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# Homeland Security Moves to Restrict How Long International Students Can Stay in U.S.

The proposal would limit international students' duration of stay to four years. Advocates slammed the plan, saying it would force students "into a sea of administrative delays" at best.

By Katherine Knott



This latest plan is one of several ways the Trump administration is targeting international students.

**A**fter months of speculation, the Department of Homeland Security publicly released its plans to limit how long international students can stay in the United States—a proposal that advocates say will only add to uncertainty and chaos that this group is already facing.

Currently, students can stay in the country as long as they are enrolled at a college or university. But the proposed rule released Wednesday would allow students to stay for the duration of their program, but no longer than four years. That isn't enough time for students to complete a doctoral program, and it's less time than the average student takes to complete a bachelor's degree. Students who want to stay longer would have to seek authorization to extend their visa.

The first Trump administration tried to make this change, which would roll back at 1991 rule known as duration of status. However, the Biden administration withdrew the proposal. Officials said in a news release that setting a fixed time for students on visas to stay would curb what they call abuses and allow the government to better oversee these individuals. Additionally, officials alleged that the current policy incentivizes international students to “become ‘forever’ students,” who are “perpetually enrolled in higher education courses to remain in the U.S.”

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DHS will take public comments on the proposal until Sept. 29. Before the agency can finalize the rule, it will have to review and respond to those comments.

Advocates for international students have been sounding the alarm about this plan since DHS first sought approval in June to make the proposal, and those warnings continued this week now that the plan is public. Changing the rule, they say, would be another hurdle for international students who want to come to the United States. These others include vetting students' social media profiles and more scrutiny on current visa holders. Since President Trump took office, the State Department has revoked 6,000 student visas.

More than one million students from other countries enrolled in at a U.S. college or university in 2024, making up about 6 percent of the total student population. Experts predict the number of international students to drop off significantly this academic year.

Fanta Aw, executive director of NAFSA, the association of international educators, said in a statement that the DHS proposal is a “bad idea” and “a dangerous overreach by government into academia.”

“These changes will only serve to force aspiring students and scholars into a sea of administrative delays at best, and at worst, into unlawful presence status—leaving them vulnerable to punitive actions through no fault of their own,” Aw added.

Miriam Feldblum, president and CEO of the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, described the proposal in a statement as “another unnecessary and counterproductive action aimed against international students and scholars.”

“This proposed rule sends a message to talented individuals from around the world that their contributions are not valued in the United States,” she said. “This is not only detrimental to international students—it also weakens the ability of U.S. colleges and universities to attract top talent, diminishing our global competitiveness. International students, scholars, and exchange visitors contribute economically, intellectually, and culturally to American

society. They drive innovation, create jobs, and advance groundbreaking research.”

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