



DHS ENDS DURATION OF STATUS FOR F, J, AND I NONIMMIGRANTS: WHAT THE FINAL RULE MEANS

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On July 17, 2026, DHS published a [final rule](#) that is scheduled to take effect on September 15, 2026 and that fundamentally changes the admissions and status-maintenance framework for F students, J exchange visitors, and I representatives of foreign information media. Although the rule applies across all three categories, its most immediate and disruptive effects are likely to be felt by F-1 students, J-1 exchange visitors, their dependents, and the schools, sponsors, hospitals, research institutions, and employers that have long operated under the duration-of-status model. The core change is significant: F, J, and I nonimmigrants will no longer generally be admitted for duration of status. Instead, they will be admitted for a specific period of stay, and if they need additional time to complete a program, employment, or assignment, they will generally need to seek an extension of stay from USCIS. Once the admission period expires, unlawful presence will generally begin to accrue unless a timely filing or other status-preserving action has been taken. Unlawful presence may result in a 3-year or 10-year bar to reentry if the nonimmigrant departs the United States and later seeks to reenter.

That shift matters because duration of status historically reflected the practical reality that education, research, exchange programming, and media assignments do not always unfold according to rigid timelines. Under the prior framework, F-1 students generally remained in lawful status for the time needed to complete their course of study and any authorized practical training, followed by a 60-day grace period. J-1 exchange visitors likewise operated under a program-centered model, and I nonimmigrants were generally able to remain for the duration of a qualifying foreign media assignment. The final rule

replaces that structure with one centered on the Form I-94 and a date-certain admit-until period. It does that not only by eliminating D/S terminology from the regulations, but by revising the core admission and maintenance rules in 8 CFR 214.1 and 214.2 so that F, J, and I nonimmigrants are treated much more like other fixed-date nonimmigrant categories. In practical terms, lawful stay will now depend far more heavily on filing strategy, adjudication timing, and precise compliance with deadlines than it did under the duration-of-status system.

For F-1 students, this is a particularly consequential change because the existing system has long been shaped by the Form I-20, SEVIS, and school-based program management. Under the new rule, the Form I-94 becomes the controlling document in a way it has not been before. F-1 principals and their dependents will generally be admitted for the length of the principal's program, including any period of post-completion practical training, up to a maximum of four years, plus a 30-day grace period. That last point is especially important. The final rule shortens the familiar F-1 post-completion grace period from 60 days to 30 days. In practice, that means students will have less time to prepare for departure, transfer to another status, address documentary problems, or file any necessary requests at the close of studies or practical training. The rule also makes clear that if an F-1 student ends study or training early, the student and any eligible dependents must depart or otherwise take action to maintain lawful status within 30 days of the end date.

The extension-of-stay requirements are equally important. A revised Form I-20 or DS-2019 will no longer, by itself, solve many timing problems. If additional time is needed to complete a program, begin a new one, pursue post-completion OPT or STEM OPT, extend a J program, or continue a qualifying I assignment, a formal extension-of-stay filing may be required. That means additional fees, biometrics, federal adjudication, and the possibility of delay or denial. It also means schools and sponsors cannot assume that a valid academic or program justification alone will protect lawful stay. A school may be able to document the need for more time, but the individual may still need a separate USCIS approval to remain beyond the I-94 admit-until date. The revised regulations now set out the EOS process directly in 8 CFR 214.1 and also update 8 CFR 214.2 to clarify when a continuing student may be granted more time, what types of reasons will support an extension, and what types of delays generally will not.

The rule does provide a limited safeguard for F-1 students who timely file an extension of stay: they may continue pursuing a full course of study after the admission period expires while the EOS remains pending. USCIS is notorious for delays in processing extension applications, and preventing a student from continuing to pursue a course of study while the extension request remains pending can result in inconvenience and hardship. But that protection is not a continuation of the old duration-of-status model. It does not eliminate the need to file, excuse late filings, or automatically preserve all forms of employment authorization while the case is pending.

The final rule preserves the existing 180-day automatic extension for timely filed STEM OPT extension requests. It also updates 8 CFR 274a.12 to match the new admissions structure. For F nonimmigrants, current authorization for on-campus employment or off-campus employment based on severe economic hardship tied to emergent circumstances may be extended for up to 240 days while the EOS request is pending, or until the end date of the relevant Federal Register notice, whichever comes first. J-1 nonimmigrants whose work is incident to status with a specific employer may continue working for up to 240 days while a timely filed EOS remains pending. I nonimmigrants may likewise continue working for the foreign employer for up to 240 days, or 90 days in certain PRC passport cases, while a timely filed EOS is pending. These rules help, but they are not universal. A late filing may preserve the ability to remain in the United States while still interrupting work authorization, and some dependents, such as J-2s relying on EADs, do not receive continued work authorization once the EAD expires.

