

DHS Final “D/S” Rule Published 7/17/2026

Summary of Impacts for UNM International Students, J Research Scholars and J Professors who enter the US with F and J visas or are in the US in F or J immigration status on and after September 15, 2026.

A [final rule](#) published by the Department of Homeland Security on July 17, 2026, represents a major change to U.S. immigration procedures for international students, scholars and dependents in F immigration status. It ends the **Duration of Status (D/S)** system which allowed the F or J status holder to remain in the U.S. for the time they were maintaining status and replaces it with a fixed admission period that will require approval of an extension application that must be filed with a fee to USCIS to remain in the United States. This message contains the information we currently have about this new rule. The new rule is very complex, and has different provisions for F students, J students and J scholars and these individuals **MUST** pay close attention to the details to maintain lawful status in the U.S.

Disclaimer: *Please be aware that this information is what we know right now from the available information and could change as ambiguous or unclear parts of the rule are clarified by DHS or if the rule is changed or revoked through government action or litigation.*

1. New Date of Expiration of Status for all and shortened Grace Period for F1 students:

- a. F and J visa holders who enter the U.S. or those who change to F or J immigration status AFTER September 15, 2026, will be given a fixed expiration date on form I-94 that will correspond to the end date on the I-20/DS-2019 + a 30-day grace period or 4 years, whichever is shorter. This new date is called the **Admit Until Date or AUD**.**

F and J students and scholars must keep track of this new end date and MUST:

- i. **Extend** their permission to stay with a new or unexpired I-20/DS-2019, and an I-539 extension application to USCIS (currently \$420) before the expiration (AUD) or leave and reenter on a valid visa with a new or unexpired I-20/DS-2019 **IF:**
- Their current I-20/DS-2019 is expiring and they need more time to complete their current program
 - They want to continue in a new program of study (see restrictions, below)
 - They want to transfer to another school (see restrictions, below)
 - F1 students want to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) work permission, or J1 students want to apply for Academic Training work permission which requires an extension of the current DS-2019 form.

OR

- ii. **Depart** the US within 30 days of completing their current program or AUD whichever is shorter unless they have:
- Filed an application to extend status with USCIS on form I-539
 - Applied to change or adjust to another immigration status, OR
 - For F1 students, applied for post-completion OPT on form I-765 combined with an I-539 extension of status application.

b. F and J status holders who enter the U.S. BEFORE September 15, 2026, and DO NOT LEAVE are under transition provisions and are permitted to remain until: the current program ends, the I-20/DS-2019 ends, or November 14, 2030, whichever is sooner. Before this permission to remain expires they MUST:

- i. **Extend** their permission to stay with a new or unexpired I-20/DS-2019, and an I-539 extension application to USCIS (currently \$420) or leave and reenter on a valid visa with a new or unexpired I-20/DS-2019. **IF:**
- Their current I-20/DS-2019 is expiring and they need more time to complete their current program
 - They want to continue in a new program of study (see restrictions below)
 - They want to transfer to another school or program (see restrictions below)
 - F1 students want to apply for OPT after March 18, 2027.

OR

- ii. **Depart** the US within the grace period (60 days for F and 30 days for J) of completing their current program unless they have:
- Filed an application to extend status with USCIS on form I-539
 - Applied to change or adjust to another immigration status, OR
 - For F1 students, applied for post-completion OPT on form I-765 combined with an I-539 extension of status application (If applying BEFORE March 18, 2027, an I-765 application for employment alone is sufficient).

Any exit and re-entry, extension, transfer, change of program or OPT application will automatically put F and J status holders into group “a.” and they will NO LONGER FALL UNDER TRANSITION PROVISIONS. In other words, they will have a new expiration date that corresponds to the new program end date (or post-completion work end date for students) up to 4 years, whichever is shorter. Extensions from within the U.S. should be applied for 6 months (or more) in advance of the expiration date.

If an extension application is denied, the individual and all dependents must depart the U.S. immediately unless they have another means of maintaining lawful status.

c. F2 and J2 Dependents are bound by the same rules, must be included on ALL extension applications to remain in the U.S., AND

- i. If the F1 or J1 principal visa holder leaves the U.S. and reenters and is given a **shorter** I-94 expiration date/AUD, the dependent **MUST** leave or extend by the earlier date even if the dependent I-94/AUD says a date farther into the future
- ii. If the principal visa holder leaves the U.S. and reenters and is given a **longer** I-94 expiration date/AUD, the dependents would need to file an Extension of Status (EOS) application with USCIS or leave and reenter before the end date on the dependent I-94 (their own AUD)
- iii. There is no mention of what happens to the principal visa holder if a dependent travels out of the U.S. independently during the transition period and returns with a different I-94 end date/AUD. Therefore, travel for all family members should be considered carefully!

