



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

F-1 REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL) INFORMATION REQUEST MUST BE SUBMITTED THROUGH I3S TERRA DOTTA STUDENT PORTAL

International students in F-1 or J-1 status must maintain full-time enrollment during the academic year. If you cannot meet this requirement, you must request a Reduced Course Load (RCL) and meet with a WMU international student advisor at International Student and Scholar Services (I3S).

Federal immigration regulations allow less than full-time enrollment only in limited circumstances. Dropping below full-time without prior authorization requires I3S to report the violation to SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System), resulting in the loss of your F-1 or J-1 status.

Under [8 CFR §214.2(f)(6)(iii)], only a Designated School Official (DSO) - an I3S advisor, not your academic advisor - can approve an F-1 student to take less than a full course of study. You must obtain DSO approval **before** dropping below full time. Students who do so without prior approval will be considered **out of status**. Please note that **financial difficulties are not a valid reason** for an RCL under immigration regulations.

DEFINITION OF FULL TIME

Undergraduate students must register for and complete **at least 12 credits** each mandatory fall and spring semester. No more than one online class (or 3 credits) will count towards full-time status.

9 credits – In-Person or Hybrid	3 Credits - Online	12 Credits total 
---------------------------------	--------------------	---

Graduate students must register for and complete **at least 6 credits** each mandatory semester. No more than one online class (or 3 credits) will count towards full-time status.

3 credits – In-Person or Hybrid	3 Credits - Online	6 Credits total 
---------------------------------	--------------------	---

Courses taken for **audit** do not count toward full-time enrollment for immigration purposes.

If student meets this requirement, then they may take additional courses incidentally, whether in person, hybrid or online. If your last semester will be in the Summer; then you must still enroll full-time for the Summer. Last semester for summer requires 3 credits for Graduate students and 6 credit Undergraduate students. If summer is not your last semester, and you are still returning in the Fall; then no RCL is needed.

ONLINE COURSES

Federal regulations limit how many online or distance education courses count toward full-time enrollment. Only one online course (up to 3 credits) per semester may count toward the full course of study. This rule applies even in your final semester. F-1 students in their last semester must take at least one in-person class to maintain status, and the final remaining course cannot be fully online. Before registering for any online or web-based courses, consult an international student advisor at I3S.Academic Difficulties

RCL OPTIONS

A student must apply for reduced course load if, due to academic difficulties, he/she is unable to be enrolled full time during their first semester only.

- **Important!** Even with the reason of academic difficulties, 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 I3S is a copy of the approved **Underenrollment 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 I3S.

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

Students in their final semester who need fewer than a full course load to finish their program must apply for a Reduced Course Load (RCL). F-1 students must enroll in at least one in-person class during their final term to maintain status; the last remaining course cannot be fully online, and federal online course limits still apply.

Students must submit a Summary of Audit for Graduation letter from the Office of the Registrar confirming their graduating semester and the credits being completed. This final-semester RCL may be used only once per program level.

HOW TO APPLY FOR A REDUCED COURSE LOAD:

1. Log into your I3S Terra Dotta Student Portal, go to Control Center, and select Reduced Course Load request.
2. For medical reasons, 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. Upload the following documents into the request through your I3S Terra Dotta Student Portal.
 - Your I-20(s)
 - Passport, Visa, I-94 record

- (if applicable) A copy of Summary of Audit for Graduation letter; a copy of approved Underenrollment 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. Once all is submitted, an email will go to your academic advisor for initial approval. Once your academic advisor signs the approval, it will be sent to I3S for final review and approval.
- 5. An I3S international student advisor will review your request and will decide whether to approve your Reduced Course Load Request. **Your RCL is not approved until you have received notification from I3S.**
- 6. If approved, you will be notified through your I3S Terra Dotta Student Portal and will be able to print the updated I-20.

REDUCED COURSE LOAD (RCL) ELIGIBLE OPTIONS

- **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 teaching method
 - ☐ 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 **Underenrollment 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 I3S.
- **Masters or PhD student on thesis or dissertation track** – have completed all course work excluding thesis or dissertation and the student is registered this semester per University Academic Regulations and writing thesis/dissertation full-time;
- **Or, full-time graduate level capstone project** or other **full-time equivalent** (example: MUS 4810).
- Graduation requirement that meets at least 22 clock hours per week. Class name: _____
- **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. Students in their final semester must have at least one in-person class to maintain F-1 status. They cannot take their final sole remaining course in online format. Online course limitations for maintaining status still apply.*

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. This includes during your final semester.

It is your responsibility to drop the course, only after the RCL has been approved by an I3S DSO.

All RCL requests must be submitted at the beginning of the semester, or at the time of medical diagnosis. Failure to do so may result in SEVIS termination.