

ISSS VIRTUAL BRIEFING

Federal Changes Impacting International Students

Meeting Chat — Questions & Answers Reference Document

August 10, 2026, | Texas A&M University

Resources[Final Rule \(Official\): 2026-14439.pdf](#) — Published July 17, 2026 (156 pages)[ISSS D/S Page: Duration of Status Final Rule Webpage](#)[SEVP Quick Facts & FAQs: Available on ISSS website](#)

Immigration Attorney Resources: Available on ISSS website

Questions: Contact ISSS via email or Teams message — [Samantha Clement](#), [Jie Fan](#), or [Amanda Brinlee](#)**Purpose of this Document**

This document compiles all questions and responses from the meeting chat of the ISSS Virtual Briefing held on August 10, 2026. It is intended as a reference for faculty, staff, and administrators. Content is reproduced accurately from the meeting chat and supporting transcript. Responses are attributed as provided. This document does not constitute legal advice.

Facilitators: Samantha Clement, Director ISSS | Jie Fan, Associate Director ISSS | Amanda Brinlee, Sr. Associate Director ISSS | Dr. Holly Hudson, AVP for Global Engagement

Section 1 — Fixed Admission Period & Admit Until Date (AUD)

Question / Topic	Response
For doctoral students, most will have 4 years for the I-94 expiration. How is the program end date determined for master's students? — Smith, Trenton S	Since master's programs are less than 4 years, students will have an AUD based on their current program end date plus the grace period. If they need more time, they must seek extensions. If they plan to do OPT after graduation, they also need to seek extensions. This is the general gist — it will differ based on individual timelines and specific situations. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Regardless of program type, what is the maximum Admit Until Date a student will receive?	Regardless of program type, the maximum amount of time a student will receive for their Admit Until Date (AUD) will be 4 years plus a 30-day grace period. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Do continuing students in their 2nd or 3rd year of a PhD program need to apply for an extension after 4 years? — Mandal, Anindita	To apply proactively is reasonable. If they submit the extension well in advance, that could happen as early as their 2nd or 3rd year. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Clarification for current students: If they expect to still be in the program after the I-20 end date, they should request an extension now. If they expect to finish before the I-20 end date, they are good for now? — McAdoo, Tera	Yes. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS

If someone has an I-20 valid for another 2 years and they travel out of the country, are they okay? — Kerins, Carolyn A	If they return to the U.S. after September 15, 2026, they will receive an AUD plus a grace period. They are okay, but they now have a deadline — the last day they can legally remain inside the U.S. They must take action to extend if they need more time to complete their program. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director For most students, the AUD will be the I-20/DS-2019 end date + 30 days OR 4 years + 30 days, whichever is less. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
How is the Admit Until Date (AUD) determined? — Newman, Julie	For most students, the AUD will be the I-20/DS-2019 end date + 30 days OR 4 years + 30 days, whichever is less. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Important Dates shared by ISSS in the meeting chat:	Publish Date: July 17, 2026 Effective Date: September 15, 2026 Max 4-Year from Effective Date (Actual End Date): September 15, 2030 F AUD (Actual End Date + 60 days): November 14, 2030 J AUD (Actual End Date + 30 days): October 15, 2030 — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director

Section 2 — Extension of Stay Process

Question / Topic	Response
Are there examples of compelling academic reasons? If a program requires a minimum of 130 hours, will that be considered compelling? — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean	Direct quote from the Final Rule (pg. 45126): "Documentation demonstrating the request for an extension is based on one of the following reasons: (i) A compelling academic reason, such as a change of major or research topic or unexpected research problems. Unexpected research problems are those caused by an unexpected change in faculty advisor, need to refine an investigatory topic based on initial research, research funding delays, and similar issues. . . . (ii) A documented illness or medical condition . . . such as a serious injury, that is supported by medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, a licensed doctor of osteopathy, a licensed psychologist, or a licensed clinical psychologist; or (iii) Circumstances beyond the student's control, including a natural disaster, national health crisis, or the closure of an institution" (pg. 45126). — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director For students whose programs are more than 4 years, they can apply for an Extension of Stay (EOS) with USCIS to complete the remainder of their program. We have to assume that if they can show their program requires a certain number of credits and they have been making progress — enrolling full-time as required by F-1/J-1 status — then that is sufficient. However, we won't know for sure until students start applying and we see trends in USCIS adjudication. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS

