2026, you can still enroll in that same level degree program after September 15, 2026.

I want to apply for OPT after I graduate. Will I need to file an I-539 EOS application?

Possibly. Until March 18, 2027, students who still have D/S and have not received an AUD, will not have to file the I-539 extension form and will only need to complete the I-765 application for OPT.

After March 18, 2027, or if you have received an AUD (likely due to traveling outside the country and reentering after September 15, 2026), you will likely need to file both the I-539 form and I-765 form.

How can I file Form I-539 for an EOS?

We are hoping to provide future guidance on this. Refer to the [USCIS website for information on filing I-539](#). Because the Form I-539 is a legal application with USCIS, working with a qualified immigration attorney may be recommended.



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What are valid reasons for getting an extension of stay (EOS) approved by USCIS?

USCIS can use agency discretion to determine if an extension is warranted. According to the final rule, USCIS will consider whether the individual has abided by the terms of their F-1 nonimmigrant status and whether the individual has sufficient funding to continue studying in the U.S.

What are some reasons why an extension of stay (EOS) may be denied by USCIS?

According to the final rule, USCIS may deny an extension of stay request if:

- *Delays in program completion were shown to be due to poor academic performance, failing classes, or otherwise failing to make normal academic progress*
- *The student is deemed to have exceeded the normally allowed time for a given academic program*
- *The student cannot show proof of sufficient financial resources for the additional time or if funding was deemed insufficient*

USCIS may review cases as well for possible fraud issues, and violations of required non-immigrant intent - which requires F and J visa holders to maintain the intention of returning to their home country.

What happens if USCIS denies my EOS application?

According to the final rule, with a denial of the EOS application your lawful status in the U.S. would end, and you would not be allowed the normal grace period to depart the U.S. Remaining in the U.S. following an extension denial would be a serious violation of immigration regulations and may subject you to the accrual of unlawful presence. This could result in you being barred from coming back to the U.S. for a certain number of years. This is one of several reasons that working with a qualified immigration attorney may be recommended.



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