



DHS Rule On International Students

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Action: The Department of Homeland Security finalized a rule, effective September 15, 2026, replacing the longstanding “duration of status” framework for international students, exchange visitors, and foreign media representatives with fixed admission periods!

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- Previously, students and exchange visitors could remain for the “duration of status” (a flexible period) while in the approved program of study or exchange. The rule replaces that framework with fixed admission periods—generally the program length for students, up to four years, with a 30-day extension before departure (down from 60 days).
- The rule requires those needing more time to seek a USCIS extension or leave and apply for readmission.
- DHS estimates the rule covers 2.1 million nonimmigrant participants. Most current students and exchange visitors may remain until their existing program end date or September 15, 2030, whichever comes first. However, visa holders in these categories who travel abroad will be moved into the new fixed date system upon reentry, which may force reapplication for a student visa for longer-duration programs such as PhDs.
- Research universities and higher education organizations are concerned the rule may not reflect the realities of advanced training, in which research, laboratory work, clinical requirements, and other academic changes often extend programs beyond four years. Although students with timely filed applications may generally continue studying while USCIS reviews an extension, added Federal review and uncertainty could complicate recruitment of doctoral researchers, postdoctoral fellows, and physician trainees²
- **What this means for business:**
 - Employers recruiting PhD candidates, postdoctoral researchers, medical trainees, and other international graduates may face less predictable access to workers when completion of a longer program requires USCIS approval and in transitioning those people to a new, work-based visa status. Switching to a different, work-based visa status may take longer and could require applicants to leave the US while the application is pending.
 - Research universities and industries that recruit from advanced technical and clinical programs, including technology, semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and health care, are most affected. About 16,000 medical residents and fellows train through J visa programs each year³ International talent also represents a meaningful share of the STEM workforce: foreign-born workers accounted for 22% of US STEM workers in 2023, ⁴ and 73% of temporary-visa recipients earning US science and engineering doctorates from 2017 to 2019 remained here five years later⁵
 - Universities will face a higher workload for these students and may need to enhance immigration advising, including supplementing formal monitoring with stronger internal systems where necessary, and begin extension planning in advance. They may also consider modifications to coursework schedules.
 - The additional burdens on students may affect the ability of US institutions to recruit, train, and retain this talent over time. Universities, laboratories, and research sponsors may need to coordinate immigration deadlines more closely with academic schedules, multiyear grants, staffing plans, and private-sector research partnerships.

1. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/07/17/2026-14439/establishing-a-fixed-time-period-of-admission-and-an-extension-of-stay-procedure-for-nonimmigrant>
2. <https://www.aplu.org/wp-content/uploads/APLU-Duration-of-Status-Comment-Letter.pdf>
3. <https://www.aamc.org/news/press-releases/aamc-statement-duration-status-final-rule>
4. <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsb20261/stem-labor>
5. <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf25325>

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