Is change of major allowed as a compelling academic reason (as referenced in the final rule quote)? — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean	I apologize. This direct quote may be taken out of context. In other parts of the rule, it is mentioned that for graduate level, change of major is not permitted. Direct quote from pg. 44978: "[This rule prohibits] F-1 students at the graduate educational level or above from changing educational objectives at any point during a program of study." — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director Change of major is only permitted for undergraduate students after one full year in their program in F-1 status. For graduate students — no. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
All CIPs in Texas have an expected program length. For PhDs it is 5 years. Could this be used as justification for an extension? — Smith, Trenton S	Sounds promising! — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
For extension, is there a standard timeframe (e.g., apply every year), or is it based on the specific request? — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean	There is not a limit on how early students can apply — submitting 6 months in advance is reasonable. Extensions are based on the specific request and academic need, not a set recurring schedule. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript)
Is there a limited number of extension requests a student is allowed to submit? — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean	As far as we know, no. Students will need to continue to show that they have a compelling academic reason — or that they are applying for OPT, or starting a new program — each time they request an extension. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript)
If a student files for an extension but the application is still pending, can they continue in the program? Do you know how long the approval process will take? — Zhang, Yvette Yu	Students can and should continue to enroll. For work authorization, they can continue to work for up to 240 days while the application is pending. They must stop working beyond 240 days. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Section 3 — Academic Objective Limitations (Program & Degree Changes)	
Question / Topic	Response
Is there any consideration for a 64-hour vs. a 96-hour PhD? (e.g., student entering with an M.S. vs. from a B.S.) — Lauren Johnson CS / Rosser, Suzanne	PhDs are all treated the same. If more than 4 years are needed, the student must seek an extension. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
What about 3+2 programs (students who begin in undergrad and transition to graduate)? — Kim Widdison	If students start in undergrad and change to graduate, that is a higher-level change and is generally permitted. However, they may still need to seek extensions based on specific timelines. There is still a lot unclear regarding 3+2 programs. — Fan, Jie & Clement, Samantha — ISSS
Should students consult with ISSS regarding what to submit? — Fulton, Clarice	It depends. The scope of ISSS advising is now more limited than before. Amanda Brinlee will cover this further regarding the scope of advising. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director

When you say students "can't go down" — does that mean they can't drop from PhD to M.S.? — Rosser, Suzanne	Correct. DHS is preventing students from doing this. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Can a student move from PhD to M.S. if this is done prior to September 15? — donna.adcock	Prior to September 15: YES. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Students can change their program prior to September 15, but not after — regardless of when they were admitted? Is there no grandfathering? — Smith, Trenton S	Correct. Starting September 15, F-1 and J-1 students cannot change their primary curricula from PhD to Master's and continue to maintain their immigration status. They can make those changes through September 14 without immigration consequences. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
If an international student begins a PhD program and then needs to master out, what happens if they still need a semester to complete their Master's? — Stefan	Unfortunately, if this occurs after September 15th, it appears this may not be possible from an immigration perspective. The student will likely need to be referred to an immigration attorney. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS That is still unclear. The final rule essentially says no, but there are still questions about whether exiting the U.S. and re-entering with a new immigration record would allow the student to do this. We need more clarity from DHS on this. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
If the PhD is not completed, could the student apply for a new I-20/I-94 as an M.S. student? — Stefan	That is still unclear. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
I have pediatric dental residents who complete a 2-year certificate; international students complete a 3rd year to earn an M.S. Does this mean they will need to register for M.S. from the very beginning or as a joint program? — Kerins, Carolyn A	Great question. Professional certificate programs such as dentistry programs are not discussed in the rule. We are waiting for DHS to provide further guidance. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
Should we no longer allow students to submit the MDD petition to change from PhD to M.S.? Can they change to the same level but a different program or major? — Kim Widdison	This is something we need to discuss further. Some actions may still be permitted by the University but may no longer be permitted from an immigration standpoint. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS Not permitted from an immigration standpoint = cannot maintain active F-1 or J-1. Hence, risky to remain in the U.S. — and cannot participate in OPT/STEM/Academic Training. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
In that situation — without maintaining F-1/J-1 status — the student cannot be employed, correct? — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean	Correct. If they do not maintain F-1/J-1 status, they cannot work in the U.S. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS

For a PhD student mastering out this fall 2026 who wants to apply for another PhD in spring 2027 — do they need an extension, or is this no longer possible? — Ayodele, Ayomiposi	This may be tricky. Technically, a PhD student in F-1/J-1 status will not be able to maintain that status if they master out. If they lose immigration status, there are additional issues they will need to address. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS If applying for another PhD at a different university, this is possibly no longer possible, as transfer at the graduate level is no longer permitted. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director Our best understanding at this time is that they will not be able to maintain immigration status if they do this. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Are stand-alone graduate certificates considered "additional programs" under the new rule? — Albrecht, Heather	It is unclear from what we read in the final rule. Certificate programs were not discussed. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
If an international student fails the PhD qualifying exam, our previous practice was to allow them to switch to M.S. Exam results are released in early August. Would the student have enough time to change immigration status for fall semester? — Zhang, Yvette Yu	The last day for the Graduate School to receive MDD paperwork to change degree level and have it be effective for this fall is September 4th — slightly before the September 15th effective date. — Sawyer, Raiden — Graduate School
Section 4 — Travel & Re-Entry	
Question / Topic	Response
If a student attends an international conference after September 15th, when they re-enter will it be under the new rules? Will their end date change? — Newman, Julie	If they return to the U.S. after September 15, 2026, they will receive an AUD plus a grace period. They are okay, but they now have a deadline — the last day they can legally remain inside the U.S. They must take action to extend if they need more time. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
If students have to leave the country, can they still complete their degree remotely if they are denied an extension? — Wiederwohl, Chrissy	Great question. We plan to explore this option with other offices, such as Export Control and the Graduate School. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
We have ABD students with a reduced course load in their final year. Could they complete their final year from their home countries without applying for an extension, as long as they do not re-enter the U.S.? — Zhang, Yvette Yu	Yes. If they are outside the country, they technically do not need an active immigration status. It is possible, in theory, to complete their program from outside the U.S. without seeking an extension — as long as they do not return in F-1 status and do not pursue OPT. — Fan, Jie & Clement, Samantha — ISSS To complete a PhD or M.S. outside the country, the program will have to be approved for distance delivery. However,

