

2026 Duration of Status and Related Rule Changes for F-1 and J-1 Students and Scholars

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has issued a final rule replacing the longstanding “Duration of Status” (D/S) framework for F and J nonimmigrants with fixed periods of admission. The rule is currently scheduled to take effect on **September 15, 2026**. Some implementation details may continue to be clarified through additional government guidance. Please read this communication carefully and contact the Office of International Student and Scholar Services (OISSS) if you have questions or concerns. We will continue to share updates as additional information becomes available. Bard’s Office of International Student and Scholar Services will continue to provide information sessions and individual advising regarding these changes.

The following changes are currently scheduled to take effect on September 15, 2026:

- Fixed admission periods will replace Duration of Status (D/S) for new admissions and readmissions. F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors admitted or readmitted to the United States on or after September 15, 2026 will receive a specific “Admit Until Date” (AUD) on their Form I-94 rather than D/S. The admission period generally will correspond to the program end date listed on the Form I-20 or DS-2019, subject to a maximum four-year period, plus a 30-day period to prepare for departure or otherwise seek authorization to remain in the United States. The actual AUD issued by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) may be earlier, including where the individual’s passport validity limits the period of admission. Students and exchange visitors should therefore check their Form I-94 after every entry to confirm the Admit Until Date and contact OISSS promptly if it is earlier than expected.
- The post-completion grace period for F-1 students admitted under the new fixed-date system will be reduced from 60 days to 30 days. During this 30-day grace period following completion of the program or authorized practical training, students may prepare to depart the United States or take appropriate action to maintain lawful status.
- Undergraduate F-1 students generally will not be permitted to transfer schools or change their educational objective during the first academic year of their program. Exceptions may be available in limited circumstances based on extenuating circumstances and authorization by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). Students considering a change of major or transfer should consult OISSS before taking action.
- Graduate-level F-1 students generally will not be permitted to change their educational objective during their program. Transfers during a graduate program

also generally will be prohibited, although SEVP may authorize a transfer in limited circumstances based on extenuating circumstances.

- Restrictions will apply to pursuing a second program at the same or a lower educational level. An F-1 student who completes a program after September 15, 2026, generally will not be permitted to begin another F-1 program at the same or a lower educational level. Programs completed before the rule takes effect will not count toward this restriction. Students may still be able to pursue concurrent or combined programs, such as double majors or appropriately structured dual-degree programs, when pursued simultaneously.
- F-1 students who need additional time to complete their program may need to apply to USCIS for an Extension of Stay (EOS). An otherwise eligible F-1 student may qualify for an EOS if the DSO issues a current Form I-20 indicating that additional time remains to complete the program, or if the student documents a compelling academic reason, qualifying illness or medical condition, or circumstances beyond the student's control.

Transition rules for students and scholars currently in D/S:

- F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors who are **in the United States in D/S on September 15, 2026 and are properly maintaining status** generally may continue under the transition provisions. Their authorized period generally will continue until the program end date listed on the Form I-20 or DS-2019 that is valid on September 15 or four years after the effective date of the rule, whichever comes first, plus the departure period applicable under their prior D/S admission.
- For F-1 students remaining under the D/S transition provisions, the existing 60-day post-completion departure period generally continues to apply. For J-1 exchange visitors, the existing 30-day departure period generally continues to apply.
- International travel after September 15, 2026 can change how the new rule applies to you. A student or exchange visitor who was previously admitted for D/S and departs the United States during the transition period generally will receive a new I-94 with a fixed AUD upon readmission.
- International travel remains possible for students and exchange visitors who otherwise have the required documentation and are admissible to the United States. However, because travel may affect the D/S transition provisions, a pending Extension of Stay application, or an upcoming OPT/STEM OPT filing, students and exchange visitors are strongly encouraged to consult OISSS before traveling internationally.

What you need to do:

- **Check your Form I-94 after every entry or reentry to the United States.** F-1 students and J-1 exchange visitors should carefully monitor the AUD listed on the I-94 as well as their passport expiration dates. The AUD generally cannot extend beyond the expiration date of the passport used for admission, even if the student's or exchange visitor's program end date is later. Please inform OISSS as far in advance as possible of any potential issue, including a passport that may expire during the academic year.
- **Contact OISSS early if you may need additional time to complete your program.** Under the new system, an updated Form I-20 or DS-2019 alone may not be sufficient to extend your authorized stay. An Extension of Stay application with USCIS may also be required. USCIS processing times, filing fees, possible biometrics requirements, and the possibility of additional evidence requests should be taken into account.
- **Do not wait until the 30-day departure period to address an Extension of Stay if you are working or participating in practical training.** A timely filed EOS may allow an F-1 student to continue a full course of study while the application is pending. However, if an EOS is filed during the 30-day departure period following the end of the program or practical training period, the student may not continue or begin CPT or other employment until the EOS is approved.
- For qualifying F-1 students who timely file an EOS before the 30-day departure period begins, existing on-campus employment, CPT, or qualifying severe-economic-hardship employment may continue while the EOS is pending for up to 240 days, subject to applicable limitations. In the case of CPT, authorization cannot continue beyond the CPT end date authorized by the DSO on the Form I-20.

OPT and STEM OPT applicants:

- F-1 students who remain eligible for the D/S transition provisions and timely file an I-765 application for post-completion OPT or a STEM OPT extension **on or before March 18, 2027** generally will not also be required to file an Extension of Stay application for that period. DHS may extend this transition period in six-month increments.
- This transition provision does not apply if a student departs the United States before filing the OPT or STEM OPT application and is subsequently readmitted with a fixed period of admission. In that circumstance, the student will be required to file both an application for employment authorization and an Extension of Stay application if the student seeks to remain in the United States for the requested practical-training period.

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- Students admitted under the new fixed-date system who need additional F-1 time for post-completion OPT or STEM OPT generally will need either to obtain an Extension of Stay from USCIS or, where appropriate, depart the United States and seek readmission for the practical-training period.
- Students who are required to file both an EOS application and an employment authorization application may file the applications concurrently. Students generally may not begin post-completion OPT employment until both the EOS and employment authorization applications are approved, unless a specific transition or automatic-extension provision applies.
- Because the filing and travel rules differ depending on whether a student remains under D/S or has received a fixed AUD, students planning to apply for OPT or STEM OPT should consult OISSS regarding their individual filing timeline and before making international travel plans.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I pursue a double major or double degree? Generally, yes, where the programs are structured and pursued simultaneously. The rule does not prohibit appropriately planned concurrent programs, including double majors or combined degree programs. Please consult OISSS if the additional program will extend your anticipated completion date or otherwise require an update to your Form I-20.

Can I continue studying while an Extension of Stay application is pending? Yes. An F-1 student who timely files an Extension of Stay application may continue a full course of study while USCIS is adjudicating the application. Different rules apply to employment and practical training, particularly if the EOS application is filed during the 30-day departure period.

Is Premium Processing available for an Extension of Stay application? No, Premium Processing is not currently available for the new F-1 and J-1 Extension of Stay applications created by this rule.

Can I travel internationally while an Extension of Stay application is pending? Travel while an EOS application is pending does not, by itself, result in abandonment of the application. However, travel may affect the pending EOS and the period for which you are admitted when you return. If a student or exchange visitor seeks readmission based on a new Form I-20 or DS-2019 with a program end date extending beyond the previously authorized admission period, USCIS may consider the pending EOS abandoned because the individual has obtained a new period of admission from U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Students and exchange visitors with a pending or anticipated EOS should consult OISSS before traveling internationally.

