



**Policy Title:** Request for Reduced Course Load (RCL) for F-1/J-1 Status International Students

**Policy Number:** ISO.107

**Policy Owner:** Director of International Student Office

**Responsible Office:** International Student Office

**Revision Date:** 11/16/2017

---

## 1. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this policy is to outline the requirements for an F-1/J-1 student who would like to drop below full-time enrollment and obtain approval for a Reduced Course Load (RCL). An F-1/J-1 student must not drop below full-time enrollment without prior approval from ISO. Without ISO approval to drop below full-time enrollment, an F-1 student will be considered out of legal immigration status.

## 2. Policy

International students in F-1/J-1 status are required to maintain full-time enrollment (12 credit hours per semester) during the school year. If the student cannot or will not meet this requirement, the student must request a reduced course load. Federal immigration regulations severely limit a student's ability to be less than full time, but it may be allowed in some circumstances as explained below. If the student drops below 12 credit hours at any time without obtaining prior approval and documentation from the Primary Designated School Official (PDSO) or Designated School Official (DSO), as designated by SEVIS, the student's record will be terminated in SEVIS, and the student will be considered out of status. Upon termination, the student has 15 days to leave the country before being considered in violation of F-1/J-1 status.

Regulations permit the consideration of international students in F-1/J-1 status to request a reduced course load only for the following reasons:

- **Academic Difficulties:** A student may be authorized for a reduced course load due to “academic difficulties” only for a single term and must resume a full course of study during the next standard semester.

Academic difficulties are defined as:

1. Initial difficulties with the English language (allowable only in student's first year);
2. Initial difficulties with reading requirements (allowable only in student's first year);
3. Unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods; or
4. Improper course level placement.

PLEASE NOTE: Imminent failure in a course is NOT a listed reason for RCL

A student may be authorized for an Academic Difficulties RCL basis only for a single term during any one course of study at a particular program level, and must resume a full course of study at the next available term (excluding summer).

A reduced course load for academic difficulties must consist of at least 6 credit hours for undergraduate students and at least 4 credit hours for graduate students.

- **Medical Conditions:** The student must provide medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist, to the DSO to substantiate the illness or medical condition.

The letter from the medical provider cannot be dated more than 30 days before the start of the term for which the RCL is requested.

The letter from the medical provider must recommend either that the student be part time or not enrolled due to medical circumstances.

A reduced course load for a medical condition can be granted for a period of time not to exceed an aggregate of 12 months while the student is pursuing a course of study at a particular program level.

The student must provide current medical documentation and the DSO must authorize the drop below full time for each new term.

### **3. Definitions**

Full-Time Course Load:

Undergraduate students	12 credit hours
Graduate students	9 credit hours

### **4. Procedures**

Each type of reduced course load requires that the student be currently maintaining visa status. Also, Approval for a reduced course load must be approved before the student drops below full-time.

A student must submit the Reduced Course Load Request Form (RCL) to the ISO Office. This may include documents from medical personnel, faculty members, etc. to demonstrate the need for an RCL. All medical related requests will require documentation from a licensed US physician. All other requests will require documentation from the student's advisor or major professor. RCL forms are due by the first day of classes of each semester.

A DSO will review the materials and determine whether a reduced course load is necessary.

The DSO will inform the student of his or her decision via email

### **5. Who Should Read This Policy**

- Students
- Vice President of Administrative Affairs
- Registrar's Office
- Provost, Department Chairs and Academic Advisors
- ISO

### **6. Related Documents and References**

- Reduced Course Load (RCL) Form



## Reduced Course Load (RCL) Form Guidance

### DHS Authorized Exceptions to the Full Course of Study Requirement

In order to maintain lawful F-1 or J-1 non-immigrant status, international students must either be enrolled full-time or receive permission from the Office of International Students and Scholars for a reduced course load **BEFORE** dropping below minimum credit hours.

The minimum full-time enrollment requirement is as follows:

Undergraduate students	12 credit hours
Graduate students	9 credit hours

- Courses that are audited do NOT count towards meeting the minimum full-time enrollment requirement
- Online/ distance learning courses: Only 3 credit hours may be counted towards meeting the minimum full-time enrollment requirement for undergraduate. Graduate students must have at least one face-to-face class per semester depending on their major.

**NOTE: If you only have one course left, the course by itself cannot be an online course**

In some instances, international students may be authorized to reduce their course load. This authorization must be requested prior to the beginning of the semester the reduction is requested for. **Any student who fails to enroll in a full course of study by the add/drop deadline, or drops below a full course of study without prior authorization by ISO, is considered to be out of status.**

Please be advised that the following do not constitute a valid reason to reduce course load according to U.S. Federal Regulations:

- Pregnancy
- Lack of financial support

Exceptions to the full course of study requirements are very limited; however, if deemed appropriate, the ISO may authorize a student to reduce his/ her course load in adherence to the Federal Regulation:

#### **Academic Reasons** (minimum enrollment of six credit hours required)

- Is having initial difficulties with the English language or reading requirements
- Is experiencing unfamiliarity with American teaching methods
- Student was placed in an inappropriate course level

#### **Other**

- Illness or Medical Condition

International students may be authorized to drop or withdraw from classes in the case that the student experiences unforeseen illness or a medical condition. A reduction in courses due to medical reasons must be authorized for each semester in question, not to exceed 12 months. The student must provide a statement by a licensed U.S. medical professional, on letterhead (not prescription pad) documenting the following:

- The medical necessity to reduce courses
- The semester for which the reduction is requested for
- The advised action (reduction in course or withdrawal)



**Reduced Course Load (RCL) Form**

**SECTION A. FOR THE STUDENT- PLEASE FILL OUT CLEARLY:**

Family Name:	First Name:
Email:	Phone#:
NAUID:	<input type="checkbox"/> UNDERGRADUATE <input type="checkbox"/> GRADUATE

**SEMESTER OF REQUESTED REDUCED ENROLLMENT – CHOOSE ONE TERM ONLY:**

Fall       Spring       Summer      Year: \_\_\_\_\_      # of credits that I will be registered for \_\_\_\_\_

**ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES (ALL of the following reasons are limited to ONE TIME ONLY per degree program). CHOOSE ONE REASON ONLY: (Instructor(s) for course(s) to be dropped must complete section B)**

Initial difficulty with English language or reading requirements: *Limited to first academic year only*

Initial unfamiliarity with American teaching methods: *Limited to first academic year only*

Improper course level placement

**MEDICAL REASON(S):**

Illness or medical reason (s): **Student must attach a detailed letter to this form regarding the medical condition(s) from a doctor or clinical psychologist licensed to practice in the U. S.**

**NOTE: ISO is not responsible for reaching out to the medical provider in order to obtain the required medical documents. The student must submit all required medical documents to ISO in order to be eligible for further review and authorization of RCL.**

**SECTION B. FOR THE FACULTY (Academic Difficulties only) – Please explain in detail recommendation for student dropping course.**

\_\_\_\_\_

**FACULTY's Full Name**      **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_      **Date** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (mm/dd/yyyy)

**SECTION C. FOR THE ACADEMIC ADVISOR - Please sign:**

*By signing below, I acknowledge that I understand the USCIS regulations of F-I student reduced course load and I certify the student is eligible for this reduced course load.*

**Academic/Faculty Advisor's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_      **Date:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (mm/dd/yyyy)

**Academic/Faculty Advisor's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_      **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone#-Ext.** \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION D. FOR STUDENT - Please sign:**

*By signing below, I acknowledge and agree to comply with the regulations above.*

**Student Signature** \_\_\_\_\_      **Date:** \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (mm/dd/yyyy)