

Duration of Status & Program Extension Changes

Overview of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Final Rule on Fixed Admission

Periods for F and J Nonimmigrants

Policy Background & Effective Date

The Department of Homeland Security published a new regulation establishing fixed admission periods, eliminating traditional 'Duration of Status' (D/S), and imposing new academic realities.

Rule Effective Date: Tuesday, September 15, 2026

Historical D/S vs. New DHS Rule

Legacy Rule: Duration of Status (D/S)

Since 1991, F and J visa holders were admitted to the U.S. for "Duration of Status" indicated as 'D/S' on Form I-94.

Students could remain in the U.S. for the duration of their academic program or research as long as they maintained valid status and made normal progress.

New DHS Rule: Fixed Period (AUD)

Eliminates 'D/S' on I-94 records and institutes a fixed **Admit Until Date (AUD)**.

Maximum initial admission is 4 years or program length (whichever is shorter). Any time beyond the AUD requires formal USCIS approval.

Four Pillars of the New DHS Rule



Fixed I-94 Dates

Specific end date on I-94 records capped at 4 years max. Extensions require formal USCIS Extension of Stay (EOS) based on compelling reasons.



Shorter Grace Period

F-1 grace period reduced from 60 days to 30 days post-program/OPT for entries after Sept 15, 2026.



Objective Limits

Restrictions on changing majors/degree levels for undergraduate (1st year) and graduate (entire degree) students.



Transfer Rules

Limits on transferring SEVIS records between institutions.

Fixed I-94s & USCIS Extension Process

- **Specific Admit Until Date:** I-94 arrival/departure records will specify an explicit end date matching I-20/DS-2019 program length or max 4 years.
- **USCIS Extension Required:** Students/scholars needing additional time (including OPT and STEM OPT applicants) must petition USCIS directly 180 days prior to end date.
- **Additional Filing Fees:** USCIS Extension of Stay (EOS) I-539 petitions will require government filing fees (currently \$420/\$470).
- **Re-entering the U.S. alternative** – Students/scholars with a valid visa may choose to extend their Admit Until Date by re-entering the U.S. instead of filing for EOS
- **Document Alignment:** I-94 end dates will often align with passport expiration dates if the passport expires earlier than the I-20/DS-2019.



Critical Time Frame Benchmarks

30

Days Grace Period (F-1)

4

Years Max Initial Stay

Key Operational Changes

Reduced Grace Period: For F-1 nonimmigrants entering after Sept 15, 2026, post-completion grace period drops from 60 days to 30 days. J-1 grace period remains 30 days.

Max Initial Admission: Students admitted for programs longer than 4 years (e.g., PhDs or 5-year dual degrees) must apply for an Extension of Stay with USCIS prior to their 4-year limit.

Policy Comparison: Before vs. After

Policy Requirement	Pre-Sept 15, 2026 Rules	Post-Sept 15, 2026 DHS Rule
I-94 Admission Status	Duration of Status (D/S)	Fixed Date (AUD – Max 4 Years)
Program Extension	Internal ISSO Authorization	Internal ISSO authorization is required to extend the I-20 end date Student applies for AUD extension via USCIS Extension of Stay (EOS) Application OR exits and re-enters the U.S.
F-1 Grace Period	60 days post-completion	30 days post-completion
Change of Major / Objective	Allowed with ISSO update	Restricted (UG Year 1 restricted; Grad restricted anytime)
SEVIS Record Transfer	Standard transfer window	Restricted (UG Year 1 restricted; Grad restricted anytime)

Academic & SEVIS Transfer Limits



Undergraduate F-1 Restrictions: Undergraduate students are prohibited from changing their educational objective (degree/major) or transferring SEVIS during their first academic year.



Graduate F-1 Restrictions: Graduate students cannot change their educational objective or transfer SEVIS to another institution at any point during their degree program.



Master's to PhD Progression: Transfers remain permitted when completing a master's degree and matriculating directly into a doctoral program. Student must extend AUD either by an EOS petition to USCIS, or by exiting and re-entering the U.S. on a new I-20/DS-2019.



No Lateral / Reverse Matriculation: F-1 students who have completed a program are no longer eligible for lateral or reverse matriculation moves.

Effective Dates & Transition

Transition Window Details

Rule Effective Date: September 15, 2026. DHS retains authority to adjust implementation timing.

6-Month Transition Window: Applies through March 18, 2027. Special transition rules govern students applying for OPT and STEM OPT during this period.

OPT/STEM transition period – Students applying for OPT or STEM extension whose latest I-94 Admit Unit Date is D/S do not have to file for EOS when applying for OPT if I-765 is filed by Mar 18, 2027.

International Travel Impact: Re-entering the U.S. on or after Sept 15, 2026 converts your I-94 from D/S to a fixed Admit Until Date for both students and scholars.



Action Steps for UNC Charlotte Students



Review Progress

Check degree progress with your academic advisor.

Submit program extension requests before Sept 15 if extra time is needed.



Consult ISSO

Do NOT make major or degree level changes without consulting ISSO and your Graduate Program Coordinator.



Check Passport

Ensure passport is valid.

I-94 Admit Until Dates are capped by passport expiration dates upon entry.



Verify I-94

Always print and review your I-94 arrival record at cbp.gov after returning from travel abroad.

ISSO Support

The ISSO wants to reiterate our commitment to keeping the UNC Charlotte community updated about all matters related to visa and immigration compliance through Town Halls, advising sessions, communications, and online alerts.

In the meantime, please find a helpful [FAQ](#) regarding the new regulations from the International Student Resource Center.

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