



OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

IMMIGRATION GUIDELINES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON F-1 VISA

FULL COURSE OF STUDY

US Dept. of Homeland Security requires for every student on F-1 student visa to be enrolled full-time every semester on campus when student resides in the US to maintain their legal status and to keep their I-20 active.

Here is the description for fulltime registration per semester:

Undergraduate	12 credits (minimum)
Graduate	8 credits (minimum)
Master of Divinity	9 credits (minimum)

- The minimum number of credits requirements to maintain legal student status, should be classes taken on campus. However, if there is a reason for student to take any courses online/distant, then, the student must register for a minimum of 75% of his/her coursework on campus (face-to-face) and the remainder of 25% can be taken online/distant course.
- ***Distance Education/online classes limit for F1 students residing in the US***
 - No more than the equivalent of one on-line/distance education class (maximum 3 credits UG/2 credits GR) per semester may count towards the "full course of study" requirement. (For example, if student is required to register for 8 credits for a semester, 6 credits must be on campus and 2 credits can be online.)

** No person (non-immigrant) on a F1 or F2 visa status should be admitted into a program of study that is offered entirely online while they are still residing in the US nor be permitted to register for classes under the same visa class while being in the US.

** The only person/s that could be admitted and engage in a totally online program of study are students that are not residing within the borders of the US.

** F2 is a visa status given to dependents of F1 student. Person/s holding a F2 visa status is not allowed to study (unless they are under the age of 18) or work in the US unless they change the visa status to F1.

- A student will automatically lose his/her student legal status if they fall below the above-mentioned minimum. Consequently, he/she needs to apply for reinstatement (restoring one's legal status). Approval is not guaranteed and application process may take up to 5 months.
- ***Audited credits and Withdrawals*** do not count toward maintaining legal student status. In case there are no classes being offered for the specific degree, "fluff" classes or additional classes must still be taken in order to reach the minimum number of credits to maintain legal student status.

- The consequences of losing one's legal student status are: 1) the present I-20 is no longer valid for any purpose and must be replaced by a new one; 2) the student cannot apply to the USCIS for such privileges as CPT, OPT, Economic Hardship work authorization, or program extension. Even signing a student's I-20 for travel is prohibited if the student has not maintained his/her legal status.
- Summer semester is the vacation semester. Students do not have to enroll or can enroll for a lesser course load during this time *except* if the initial (first semester) of attendance is summer semester, student would still have to be registered as fulltime student in order to maintain his/her legal status.
- International students who have completed all requirements for the degree (Graduation/Marching is irrelevant) are required to leave the country within the grace period of 60 days unless student is applying for OPT (optional practical training or continuing on with another degree program of study). They are not allowed to stay in the country to finish any incomplete courses or DGs. Students who do not register for the following semester will be considered out of status. Taking the semester off is not applicable for those who do not have any more classes (required or elective) to register for their degree. International students cannot take fluff classes in order to stay in the country after they have registered for all required and elective classes for their degrees.
- Other deviations from the full-course-of-study requirement (documentation is required from the appropriate people):
 1. Medical reason— the student must provide a statement from the health-care practitioner requiring or recommending the interruption or reduction in studies.
 2. Academic reason – If student is doing poorly in his/her academic program of study due to lack of language proficiency, could be registered in the “bridge program” (part time within the program of study and part time in CIEP (ESL as commonly known).
 3. Graduate students who have completed formal course-work—If the student is engaged in comprehensive exam preparation, project thesis, or dissertation, the student should be enrolled as such or obtain documentation from his/her academic advisor that formal coursework is complete, student is engaged in these projects, and is considered as pursuing a full course of study.
 4. Completing programs during the current term—If a student has less than the minimum to complete the degree, the student should provide documentation from an academic advisor that the student is completing their final credits in the current semester.

PROGRAM EXTENSION FOR F-1 STUDENTS

F-1 students are allowed to stay in the US until the completion of a degree program or the completion date stated in their I-20, whichever comes first. However, if students do not complete the program by the date stated on their I-20, they must apply for an extension of the I-20 no more than 30 days BEFORE the I-20 expires. Extensions cannot be given after the I-20 expires. A request to USCIS for reinstatement to student status is required.