

Call for Action: Oppose Proposed DHS Rule Eliminating Duration of Status (D/S)

Dear Colleagues,

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has released a proposed rule that could profoundly affect international students and scholars' career development and academic success: [Proposed Rule Document](#).

The rule seeks to eliminate *Duration of Status (D/S)* for F, J, and other non-immigrant categories. Instead, it would impose fixed periods of stay (generally capped at four years) for all levels of academic programs. For many PhD students, especially in the humanities and social sciences, where programs often last six years or more, this would create significant obstacles.

Extensions of legal status would require filing Form I-539, which carries significant burdens: high fees (\$470 by mail or \$420 online, plus a \$30 biometrics fee), long processing times (typically 3–9 months), and a high premium processing fee (\$1,750) that will become almost mandatory given the large number of applications. Each extension is granted for only one year, meaning international students would need to refile annually after the initial four-year admission period until they complete their studies.

Every filing exposes students to the risk of denial, particularly in STEM fields, since USCIS retains full discretionary authority and its decisions cannot be appealed. Moreover, [USCIS has recently expanded the types of visa application screening](#) to include social media vetting, and the addition of reviews for “anti-American activity”—a term that is vague and open to broad interpretation, further heightening the risks for applicants. These changes would impose heavy financial, emotional, and academic strains on international students already navigating underfunded and challenging educational paths.

For more context, please see:

- NAFSA's detailed analysis of all changes: [NAFSA Resource](#)
- Yale OISS explainer on what is d/s: [Yale OISS](#)
- Yale OISS will host a Town Hall webinar on the elimination of d/s, September 10, 3:30-5 pm EST: [Registration](#)

When international PhD students become targets of exclusion and undue burden, this proposed change would also harm U.S. interests and the global intellectual community in multiple ways. Logistically, it would overwhelm USCIS with tens of thousands of additional extension applications. This will exacerbate already severe backlogs, causing many applications to be delayed or even denied, thereby jeopardizing students' legal status and academic progress—since a denied extension request would immediately terminate a student's lawful presence in the U.S.

Beyond logistics, the proposal threatens the vitality and global attractiveness of the U.S. as a destination for advanced intellectual training. If the typical length of PhD programs fundamentally clashes with the legally permitted length of stay, enrolled international students will be forced to navigate unnecessary uncertainty and fear throughout their studies. At the same time, many talented students may be deterred from applying to U.S. doctoral programs altogether. This would not only weaken the nation's long-standing leadership in higher education and research but also send an unwelcoming message to all international scholars.

A similar rule was proposed in 2020 and successfully stopped after over 30,000 public comments. Every voice truly matters. We are asking academic organizations like yours to support your international colleagues:

1. **Submit a public comment letter as an organization** opposing the rule on the federal portal: [Submit Comment](#). Academic organizations can play a critical role as thought leaders and advocates for the international community. Comment Period Ends: **Sep 29, 2025, at 11:59 PM EDT**. A comment letter can draw points made in NAFSA's latest analysis.
2. **Submit a public comment letter as an individual (can be done anonymously).**
3. **Publicize this issue** to your members, faculty, and students at your department and school, and urge them to submit their comments as well.

We hope you will join in this collective effort to protect the academic freedom, equity, and success of international students and scholars.

In Solidarity,
Concerned international scholars and students