Reduced Course Load (RCL): Frequently Asked Questions For F-1 Students

Overview
What is a Reduced Course Load?
Immigration regulations require F-1 students to be enrolled full time during the academic year. A Reduced Course Load (RCL) is requested when a student wishes an exception for the full-time enrollment requirements.

Reasons for a RCL include:
- Academic reason
- Graduate student engaged in research
- Final semester
- Concurrent enrollment
- Medical reason

Are IEOP or non-degree students eligible for an RCL?
IEOP and non-degree students may only request an RCL based on an illness or medical condition.

Full-Time Enrollment
How is full-time enrollment defined?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Undergraduate</th>
<th>Graduate without Assistantship</th>
<th>Graduate with Assistantship</th>
<th>IEOP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall/Spring</td>
<td>12 credits</td>
<td>9 credits</td>
<td>Determined by department</td>
<td>20 clock hours*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer (If Summer is first or last semester at ISU)</td>
<td>6 credits</td>
<td>4.5 credits</td>
<td>Determined by department</td>
<td>18 clock hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Regulations state 18 clock hours, but IEOP policy is 20 clock hours

When do I need to enroll full-time during the Summer Sessions?
- First semester at ISU (applies to both initial and reentry students)
- First semester in new academic level
- Final semester in program (degree or non-degree)
- Spring II was first term at ISU (applies to IEOP students only)

How many online courses can I take each semester?
You may not have more than one online class count toward full-time enrollment, and no more than 3 credits of that course may count toward full-time enrollment.
- Undergraduate Scenarios (fall or spring semester):
  1. 9 credits on campus + one 3-credit online course = full-time enrollment.
  2. 11 credits on campus + one 1-credit online course = full-time enrollment.
Graduate Scenarios (fall or spring semester):
1. 6 credits on campus + one 3-credit online course = full-time enrollment.
2. 8 credits on campus + one 1-credit online course = full-time enrollment.

Which courses are not included in determining full-time enrollment?
- Audited courses
- Courses dropped after the semester has begun
  - Receive a mark of an "X" or "W"
- More than one class (not to exceed 3 credits) taken online or through distance education for determining full-time enrollment

Reasons for a RCL
1. Academic Reason:
   Student has a valid academic reason for a RCL. Acceptable academic reasons are below:
   - Initial difficulty with the English language
   - Initial difficulty with reading assignments
   - Difficulty with American teaching methods
   - Improper course level placement
2. Graduate Student Research:
   Graduate student is engaged in the equivalent of a full course load while working on a creative component, thesis or dissertation. This reason cannot be used by students in coursework only master’s degree programs.
3. Final Semester:
   Student is in final semester and requires less than a full course load to complete degree requirements.
4. Concurrent Enrollment:
   Student is concurrently enrolled at another U.S. school. Concurrently enrolled students must have half of full-time enrollment on-campus at Iowa State University. Combined credits from both schools must equal to full time (as described above).
5. Medical Reason:
   Student has an illness or medical condition that prevents him/her from taking a full course load.

What reasons are unacceptable for a RCL?
- Financial difficulties

Can I request a RCL for more than one semester?
- Academic reason: Only one per educational level
- Creative component: Available multiple times
- Thesis/dissertation: Available multiple times
- Final semester reason: Only one per educational level
- Concurrent enrollment: Available multiple times
- Medical reason: Available for 12 months at each educational level
How many credits must I take the semester if I am approved for a RCL?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RCL Reason</th>
<th>Minimum Number of Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Reason</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate student:</td>
<td>6 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student without assistantship:</td>
<td>4.5 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student with assistantship:</td>
<td>Determined by department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis/Dissertation/ Creative Component</strong></td>
<td>Determined by department, but no fewer than 1 credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Semester</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate student:</td>
<td>Minimum 1 credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student without assistantship:</td>
<td>Minimum 1 credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concurrent Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate student:</td>
<td>Minimum 6 credits at ISU (12 credits combined from both schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student without assistantship:</td>
<td>Minimum 4.5 credits at ISU (9 credits combined from both schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate student with assistantship:</td>
<td>Determined by department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical Reason</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As recommended by physician (0 credit is possible)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cystart Request

When do I submit the RCL request?
Students should submit an RCL request at least 3 weeks prior to the first day of the semester when planning to register part time or at least 3 working days before dropping below full time during the semester.

How do I submit an RCL request to ISSO?
RCL requests can be submitted through an electronic process in Cystart. Students can log in to Cystart using their ISU NetID and password. Complete the Reduced Course Load e-form under the F-1 Student Services tab.

What is the timeline for processing this request?
It will take ISSO up to 10 working days after there is a check mark in all boxes on the Cystart Reduced Course Load page. ISSO will send an e-mail to the student's ISU e-mail address when processing is complete. ISSO recommends sending an e-mail to isso@iastate.edu if an e-mail has not been received within 10 working days.

What happens after I am approved for a Final Semester RCL?
When a student is approved for a Final Semester RCL, the student’s I-20 is shortened to the last day of the semester in which they will finish their degree requirements. After the RCL is approved in Cystart, the student will receive an email notification of the RCL approval and that the new, shortened I-20 is ready for pickup.

If I am approved for an RCL, will I still be able to work on campus?
Yes, students are still eligible for on-campus employment during the semester when authorized for an RCL.

If I drop below full time after the beginning of the semester, will my tuition and fee charges change?
It depends on when the drop occurs. Please refer to the Registrar’s website here.
Required Documentation

What documentation do I include with my request?

- Concurrent RCL: Proof of registration at another school if concurrently enrolled
- Medical RCL: Documentation of your illness or condition if you have a medical reason which requires you to enroll less than full time
- Research RCL: If conducting research abroad, letter of support from Faculty Adviser

What information should be included in my proof of enrollment at another school (Concurrent Enrollment)?

- Name of the course(s)
- Credit hours assigned to the course (or each course)
- Method of instruction (on campus/in person, WWW/online, videostream/ICN)
- Method of grading

Who can write the letter documenting my illness (Medical Reason)?

- Licensed medical doctor in the U.S.
- Licensed doctor of osteopathy in the U.S.
- Licensed clinical psychologist in the U.S.

What must the letter from my doctor (Medical Reason)?

- Typed on physician’s or clinic’s letterhead
- Indicates you have a medical condition which prevents you from registering full time
- Indicates the date of diagnosis
- Indicates the semester when the physician recommends a RCL
- Specifies the number of semester hours for which you can register for that semester
- Specifies the date by which you will be expected to return to full-time studies
- Specifies whether the doctor is licensed as an M.D. or D.O.

Immigration Consequences

What are the immediate consequences if I fail to submit this request within the time period noted above?

- Violation of F-1 nonimmigrant status
  - Must apply for reinstatement or depart U.S. and return on new I-20 to regain F-1 status
- Must immediately stop working on campus
- Any authorized off-campus work will be automatically terminated
- Lose eligibility for all other benefits of F-1 nonimmigrant status
- Lose eligibility to change status, for example from F-1 to F-2, F-1 to H-1B, etc.

Disclaimer: This Frequently Asked Questions document is intended for general information and guidance. Please consult with an International Student and Scholar Advisor in the International Students and Scholars Office regarding your individual request.