

US caps length of student visas

By **Lindsay McKenzie** and **Jacob Taylor**

Starting on 15 September, the US will admit student visa holders for a fixed period that is tied to their program's length but capped at four years, and it will add restrictions on when and whether visa holders can change their majors or programs.

The federal rule laying out the new immigration regulations was published by the Department of Homeland Security in July. The four-year limit applies to F (student) and J (exchange visitor) visas. The rule does away with the duration-of-status system, which had allowed student visa holders to remain in the US for the duration of their time as a student.

Universities and scientific organizations warn that the change creates new administrative hurdles for international students and that it may deter them from choosing to study in the US. (For more on the uncertainty facing international students in US physics and astronomy departments, see "The US is losing appeal for international students" on page 14.) Under the rule, students who need more time to complete their program will have to either apply for a formal extension of stay from US Citizenship and Immigration Services or leave the country and apply for a new visa before returning.

DHS says that the new rule closes an immigration loophole by restoring federal oversight of immigration decisions that had been delegated to university officials. "For decades, foreign students have been admitted into the U.S. indefinitely, allowing thousands to abuse our immigration system by perpetually enrolling in courses to avoid having to leave the U.S.," DHS Secretary Markwayne Mullin said in a statement.

DHS proposed eliminating the duration-of-status rule during President Trump's first term, but the proposal was withdrawn during the Biden administration. During the public comment period for the new rule, many universities, medical schools, scientific societies, immigration advocates, and lawyers argued that the proposal would disproportionately affect doctoral students, researchers, and physicians in training, whose programs routinely exceed four years.

In its response to the comments, DHS said that the four-year cap is "intended as a law enforcement and screening tool to assess whether a student is maintaining normal academic progress and eligibility for F-1 status," rather than as a mechanism to force students to finish within four years.

In a 2025 report, the statistical research team at the American Institute of Physics (which publishes *Physics Today* and *FYT*) found that about 97% of international students in physics and astronomy take more than four years to complete their PhDs; the median duration for all students, domestic and international, is six years. The median time to complete a research doctorate across all disciplines is 5.7 years, according to NSF's 2024 Survey of Earned Doctorates.

The new rule prevents international undergraduate stu-

dents from changing programs or switching majors during their first year, and graduate students on a student visa are prohibited from changing programs or switching majors. International students who complete a degree in the US will not be allowed to pursue another degree in the US at the same or lower education level.

White House science vision puts individuals before institutions

By **Lindsay McKenzie**

The US research enterprise has become too centered on established research institutions, according to a report issued by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in July.

Authored by OSTP Director Michael Kratsios, *Science: A New Golden Age* is written as an update to Vannevar Bush's landmark 1945 report, *Science: The Endless Frontier*. Kratsios argues that today's scientific landscape is shaped by AI, global competition, and large private-sector investment and therefore requires a fundamental redesign of how the federal government funds research.

Key recommendations in the report include prioritizing individual scientists over "a narrow set of legacy institutions," with greater federal support for startups, independent research organizations, nonprofits, industry, and NSF's recently launched X-Labs program, which aims to support research teams from a wide variety of organizations and allow those teams to operate with broad independence. Kratsios also frames NSF's Graduate Research Fellowship Program as a success story that should be expanded.

In the report, Kratsios argues that traditional peer review tends to disadvantage bold ideas from individual researchers. He recommends the use of experimental funding approaches, including letting technical reviewers at federal agencies recommend "unconventional proposals that may not pass consensus-driven review panels." That "golden ticket" model is being piloted at NSF's Directorate for Technology, Innovation and Partnerships. The report also issues a new call to "rein in indirect cost recovery that supports administrative bloat, redirecting that money to real scientific infrastructure."

As a supplement to the report, Kratsios and White House Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought published a memorandum on the Trump administration's R&D budget priorities for fiscal year 2028. The memo instructs science agencies to incorporate the priorities into their forthcoming budget requests and to develop implementation plans within 90 days for a series of "R&D priority practices." **PT**

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