



International Student Services

F-1 REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL) INFORMATION AND REQUEST FORM

International students in F-1 status are required to maintain full-time enrollment during the academic year. If you cannot or will not meet this requirement, you must request a reduced course load (RCL) and meet with a SMSU international student advisor at International Student Services (ISS) to discuss your request.

Federal immigration regulations limit a student's ability to enroll less than full time, but it may be allowed in some circumstances explained below. If you drop below full time without authorization, ISS is federally mandated to report this to SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System – online database created by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to track and monitor students and scholars in F, J, and M status); and you will lose your F-1 status.

According to immigration regulations governing international students [8 CFR § 214.2(f)(6)(iii)], **the Designated School Official (DSO – the ISS Advisors have this designation, not your academic advisors) may allow an F-1 student to engage in less than a full course of study as provided below.**

A student who wishes to drop below full time must obtain the approval from a DSO in advance, regardless of what the reason might be. **A student who drops below a full course of study without appropriate prior approval will be considered out of status.** Please be advised that a lack of financial support does not constitute a valid reason to reduce course load according to immigration regulations.

DEFINITION OF FULL TIME

As an undergraduate student, you must register for and complete at least 12 credits per mandatory semester. As a graduate student, you must register for and complete at least 6 credit hours per mandatory semester. The courses you take for "audit" do not count toward the full-time enrollment requirement for immigration purposes.

ONLINE COURSES: Federal Regulations limit the number of online/web/distance education courses that can count toward the full-time enrollment requirement for immigration purposes. **No more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per semester will count toward your full course of study for immigration status if the class is taken online or through distance education (excluding hybrid classes). F-1 students in their final session cannot take their sole remaining course in online format.** Please see an international student advisor at ISS prior to registering for any online/web courses.

ACADEMIC DIFFICULTIES

A student must apply for reduced course load if, due to academic difficulties, he/she is unable to be enrolled full time. Academic difficulties are exclusively limited to:

- Initial difficulties during the first semester at SMSU with the English language, reading requirements, or unfamiliarity with American teaching methods, or Improper course-level placement.
- A student may be authorized for a reduced course load on the "academic difficulties" basis **only for their first semester at a particular program level**, and must resume a full course of study at the next available semester (excluding vacation semester).
- **Important!** Even with the reason of academic difficulties (listed above), a reduced course load must consist of at least six semester hours per semester for undergraduates; and at least three credits for graduate students.

MASTERS AND PHD STUDENTS ON THESIS/DISSERTATION TRACK (may use more than once)

If you have completed all course work for a master's or doctoral level program and have only the thesis or dissertation to complete, the University policy allows you to register less than full time, but you must follow the following rules:

- If you are a graduate appointee with employment with the University, all you need to submit to ISS is a copy of the approved **Under enrollment Permission Form for Graduate Appointees**.
- If you are not a graduate appointee, but have completed all course work excluding thesis or dissertation as a master's or PhD student, you will need to have your academic advisor fill out the attached Reduced Course Load Request Form prior to a final approval by an international student advisor at ISS.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

A student must apply for RCL if, due to a serious illness or medical condition, he/she is unable to be enrolled full time (or, if necessary, no course load).

- 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.
- Medical documentation must contain detailed diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis, along with recommendation from the authorized medical personnel (listed above) for you to reduce your course load or not enroll during the particular semester.
- A reduced course load for a medical condition can be granted for a period of time not to exceed a total 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 semester.

COMPLETION OF COURSE OF STUDY

A student must apply for RCL in his/her final semester if fewer courses (i.e. less than full time) are needed to complete the course of study. F-1 students in their final session must have at least one in-person class to maintain F-1 status. F-1 students in their final session cannot take their sole remaining course in online format.

The student must submit a copy of his/her Summary of Audit for Graduation letter from the Office of the Registrar, stating the graduating semester and the credits s/he is completing during the graduating semester. Please note that a student can use this Reduced Course Load option only once during his/her program level.

HOW TO APPLY FOR A REDUCED COURSE LOAD:

1. Set up an appointment with your academic advisor to obtain his/her recommendation for Reduced Course Load.
2. For medical reasons, additionally set up an appointment to see a licensed medical physician (or doctor of osteopathy or licensed clinical psychologist) to request a letter detailing information needed. The letter must be printed on an official letterhead and contain contact information of the person who signed the letter.
3. Bring the following documents with you to meet with an international student advisor at ISS:
 - Reduced Course Load Request Form (see next page) completed by you and your academic advisor
 - Your I-20(s)
 - Passport
 - I-94 card
 - *(if applicable)* A copy of Summary of Audit for Graduation letter; a copy of approved Under enrollment Permission Form for Graduate Appointees; or a letter from a licensed medical physician, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist for a medical reason
4. An ISS international student advisor will review the documents and will decide whether to approve your Reduced Course Load Request.
5. A copy of the approved RCL form will be placed in the student's file.

REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL) REQUEST FORM

(Due by the end of the first week of each semester that you are under enrolled)

SECTION A: TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____ Middle Initial: _____

Mustang ID/Tech ID #: _____ SEVIS ID#: _____ Phone: _____ Date of birth: _____

Major: _____ Academic Level (BA, MS, MBA): _____ E-mail: _____ go.minnstate.edu

I am registering for _____ credit hours during the _____ semester of _____ (year) and request that my academic load be considered as full time enrollment for immigration purposes for the reason indicated below.

Check one that applies:

Academic Difficulties [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(iii)(A)] – **Specify** and remember you can use one of the following four academic difficulty reasons during the 1st semester only AND must still be enrolled at least half-time.

- initial difficulties with English language
- initial difficulties with reading requirements

- unfamiliarity with American teaching method
- improper course level placement

Medical Reason [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(iii)(B)] – attach an official letter on letterhead stationery from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or licensed clinical psychologist including detailed *diagnosis, treatment plan, and prognosis*. Does not require a signature from his/her academic advisor in Section B of this form (below).

Copy of approved **under enrollment Permission Form for Graduate Appointees** – Does not require a signature from his/her academic advisor in Section B of this form (below) if form is submitted to ISS.

Masters student on thesis or dissertation track – have completed all course work excluding thesis or dissertation. The student is registered this semester per University Academic Regulations and working full-time writing thesis or dissertation.

Completion of course of study [8 CFR 214.2(f) (6)(iii)(C)] – Expected to complete study by the semester listed above and must graduate this semester. F-1 students in their final semester must have at least one in-person class to maintain F-1 status. They cannot take their sole remaining course in online format.

Important: If you are financially sponsored by contract, requiring you to maintain full-time enrollment, then an RCL might cause you to lose your funding. It is your responsibility to verify this with your financial sponsor.

Online Courses: No more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per semester will count toward a student's full course of study for immigration status if the class is taken online.

I understand that it is my responsibility to drop my course, only after the RCL has been approved by an ISS DSO.

Student's signature: _____ Date: _____

SECTION B: TO BE COMPLETED BY STUDENT'S ACADEMIC ADVISOR

I have reviewed and recommend the above request. I certify that information provided on this form is accurate in conformance with applicable Departmental, College and University policies, and is in the best interest of the student's successful academic progress.

I do NOT recommend that the above request be granted to this student for the following reason(s): _____

Academic advisor's name: _____ Department: _____ Campus Phone: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

SECTION C: TO BE COMPLETED BY ISS

The above request for a Reduced Course Load per 8 CFR 214.2(f) (6) (iii) is:

Approved Denied: Reason(s) for denial: _____

ISS DSO Signature: _____ Date: _____

Updated in: SEVIS _____ ISRS _____
Date Completed Date Completed