2. Restrictions on program changes and transfers for F status holders after September 15, 2026

a. General F Restrictions:

- i. **F1 students will only be able to complete one program per level in the U.S. after the rule takes effect.** For example, F students would only be permitted to do one U.S. master's degree and one U.S. bachelor's degree in F1 student status (information about dual degree programs, certificate programs or non-degree programs is not specific in the rule)
- ii. **F1 students will not be able to complete a program at a lower level or the same level in the U.S. after the rule takes effect.** For example, a student would not be able to complete a U.S. master's degree and then go back to complete a U.S. bachelor's degree or do a second U.S. master's degree (unless the prior degree (plus any post completion practical training work permission) was completed BEFORE the effective date of the rule).

b. Restrictions for F students in programs **BELOW the graduate level (e.g., Associates, Bachelors, Intensive English)**

- i. **F1 students will not be able to change major, change program or transfer schools for the first academic year in the U.S.**
- ii. After the first academic year, F1 students below the graduate level can transfer schools and change to a higher program level but would need to apply for an extension of stay to USCIS on form I-539. Because the wording is ambiguous, we are not sure if an extension would be required for transfers and program changes

even when the student still has sufficient time remaining on the I-20 to complete the new program.

- iii. F1 students below the graduate level will be able to change major after the first year with notification to the international advisor. If no additional time is required to complete the new major, it is presumed the student will not need to file an extension application with USCIS on form I-539, but DHS still need to confirm that this is true.

c. Restrictions for F1 students at the graduate level (e.g., master's and PhD programs – no information about post-master's certificate programs)

- i. **F1 graduate students in the U.S. CANNOT change program or change school unless they complete the current graduate program listed on the I-20 and go on to a higher level of study.** For example, a student could complete a master's program and apply to USCIS for an extension (or exit and re-enter) to begin a PhD program
- ii. This restriction applies to anyone who completes a U.S. graduate program as listed on the I-20 (including authorized post-completion work permission) after the rule takes effect on September 15, 2026.

3. Restrictions on program changes and transfers while in J student or scholar status after September 15, 2026

a. Restrictions for J status holders in change of program, change of level and extensions

- i. J1 students and scholars remain subject to Department of State (DOS) regulations regarding extensions, changes of category or program changes. In general, these rules already prohibit substantive changes without an application to DOS. If DOS approves a change of program or category that requires additional time to complete, the J1 will need to apply for an extension with USCIS on form I-539 using the new DS-2019. For J1 students, DOS rules already prohibit changes of level to a lower level of study but allow matriculation to a higher level of study.
- ii. J1 students and scholars will be required to file an extension application with USCIS on form I-539 using the new DS-2019 if additional time is needed to complete a new program up to the limit allowed by DOS for the J category.

b. Transfers while in J1 status

- i. The final rule does not prohibit transfers between J programs or sponsors.
- ii. J1s will be required to file an extension application with USCIS on form I-539 to transfer if they need additional time to complete their activity with the new program sponsor.

4. Restrictions on work

a. F and J Students and J Research Scholars

- i. F and J students and scholars can continue to work as authorized for the school or program while an extension application is pending (language in the rule suggests the extension application must be filed before the start of the 30-day grace period to continue work). For students, this would be on-campus work or work pursuant to the academic program such as Curricular Practical Training for F1 students and Academic training for J1 students, for J researchers and professors this would be work at the site of activity on the DS-2019.
- ii. F and J students and scholars who file a “timely” application for extension of stay with USCIS upon program change or transfer can continue study/research and any related on-campus or authorized work. This authorized work is limited to 240 days while the extension application is in process (J status holders who file before March 18, 2027, could continue until the end of the DS-2019). Extension applications should be filed before the current program expires and preferably at least 6 months in advance.
- iii. If USCIS does not process the application within the allotted timeframe, the individual must stop working until the application is processed.

b. F Student Optional Practical Training (OPT)

- i. Students who apply for OPT after March 18, 2027, will need to submit the I-765 employment application together with the I-539 application for extension of status (EOS).
- ii. It is not clear if a student who applies for OPT after March 18, 2027, and who receives the work authorization approval would need to wait for the EOS to be approved before beginning work or could work under the 240-day automatic extension allowed for the other types of student work until the extension is approved.

