

October 03, 2025

Institutions, Faculty Oppose Plan to Limit Foreign Students' Time in U.S.

Commenters from across numerous sectors say they fear that the new rule, which would require international students to get extensions to stay in the U.S. more than four years, would be a barrier for the vast majority of students.

By [Johanna Alonso](#)



Along with institutions of higher education, hospitals and private sector
ers sounded the alarm about DHS's proposal.

Spencer Platt/Getty Images

A slew of public commenters derided the Department of Homeland Security's proposal that would restrict how long international students can stay in the country.

The measure would alter the long-standing policy known as duration of status, which allows international students to stay in the U.S. until their course of study is complete. Among other concerns, commenters argued that the rule would unnecessarily restrict international students, who are already closely monitored by the government and their institutions of study. Many commenters also drew attention to the potential consequences for the health-care system and employers.

The proposed rule would instead cap the amount of time students could stay in the U.S. to just four years, though they would be able to request an extension from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. It would also prevent international students from changing their majors or transferring between U.S. institutions.

Most Popular

Trump Administration Finalizes Limits on Student Visas

Trump Administration Finalizes Limits on Student

Visas

Pressures Mount at South Carolina HBCU

According to DHS, the proposal aims to lessen the number of students who overstay their F and J visas. However, NAFSA, the international education association, argued that research has shown that DHS overestimates overstay rates. The organization, along with other commenters, also noted that the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System—the online system that monitors international students—already alerts Immigration and Customs Enforcement if a student overstays their visa.

The comment period closed on Sept. 29. DHS will now have to review and respond to more than 15,700 comments before deciding whether to move forward with the elimination of duration of status.

More Than 4 Years

Numerous commenters noted that a significant number of students take more than four years to complete their undergraduate degree—and it's incredibly rare to complete a Ph.D. in that length of time. That means a significant number of students will be at risk of being unable to complete their programs if they are unable to secure extensions.

Commenters noted a range of reasons they, their peers or their students have struggled to finish a degree in under four years, including medical and family emergencies, the death or departure of a faculty mentor, completing cooperative internships, and more.

Others pointed out that some programs are even intended to take longer than four years. Jessica Goswick, an architect and a lecturer, wrote that a B.Arch., a professional bachelor's degree in architecture, is intended to be completed in five years. The University of Illinois system—one of several dozen institutions that opposed the rule in written comments—said that its main Urbana-Champaign campus has over 30 undergraduate programs requiring more than 120 credit hours.

“Limiting initial entry to four years would require students in these programs to take more than 15 credits every semester for four years, which would reduce performance and graduation rates,” the system’s comment reads.

“Undergraduate students should be encouraged to take course loads appropriate for success rather than rush toward an arbitrary completion date determined by their date of entry to the United States.”

Several researchers and current Ph.D. students also stressed that graduate students frequently need more time to complete their research.

“Reducing this time for foreign student scientists would make it impossible for them to earn a Ph.D. in many fields,

including my own field of neuroscience. Science takes years to build, develop, execute, and compile in order [to] share the information with the world and enrich the scientific community,” wrote Grace Swaim, a postdoctoral researcher at Yale University.

Although students would have the option to get their visas extended beyond the four-year cap, experts warned that doing so is costly, time-consuming and uncertain, and it would add to USCIS’s already-lengthy processing time—about 6.5 months—for such extensions, according to NAFSA. The University of Illinois system also emphasized that the rule would force the system to hire 13 new full-time and one part-time employee and spend over \$2 million in the first year alone to apply for these extensions.

Editor's Picks

Brown Professor Suspects Majority of His Class Used AI to Cheat

Ursuline Fights Expulsion From Athletic Conference After Merger

To AI-Proof Lawyers, Some Law Schools Restrict Technology

These added barriers could ultimately lead fewer students to want to study in the United States, commenters warned, which many faculty said would be a loss for their labs, their larger institutions and the country as a whole.

“These students not only make crucial contributions to the fundamental research in our department, but often end up filling important roles in industry, academia and national labs in the U.S. Others contribute to the international efforts unraveling the nature of matter and developing novel technologies even after returning to their home country,” wrote Sebastian Kuhn, chair of the physics department at Old Dominion University. “International graduate students are an indispensable contribution to the success of the U.S. research enterprise and the international standing of our country.”

Beyond the Campus

Other commenters shared that the rule could have an impact outside of the classroom and the lab. Physicians and hospital administrators said the roughly 17,000 J-1 visa holders currently working in hospitals as part of their medical training would be affected and detailed in comments how the change could ultimately disrupt Americans’ access to health care.

“It is important to recognize that the 17,000 J-1 physicians training in the U.S. do not displace domestic medical graduates; rather, they fill residency slots that would otherwise remain unfilled each year,” wrote the American

Hospital Association in a comment. “These physicians disproportionately train in high-need specialties that continue to be in substantial shortage, such as internal medicine, pediatrics and family medicine. They also frequently work in rural and underserved communities, and many who train in those settings continue to work in them when their training is complete. J-1 physicians not only help sustain the physician workforce pipeline but also help expand patient access to essential care.”

Numerous commenters who identified themselves as leaders in industries from financial services to pharmaceuticals also explained how their companies and industries at large rely on the contributions of international students.

“The maximum stay restrictions are especially problematic for Ph.D. students and those conducting long-term clinical trials, which often span five to seven years,” wrote an anonymous commenter who identified themselves as a senior executive in a global pharmaceutical company. “Reducing this flexibility would disrupt important research in drug efficacy and public health. Students engaged in such long-term research projects would be forced to abandon their work prematurely, leading to a waste of time, resources, and intellectual capital that the U.S. cannot afford to lose.”

A seemingly small number of comments were in favor of the change, with many of the supportive comments claiming international students are taking jobs and spots at colleges away from Americans.

One higher education association—the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities—did not outright oppose the measure, but rather encouraged DHS to limit it just to colleges with admission rates under 30 percent. The council’s president, David A. Hoag, argued that those are the institutions at which the administration is concerned about “foreign students potentially displacing American students.”

“This approach directly addresses the administration’s stated concern by focusing on the subset of institutions where foreign student enrollment is most likely to impact domestic applicants,” he wrote. “By limiting the rule’s scope in this way, DHS can more effectively target its regulatory efforts while minimizing unnecessary restrictions on less selective schools where this displacement issue is less pronounced.”

Written By



Johanna Alonso

Share This Article

