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

When do I need a reduced course load?
- When you wish to enroll less than full time for a fall or spring semester
- When you wish to enroll less than full time for the summer session if summer is your first or last semester at Iowa State University (ISU)

How is full time defined?
- Undergraduate students - 12 credit hours each Fall and Spring semester
- Graduate student - 9 credit hours each Fall and Spring semester
- Graduate student with an assistantship - required credit hours are determined by departments
- Intensive English and Orientation Program (IEOP) students - 21 clock hours

How is summer enrollment different?
- You are not required to enroll in summer, unless it is your:
  - First semester at ISU:
    - Undergraduate students must complete 6 credits
    - Graduate students must complete 4.5 credits
    - IEOP students must complete 21 clock hours
  - First semester in new program at ISU (degree or non-degree) which required issuance of new I-20:
    - Undergraduate students must complete 6 credits
    - Graduate students must complete 4.5 credits
  - Final semester in current academic program at ISU
    - All students, except those in IEOP, must enroll in at least 1 credit in their academic major
    - IEOP students must complete 21 clock hours

What courses are not included in determining full-time enrollment?
- Courses which you take as an audit
- Courses which you drop after the semester has begun
  - Receive a mark of “X” or “W”
- More than 3 credits taken on-line or through distance education for determining full-time
  - Undergraduate scenario:  9 credits of courses which meet on-campus + 3 credits of courses which meet on-line or through distance education = full-time enrollment. Once enrolled full-time, you can take additional on-line or distance education courses.
  - Graduate scenario:  6 credits of courses which meet on-campus + 3 credits of courses which meet on-line or through distance education = full-time enrollment. Once enrolled full-time, you can take additional on-line or distance education courses.
If I only need one course for a term (fall, spring, summer) can I take that course on-line or as a distance education course?

- No, you cannot take only distance education courses and maintain legal F-1 status
  - Example 1: If you have only one course left to complete your degree, that course cannot be taken as an on-line or as a distance education course in any term (fall, spring, summer)
  - Example 2: If summer is your first semester at ISU or your first semester in a new degree program, you cannot take only on-line or distance education courses

What are acceptable reasons for a reduced course load?

- Student has a valid *academic reason* for a reduced course load (acceptable reasons listed below)
  - Initial difficulty with the English language
  - Initial difficulty with reading assignments
  - Difficulty with American teaching methods
  - Improper course level placement

- 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 master’s degree programs that are coursework only.

- Student is in *final semester* and requires less than a full course load to complete degree requirements.

- Student is *concurrently enrolled* at another U.S. school and combined credits from both schools equal to full time (as described above).

- Student has an *illness or medical condition* that prevents him/her from taking a full course load.

What reasons are *not* acceptable for a reduced course load?

- Financial difficulties

Can I request a reduced course load for more than one semester?

- Academic reason: available only one semester for each educational level
- Creative component: available one semester for each degree program
- Thesis/dissertation: available multiple times
- Final semester reason: available only one semester for each educational level
- Concurrent enrollment: available multiple times
- Medical reason: available for 12 months for each educational level

Can students in the IEOP request reduced course load?

- IEOP students may only request a reduced course load based on an illness or medical condition.
How many credits must I take the semester I am approved for a reduced course load?

- **Academic reason**
  - Undergraduate student: 6 credits
  - Graduate student without assistantship: 3 credits
  - Graduate student with assistantship: Determined by department

- **Thesis/dissertation**
  - Graduate student: Determined by department, but at least 1 credit

- **Creative component**
  - Graduate student: Determined by department, but at least 1 credit

- **Final semester reason**
  - Undergraduate student: at least 1 credit
  - Graduate student: at least 1 credit (however, the Graduate College requires 2 credits)

- **Concurrent enrollment reason**
  - Undergraduate student: 12 credits (combined from both schools)
  - Graduate student without assistantship: 9 credits (combined from both schools)
  - Graduate student with assistantship: Determined by department

- **Medical reason**
  - All students: As recommended by physician (0 credit is possible)

How do I submit a reduced course load request to ISSO?

- This is an electronic process completed through Cystart. The link for Cystart can be found on the ISSO website. Log in to Cystart using your ISU NetID and password
- Cystart » F-1 Student Services » Reduced Course Load
  - Reduced Course Load: Student Request e-form

What documentation do I include with my request?

- If applicable, documentation of your illness or condition if you have a medical reason which requires you to enroll less than full time
- If applicable, proof of registration at another school if concurrently enrolled

What information should be included in my proof of enrollment at another school?

- Name of the course(s)
- Credit hours assigned to the course (or each course)
- Method of instruction (on campus/in person, WWW/on-line, videostream/ICN)
- Method of grading
Who can write a letter if I have a 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 should the letter look like from my doctor if I have a 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 reduced course load
- 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.

When do I submit the RCL request?
- At least three weeks prior to the first day of the semester when planning to register part-time
- At least 3 working days before dropping below full time during the semester

How long will it take ISSO to process my RCL request?
- Up to 10 working days after there is a check mark in your Cystart request page

How will I know if my request has been processed?
- ISSO will send an e-mail to your ISU e-mail address when processing is complete.
- If you do not receive this e-mail after 10 working days as noted above, please send an e-mail to isso@iastate.edu to check on the status of your request

If I am approved for a reduced course load, will I still be able to work on campus?
- Yes

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 following website: http://www.registrar.iastate.edu/fees/tuition-adj

What are the immediate consequences if I fail to submit this request within the time period noted above?
- You will be considered in violation of your F-1 nonimmigrant status
- You will not be allowed to continue working on campus
- If you have authorization to work off campus, it will be automatically terminated
- You lose your eligibility for all other benefits of your F-1 nonimmigrant status
- You lose your eligibility to change your 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.