The changes to academic and program flexibility are also significant, especially for F-1 students. The final rule does not merely change how long students may remain. It also narrows how they may move through academic programs. Undergraduate students generally must complete the first academic year at the school that initially issued the Form I-20 before transferring or changing educational objectives, unless SEVP authorizes an exception. Graduate-level students face even tighter constraints. They generally may not change educational objectives during the program and may not transfer during the program absent an exception for extenuating circumstances. The rule also restricts movement to the same or lower educational level after completion of a program. It outlines procedures for F-1 students who do change educational objectives while still in status, but overall it takes a much more restrictive view

of educational mobility than the prior framework. For many bona fide students, especially those in interdisciplinary, research-based, or evolving academic pathways, these restrictions will significantly reduce flexibility at precisely the points where academic plans often shift for legitimate reasons.

The standard for relief is narrow. The final rule's exception framework focuses on extenuating circumstances and emergency-type situations rather than the broader range of ordinary academic realities students often encounter. School closure, prolonged inability to hold classes, and similar institutional disruptions may qualify. More routine but still legitimate reasons for a change in academic direction may not. That is one reason this rule is likely to be especially burdensome for students whose educational goals develop over time, particularly as rapid technological change reshapes fields of study. Even in non-STEM fields, new world events may prompt new thinking in the humanities. In those circumstances, a student may be unable to pursue a legitimate academic shift and instead be required to remain in the same course of study. The same tightening appears in the extension rules themselves. The final rule specifically provides that delays in completing a program caused by academic probation or suspension, or by repeated inability or unwillingness to complete the course of study, are generally not acceptable reasons for additional time.

J-1 exchange visitors also face meaningful changes. They will now generally be admitted for up to the length of the principal's program, not to exceed four years, plus a 30-day grace period. That means lawful stay is no longer anchored as strongly in the open-ended program-centered model that many sponsors and participants have relied on. Scholars, physicians, teachers, researchers, and trainees may increasingly need to think in terms of fixed admission periods, extension-of-stay filings, and the legal consequences of shortened or extended program end dates. The rule also requires that if a J program end date is shortened, the J-1 and accompanying J-2 dependents must depart or otherwise take action to maintain lawful status within 30 days from the new end date. There is a limited transition reprieve for certain J-1s whose D/S status expires shortly after the rule takes effect, but that is temporary and should not be mistaken for a continuation of the old framework. The revised rules also place clearer responsibilities on responsible officers when late requests to extend a current program end date are involved, which will likely increase the operational pressure on sponsors to identify and address timing problems early.

I nonimmigrants should not be overlooked. The final rule replaces duration of status for representatives of foreign media with admission for a fixed period necessary to complete the qualifying assignment, generally not to exceed 240 days, and 90 days in certain PRC passport cases. It also codifies the definition of a foreign media organization and updates the required evidence for I classification. These changes move foreign media representatives into a much more formal extension structure than many have experienced under the older duration-of-assignment model.

The transition rules are important, but they do not preserve the current framework indefinitely. Individuals already admitted in duration of status before the effective date may receive temporary accommodations, particularly F and J nonimmigrants who remain in valid status when the rule takes effect. In general, they may remain through the end of the current I-20, DS-2019, or qualifying practical-training period, subject to the transition limits set out in the rule. But once additional time is needed beyond that period, the new extension-of-stay framework applies. The rule also creates a short-term reprieve from separate EOS filing during the first six months after the rule takes effect for certain F-1 students applying for post-completion OPT or STEM OPT employment authorization. That relief is limited and should not be read as preserving the old system. The transition provisions therefore operate as a managed phase-in, not as a permanent grandfathering of D/S.

Travel becomes more consequential under the new rule. The rule specifies the effect of departure while an EOS application, or a related employment authorization filing, is pending. Depending on the documents presented at reentry, the individual may be readmitted for the balance of the prior admission period or for a new period. In some circumstances, the pending filing may then be treated as abandoned. The rule also codifies the longstanding policy that a change-of-status application is deemed abandoned if the applicant departs the United States while it is pending. These travel consequences are particularly important for students, exchange visitors, and media representatives who may have limited visa validity, long consular wait times, or urgent reasons to travel abroad. DHS also revised the admission rules for certain short trips to contiguous territory or adjacent islands, making clear that automatic visa-validity and readmission rules now operate within the fixed-date framework rather than the old D/S model.

This rule replaces a longstanding duration-of-status framework with a more

rigid system of fixed admission periods, shorter grace periods, added USCIS filings, and tighter limits on ordinary academic and programmatic change. For F-1 students, J-1 exchange visitors, and I nonimmigrants, the practical result is clear: more deadlines, less flexibility, greater cost, and a higher risk that routine developments in study, research, training, or assignment planning will trigger serious immigration consequences.

What makes this rule especially troubling is not only the volume of new compliance obligations, but where those obligations fall. They fall on students finishing degrees, exchange visitors navigating time-sensitive programs, researchers working across longer academic timelines, media professionals managing ongoing assignments, and the institutions trying to support them. They fall at the very moments when flexibility has historically mattered most. A system that once allowed lawful stay to track the real pace of academic and professional life will now depend far more heavily on fixed I-94 end dates, early filing strategy, and repeated federal adjudication.

This rule does not close the door on educational or exchange opportunities in the United States, but it does make those opportunities harder to access, maintain, and navigate. It will place the greatest pressure on precisely those nonimmigrants who are trying in good faith to comply, complete their programs, and contribute meaningfully to the institutions and communities they serve.

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