5. What is not clear:

Exit and Reentry

The preamble to the rule mentions processing an extension by exit and reentry, but the actual rule does not say this. This may be because this is the normal process for other visa types. However, the actual rule describes what happens upon re-entry while an extension application is in process.

How soon can one apply for the extension

The rule says that individuals should apply “early” but does not give a definitive date. At present, 6 months is the earliest individuals can apply for extensions in other immigration

statuses (such as H1B), but that limit is not stated in this rule. Everyone should apply more than 30 days before the current program end date or the I-94 expiration date (AUD), whichever is sooner. The rule states that F1s who apply for an extension during the grace period are not able to continue working while the extension is in process, while those who apply before can continue working in on-campus employment and CPT for 240 days while the extension is in process.

Passport

Currently Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) have the option of admitting an individual only until the end date of the passport. This new rule specifically states the admission should be for the I-20/DS-2019 end date or 4 years whichever is shorter. It is unclear whether shorter passport expirations dates will lead to shorter expiration dates for F and J visa holders. However, everyone should ensure that their passports are valid as far into the future as possible to avoid the possibility of receiving an earlier end date (AUD) upon reentry.

Effects of dependent travel and re-entry

It is not clear what the effect is on the F1/J1 if the F2/J2 dependent travels out of the U.S. independently during the transition period and returns with an end date on the I-94 while the F1/J1 still has an expiration date of D/S. At a minimum, that dependent would need to apply for an extension before their own expiration date. In other immigration contexts, the family group will be given the shortest period of validity for any member of the family group, which could be the soonest date that any family member's passport expires, the date the dependent turns 21, or the soonest date given on the I-94 at entry for any family member.

Program changes and Transfers for **F1 students** below the graduate level

The rule explains that transfers and changes of educational objective are not allowed for the first year for F1s below the graduate level (defining a change of education objectives as a change in major or educational level) and then states:

*(D) When seeking a change in educational objectives, F-1 students referenced in paragraphs (f)(5)(ii)(A) through (C) of this section must, **if seeking an extension of stay**, apply for an extension of stay on the form designated by USCIS, with the required fee and in accordance with the form instructions, including any biometrics required by [8 CFR 103.16](#)*

This makes it unclear as to whether F1 students below the graduate level who will not receive additional time on an I-20 when they change program or transfer will be able to change major, level or transfer without an extension application. The rule seems to indicate that changes of level and transfers will always require an extension application.

Corrections for incorrectly issued documents and program change exceptions for extenuating circumstances

There is no mention of a correction process for legitimate errors in the major or level on the I-20 or DS-2019. The rule mentions that program change exceptions might be made in extreme circumstances such as closure of a school or natural disaster. It does not mention errors or routine academic exceptions such as a faculty research group moving to a new institution which currently is often accompanied by transfers of the F and J members of the research group. Finally, it is unclear what would happen if a student on the way to the PhD master's out due to failing qualifying exams or deciding not to continue in the program. The presumption is that the student would NOT qualify for post-completion work permission in this case and would have to leave the U.S.

F1 Optional Practical Training (OPT) applications after March 18, 2027

It is not clear if a student who applies for OPT or STEM OPT after March 18, 2027, and who receives the work authorization approval would need to wait for the Extension of Status (EOS) to be approved before beginning work or could work under the 240-day automatic extension allowed for the other types of student work until the extension is approved.

I-9s for continued employment

It is not clear but likely that every change in expiration date (due to exits and re-entries or extension applications) will necessitate a new I-9. Also, during the waiting period for an extension, where an F or J could continue employment, they would likely need to show some proof of timely filing for the extension application to demonstrate continued employment permission for the employer to comply with I-9 requirements. Since this will differ for F and J status holders and depending on the individual's circumstances, this presents a challenge for the employer to correctly execute the I-9 and understand the expiration of work permission.

Conclusions

As you can see from the above information, this rule is complex, and procedures and details are not yet fully known. Out of an abundance of caution, we are recommending that students and scholars NOT travel out of the U.S. AFTER September 14, 2026, until the full impacts and details of these new regulations become clear. Anyone F or J status holder considering traveling after September 14, 2026, should carefully consider all details of their situation and speak with an ISSS advisor in GEO before making travel plans. Students may be referred out to immigration attorneys.