



Permissible Reasons Under F-1 Regulations to Register for Less Than a Full-Time Course Load

There are very few exceptions to the full-time course load rule. Those exceptions include academic difficulty, medical condition, and completion of study, and there are strict criteria for each. In every instance, you **must** obtain **PRIOR** authorization from the International Programs Office. Only once you receive this authorization from the International Programs Office can you then drop the course. An F-1 student who drops below a full course of study without the prior approval of the International Programs Office **will be considered out of status** and must be reported in SEVIS as having dropped below a full-time course load without authorization.

See the information sheet titled "*Rules for Maintaining a Full-Time Course Load*" for complete information on what constitutes a full-time course load.

Academic Difficulty:

The student must first obtain permission from the International Programs Office before dropping below a full-time course load for academic reasons, which are limited to the three choices listed below. A special form available in the International Programs Office will need to be completed by both the student and department advisor and then approved by the International Programs Office before the course can be dropped. If the drop is approved, the student must then be registered for at least six credits.

Federal immigration regulations define academic difficulty as:

- initial difficulty with English Language or reading requirements, or
- unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods, or
- improper course level placement

The student must resume a full course of study in the next available semester in order to maintain student status. A student previously authorized to drop below a full course of study due to academic difficulties will not be eligible for a second authorization due to academic difficulties while pursuing a course of study at that program level.

A student authorized to drop below a full course of study for academic difficulty while pursuing a course of study at a particular program level may still be authorized for a reduced course load due to an illness or medical condition, should such a condition arise (see next section).

Medical Condition:

The International Programs Office may authorize a reduced course load (or if necessary, no course load) due to a student's temporary illness or medical condition 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. In order to authorize a reduced course load based on a medical condition, the student must provide current medical documentation from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, or a licensed clinical psychologist to the International Programs Office to substantiate the illness or medical condition. The International Programs Office must authorize the drop below full-time for each new semester.

The student must first obtain permission from the International Programs Office before dropping below a full-time course load or withdrawing from school due to a medical condition. A special form, available in the International Programs Office, will need to be completed by the student with documentation attached by the appropriate health care provider and then approved by the International Programs Office before courses can be dropped.

A student previously authorized to drop below a full course of study due to illness or a medical condition for an aggregate of 12 months may not be authorized by the International Programs Office to reduce his or her course load on subsequent occasions while pursuing a course of study at the same program level.

A student may be authorized to reduce his/her course load for a reason of illness or medical condition on more than one occasion while pursuing a course of study as long as the aggregate period of the authorization does not exceed 12 months.

Completion of Course of Study:

The International Programs Office may authorize a reduced course load if the student is in his or her final semester and if fewer courses than a full-time course load are needed to complete the course of study. If the reduction is authorized, the student must then be registered for those credits needed to complete the course of study.

The student must first obtain permission from the International Programs Office before dropping below a full-time course load, because the student is in his or her final semester. A special form available in the International Programs Office will need to be completed by both the student and department advisor and then approved by the International Programs Office before any courses can be dropped.

A note of warning: Students should be absolutely certain that they will be graduating in the current semester before choosing to register for less than a full-time course load. Failure to graduate after dropping below a full-time course load will result in the student being out-of-status and the loss of F-1 benefits.

An F-1 student who drops below a full course of study for reasons other than the ones described above will be out of status, and that information will have to be reported to the federal immigration authorities via the SEVIS system.

F-1 students who fall out of status may be eligible for reinstatement provided they meet the eligibility requirements as described in U.S. federal regulations or may have to depart the United States for their home country and re-enter on a new I-20.