

International Student Resource Center

Filing Guide: Form I-539 for Visa Status Extension or Change of Visa Status with U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)

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NOTE: Information on the USCIS website can change at short notice - hyperlinks are provided to the US government websites so that you can confirm the most recent information right before you file, including filing address, fees, correct edition of form, etc.

1. Background

There are two ways to move into a new temporary (nonimmigrant) status, or to extend your period of non-immigrant status in the U.S.:

1) leave the US and apply for a visa stamp at a US consulate, and then present that visa stamp at a US port of entry (land border or airport) or
2) apply to change status or extend your status within the US.

This Insight document discusses the process to apply for a change of status from within the United States.

Current situation: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Form I-539 is used to file for a change of status to F-1 or J-1. As of March 2026, F-1 and J-1 individuals do not need to file an I-539 to extend their status from within the U.S. They only need to apply to their sponsoring institution for an extension of their I-20 form (F-1 students) or DS-2019 form (J-1 students or scholars).

Anticipated change: There is a pending regulation, however, that if finalized, would require an I-539 filing with USCIS for F-1 and J-1 status holders in order to gain an extension. Although the regulation has not yet been finalized nor taken effect, the Duration of Status regulation (commonly known as the "D/S rule") is anticipated to be finalized and take effect sometime in Spring 2026.

If you are considering filing Form I-539 for a change of status to or from F-1 or J-1 status, or you may need an extension of your F-1 or J-1 status in the future after the new D/S rule is finalized and implemented, you must communicate with your Designated School Official (DSO) or Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) to confirm your eligibility and that you have all the required documents.

2. Filing options

a. Paper filing: You can download the paper form from USCIS, here: https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-539.pdf

i. Instructions can be found here: https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/forms/i-539instr.pdf
ii. The correct edition date (as of March 2026) is 08/28/2024.

b. Online filing: https://www.uscis.gov/i539online

Note: online filing is generally preferable as it generates an immediate receipt, and avoids potential spelling mistakes when an officer manually enters information from a paper filing. It is also possible to upload evidence, and get copies of notices before they are sent in the regular mail.

c. Premium Processing: Premium processing filing is an expedited service with USCIS that requires an additional filing fee of $2,075 and form I-907. Regular processing times can exceed several months. Premium Processing requires USCIS to review the application within 30 business days so that an approval or request for evidence (RFE) will be sent within that time period. If there is an RFE, applicants are usually allowed 33-87 days designated to respond. USCIS will make a final decision within 30 business days after the response is received.

How Do I Request Premium Processing? | USCIS

3. Filing Fee Information

The USCIS fee amount depends on whether the application is filed online or by paper.

- The paper filing fee is $470.;
- The online filing fee is $420. (Fees as of spring 2026).
- The Premium Processing fee is an additional fee of $2,075 (online or paper filing) for those requesting expedited service. The applicant must file Form I-907 to use premium processing in addition to the I-539 form.

The official USCIS fee schedule can be found here: USCIS Fee Schedule. Be sure to check for the correct fee amount before filing your application.

Effective October 28, 2025, USCIS will only accept electronic payments for paper-filed forms. Payments may be made either:

- with Form G-1450, Authorization for Credit Card Transactions, or
- with Form G-1650, Authorization for ACH Transactions.

4. Possible Required Supplemental Documents

An I-539 application to USCIS must be accompanied by evidence supporting the application for either a change of status, or an extension of stay. This might include evidence of your current status, evidence of eligibility for an extension of status, and/or evidence relating to the new status being requested. Some examples of evidence that is typically included with an I-539 application may include but is not limited to the following:

- I-20 or DS-2019 signed by the Designated School Official (DSO) for F-1 status, or Alternate Responsible Officer (ARO) for J-1 status.
- SEVIS I-901 fee receipt. Changes of status require the SEVIS fee proof of payment: Department of Homeland Security - Form I-901. In the future, extensions of stay may also require this.
- I-94 electronic entry record - I-94/I-95 Website - Official Site for Travelers Visiting the United State
- copies of US immigration history including current passport biographical page, any previous I-20s, DS-2019s or changes or extensions of status notices
- Financial support documents - usually the same as submitted to the school, proving the ability to pay tuition, fees, and all living expenses.
- Social media vetting

Dependents (spouse or child)

Dependents who will be changing or extending their status within the United States based on your status (the principal applicant) must prepare and file the following documents along with your application:

- Form I-539A must be completed for each dependent
- Evidence documenting proof of relationship (e.g., birth certificate for child, or marriage certificate for spouse) - if documents are not in English, you must provide certified translations
- Identity / immigration documents (e.g., passport biographic page, visa stamp (if applicable), Form I-94 - Arrival / Departure Record)
- Fees
- Other supporting documents (if applicable)

5. When to file

Changes of Status (CoS):

CoS to F-1 or J-1: Generally the change of status request should be filed prior to the expiration of the previous status, and also prior to the academic program start date. Allowing several months for processing time is advisable, though it can take much longer if premium processing is not used. If the change is not approved by 30 days following the academic program start date, the academic immigration advisor (DSO or ARO) will have to defer the start date in SEVIS to the next academic term.

Individuals changing to F-1 status are not required to maintain valid status to within 30 days or the new start date, but those changing to M-1, and possibly J-1 status should be able to prove their lawful status was maintained to within 30 days of the new program start date.