	research hours could be completed in absentia without an approval for distance delivery. — Bryk, Mary E & Dunn, Angie — Participants
If students complete their program from outside the country — would they be permitted to return for graduation? — Fulton, Clarice	The student would not be permitted to return in F-1 status, but they could possibly come back as a tourist to attend the graduation ceremony. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
If students decide to complete their fifth year from their home country, would they still need to apply for an extension? — Zhang, Yvette Yu	If they leave the U.S. during their grace period without intent to return in F-1 status, ISSS can work with them to complete the immigration close-out process. If the department is willing for them to complete from their home country, there are no concerns from an immigration standpoint — they simply would not be able to return in F-1 status. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript)

Section 5 — Optional Practical Training (OPT) & Post-Completion

Question / Topic	Response
Can students on an F visa still apply for OPT? — Trache, Andreea	Yes, they can. They may need to apply for both an extension and OPT/STEM. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director Yes, they can. The process and timing may change slightly. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Will OPT extension applications begin for graduates after September 15th? — Sprayberry, Jana	The rule mentions that if students file for OPT before March 18, 2027, they do not need to file for a separate extension. For those who never leave the country, it is possible they may not need to file an extension up to a certain point. If they do travel and re-enter with an AUD, they may need to file an extension. — Fan, Jie — ISSS Associate Director
If any of our PhD students receive an offer for a postdoc in the U.S., do they have to leave the country to restart their visa application? — Bartlett, Gillian — Naresh Kaif Ashish College of Medicine (from transcript)	Not necessarily. They could still apply for OPT if they are on F-1. There are provisions depending on whether they are inside or outside the United States — it is not necessarily the case that they would have to leave and re-enter. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript)
The F-1 to OPT transition is critical for future postdocs. Can you share more detailed information? — Trache, Andreea	OPT was not covered in depth in this presentation. The focus was on academic program limitations and fixed admission periods. Detailed OPT impact information — including transition provisions and STEM extension — will be included in the mandatory Homebase module being prepared for students, and will also be available to faculty and staff. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS (from transcript)

Section 6 — Program Administration & Communications

Question / Topic	Response
Given the uncertainties regarding extensions, does this mean official PhD program timelines need to be adjusted to 4 years in offers of admission? — Szczepanski, Jonathan T	No, that should not be necessary. It is still important that offers of admission and the Form I-20 reflect the full length of the program — even if more than 4 years. That documentation may help students when they apply to extend the Admit Until Date (AUD). — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
For programs that are by default 5 years, should we build the extension into our international graduate student timeline? — Dicaglio, Joshua M	That is a good idea. To clarify, this will affect international students in F-1 and J-1 status only — but that is most of them. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Will these important rules, such as the four-year limit, be stated in the acceptance letter sent to students by the University? — Zhang, Yvette Yu	Not sure at this time. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS
Could ISSS provide suggested verbiage for programs to include in offer letters summarizing these rules? — Bartlett, Gillian — Naresh Kaif Ashish College of Medicine (from transcript)	That is something we can take back and explore what options we may have. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript) The Graduate School is proactively adding language to the application portal so students are aware of these changes at the time of application, working toward consistent messaging to help students make informed decisions. — Tong, Fuhui — Associate Provost & Dean (from transcript)
How would a Leave of Absence affect an international graduate student under the new rules? — Smith, Trenton S	For immigration purposes, the regulations have not changed for authorized early withdrawal. That process remains the same. — Brinlee, Amanda — Sr. Associate Director, ISSS (from transcript)
Could the chat be made available with the recording? — Newman, Julie	We are not sure if the chat can be made available with the recording, but we will make a note and try to do so if possible. Tip from Sawyer, Raiden: You can click the three dots at the top of the Zoom window and select "Save Chat" to save the chat yourself. — Clement, Samantha — Director, ISSS & Sawyer, Raiden — Graduate School

Section 7 — J-1 Research Scholars

Question / Topic	Response
What about visiting research scholars who need an extension? — Gabriel Gana Bake	This session is student-focused. There is another session scheduled for Wednesday specifically focused on the impacts to J-1 research scholars. Please feel free to message ISSS to receive an invitation to that session or the recording. — Fan, Jie & Clement, Samantha — ISSS