CoS from F-1 or J-1 to a different status: The application should be filed prior to the end of the 60 day grace period for F-1 students, and prior to the expiration date of the J-1 program. Note that the J-1 SEVIS record will automatically change to Inactive after the program end date, which may cause questions from USCIS. If possible filing prior to the end date is adviseable.

Note for changes from F-1 or J-1 **to H-1B**, an I-539 application is NOT required. It would only be required for any dependent changes of status from F-2 or J-2, including to H-4.

Extensions of Stay (EoS)

EoS in another visa status (H-4, O-3, TN…). The I-539 should be filed prior to the expiration date of the current approved status. Continued work permission is authorized in certain categories, including H-1B, O-1 and TN, while the extension is pending.

EoS in F or J status is potentially required only after the D/S rule is finalized.

6. Where to file

a. If filing by paper, check here for filing address - Filing Addresses for Form I-539, Application to Extend/Change Nonimmigrant Status | USCIS
b. If filing online, see: https://www.uscis.gov/i539online

7. Post-filing; cautions on allowed activities and travel

- Be sure to keep a copy of the I-539 application package for your files.
- Individuals holding B-2 tourist status cannot start classes until the change of status to F or J is approved. {8 CFR § 214.2(b)(7) and §248.1(c)}
- Keep in touch with your academic immigration advisor (DSO or ARO). If the I-539 is not approved by the time classes start, your advisor may need to adjust the start date set in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)
- **Travel outside the U.S. while your I-539 application is pending with USCIS can result in abandonment of the application, and a denial of your application by USCIS.**
- An approved I-539 is not the same as a passport visa stamp. If you have an approved I-539, but do not have the related approved and valid visa stamp in your passport, be sure to check with your academic immigration advisor before traveling internationally.
    - In some cases it may be possible to make short trips to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean without a visa stamp through a regulatory allowance called Automatic Revalidation.

    - Other international trips will require an appointment at a US consulate to apply for a visa stamp. It is important to confirm travel with the academic immigration advisor to make sure the SEVIS record and other documents are up to date.
- When the I-539 application is approved, the student should carry a copy of the I-539 approval notice (Form I-797) with the I-94 card as evidence of current immigration status.
- Once your change of status is approved, if you return to the U.S. after international travel, make sure to check the electronic I-94 record to ensure the expiration date and category of admission (F or J) is accurate. Students can reach out to a CBP office if a correction is needed: Deferred Inspection Sites | U.S. Customs and Border Protection

8. Caveat re: D/S rule and what that might mean

The Duration of Status rule will be reviewed carefully once it is published and updated guidance provided by ISRC. For now, the key point to understand is that extending F-1 or J-1 status **may in the future require international students and scholars to file an I-539 application with USCIS**, so students and scholars may need to plan for additional delay, effort and expense associated with such a filing.

9. Special considerations

- Presidential Proclamation 10043, issued May 29, 2020, applies to Chinese graduate students in F or J status, and restricts a US consulate or embassy from issuing an F or J passport visa stamp if the student has a connection to a Chinese military fusion university or program. Proclamation Suspending Entry of Chinese Students and Researchers Connected to PRC “Military-Civil Fusion Strategy" | NAFSA. USCIS has recently started denying I-539 change of status applications requesting a change to F or J student category based on a presumption that the student is avoiding review at a US consulate abroad. This is an evolving situation.
- Anyone with a previous interaction with law enforcement should be ready to present evidence of what happened during the interaction. USCIS officers may see that something happened in their database, but the burden of proof is on the applicant to explain the details. This should include a certified copy of the court or police records, a copy of the state, federal or local law involved, and a short legal explanation about the immigration consequences, if any. USCIS is likely to ask about any previous arrest, and may ask the applicant to appear for fingerprinting (biometrics). If you require legal representation, see here for support locally in gathering correct documentation - National Immigration Legal Services Directory - Immigration Advocates Network.
- USCIS issued a memo on January 1, 2026 stating that applications submitted by or for individuals who list one of the 39 restricted countries set forth in the December 16, 2025, Presidential Proclamation (PP) 10998, as either their country of birth or their country of citizenship will not be processed until there is further guidance. USCIS said that guidance would be issued within 90 days - so perhaps the end of March 2026. For now, USCIS is sometimes sending an RFE to individuals who list one of the 39 restricted

countries as either their country of birth or country of citizenship to ask for updated information about the person to evaluate whether the facts indicate that the officer should, in his or her discretion, approve the application. (such as evidence of volunteering, good job performance reviews, etc.), but as of spring 2026, we are not aware of any applications from citizens of the restricted countries that have been approved. The decision to grant or deny a change or extension of status involves an exercise of discretion by USCIS so officers have authority to deny these cases as a matter of discretion, though USCIS' refusal to adjudicate applications on the basis of one's place of birth or citizenship is being challenged in court.

The countries affected are (including dual citizens): Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Gabon, Haiti, Iran, Laos, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, The Gambia, Togo, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and individuals holding Palestinian-Authority-issued travel documents.

- USCIS will have access to previous applications including the DS-160s filed at a US consulate. Students should be careful to be consistent with previous government filings (and with social media or internet postings), and should refrain from filing an I-539 soon after entering the US in B-2 status.