

**The (Frequently Asked Questions) FAQs on a  
Full Course of Study/Reduced Course Load:**  
*(last revision: 03/09/2004)*

**Q: I am an undergraduate and I have finished all my coursework except for 6 credit hours. Do I still need to enroll in 12 hours? If not, what form should I submit to the International Center (IC)?**

A: If you need only the 6 credit hours to complete your degree, you do not need to enroll in 12 hours, but you will need to submit a Request for Reduced Course Load – Final Term by the end of drop/add for the semester (Spring or Fall semesters only).

**Q: Do I have to enroll in a full course of study in the summer?**

A: No, you do not. Summer is your official annual break and you do not have to enroll. Whether you stay in the US or travel abroad is also up to you. The only exception is if summer is your first semester at FSU. If it is, you will need to enroll in a full course of study. If you transfer to another institution in the summer, you will likely be required to enroll fulltime for that semester, as you would be if you transferred to FSU in the summer.

**Q: I am a Masters student and it is my first semester in the U.S. I am having some difficulty with the teaching system in the US since it is different from what I am used to back home. A friend of mine who is a new student too is also having difficulty, but with English. She is required to do much reading at advanced levels. Can we obtain authorization for a reduced course load?**

A: Yes, you both are eligible. Since it is your first semester in the U.S., you can be authorized for reduced course load based on unfamiliarity with US teaching methods and your friend can be authorized for initial difficulty with English. You MUST submit the RCL request forms to the IC by the last day of drop/add for that semester. However, you are still required to enroll in no fewer than 6 credit hours or half the clock hours required for a full course of study.

**Q: If we're authorized for reduced course load for this semester, can we continue this authorization for the next semester?**

A: No. You must resume a full course load for the next regular semester (excluding summer).

**Q: I enrolled in required courses that are too advanced for me. The load is more than I can handle. Is there any way I can take less than a full course load?**

A: Your situation may be considered an improper course level placement. With your academic adviser's recommendation, yes, it may be authorized. Submit the RCL request and supporting documentation to the IC as soon as possible, BEFORE dropping any classes.

**Q: I am a doctoral student and have already taken 18 dissertation hours. Do I have to enroll in 9 hours this semester?**

A: If you need only 6 more hours to complete the 24 dissertation hour requirement, then, for immigration purposes, you are considered as having a full course load with the 6 hours.

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**Q: I am a continuing student, and need 12 more dissertation hours to complete 24 hours. Can I enroll in 6 hours for the summer and 6 for the fall?**

A: Yes. Since the summer is not a regular semester, you are free to choose however many hours you want to enroll in (unless of course the terms of an assistantship require otherwise). Then, since you only need 6 more hours to complete 24 hours in the fall, you may enroll for only the 6 hours. We do request that you fill out the confirmation of full course of study form by the end of drop/add for that semester.

**Q: I am too ill to take a full course of study. What should I do?**

A: You must submit the RCL request form along with a letter from a licensed medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy or a licensed clinical psychologist – whichever is appropriate, in addition to the RCL request form. Once your request is approved, there is no minimum requirement for enrollment for a RCL for medical reasons. This means that you are eligible to be authorized for a reduced course load or no course load at all.

**Q: What if I am still ill the next semester?**

A: Medical RCL may be authorized for up to an aggregate of a year per academic program. Simply put, that's a year for a bachelor's degree, a year for a master's degree and another year for a doctorate. You cannot have RCL for more than a year at the same program level. So, if you are taking another masters degree and used up your one year for the first degree, you will not be eligible for RCL medical authorization.

**Q: Do I have to fill out the form next semester or is the authorization good for a year?**

A: The authorization for medical RCL does not automatically carry over to the next term. You must submit the form and a doctor's letter again and receive authorization again. Also, do not assume that you will automatically be authorized after submission of the form to the IC. An IC adviser must first approve your request and will contact you for additional information if needed.

**Q: I am taking online classes. Is that okay?**

A: Maybe, and maybe not. During the Fall and Spring semesters (unless it is your first semester at FSU), you may not take more than one class (or three credits) that may be counted toward the full course of study requirement. So, if you are a graduate student, you may take 3 online credit hours out of a total of 9 hours for that semester or up to 6 credits of online coursework if you are enrolled for 12 hours. An undergraduate may take 3 online credit hours out of a total of 12 or up to 6 hours if taking 15 credit hours. You may take as many online courses as you like during the summer, since summer is not a regular semester (unless summer is your first semester at FSU).

**Q: So what is an online course?**

A: Any course that does not require physical attendance for classes or exams and is delivered through broadcast, cable, satellite, computer/Internet, audio/teleconferencing, or any delivery that is purely technology based is an online course. Your WebMC courses do not count as online courses because they require physical presence in classes and have web-mediated content as a supplement only.

**Q: My friend is a masters student and says he plans to take 9 credit hours of online courses in the fall and that you will not know anyway. Will he be in trouble?**

A: Yes, he will. Since he will be violating federal regulations, his SEVIS record will be terminated if he keeps that enrollment and does not modify it to conform with the regulations. The IC gets a report each semester showing who is enrolled in online courses. We take our federal reporting requirements very seriously.

**Q: I am a graduate student and my department says I need to enroll in 10 hours to be in full time status, but the definition on the IC website says I only need 9? Who is right?**

A: If your department requires more than 9 hours, your department policy prevails.

**Q: I am a masters student and have completed all coursework but I am not done with my degree (I still have to defend or complete my project). May I enroll in only 1 hour?**

A: Probably not. The minimum required enrollment is 2 credit hours and, even then, the Graduate Bulletin states that the reduced enrollment must be approved by the Dean of your College/School -- not your academic adviser nor the department chair, but the Dean. If you are in your final term, you can submit a request for RCL-Final term, allowing only 1 hour of enrollment, for immigration purposes. The form requires the appropriate dean's signature.

**Q: I am a doctoral student and I have finished my 24 dissertation hours. I still need time to finish my dissertation. How many hours must I enroll in to maintain my nonimmigrant status?**

A: The minimum enrollment after you complete the 24 dissertation hours is 3 hours. We request that you fill out the Confirmation of Full Course of Study form and submit it by the last day of drop/add for the semester in which you will be taking less than the regular full course load.

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**Q: I am a doctoral student and I have finished my 24 dissertation hours. I have defended but cannot finish my corrections this semester. I need to maintain my F-1 status and need to enroll. May I enroll in only 1 credit hour?**

A: The minimum enrollment after the 24 hours is completed is generally 3 hours. In your case, if you have not requested authorization for RCL for the previous semester, you may fill out the request RCL-final term. You will need the appropriate dean's signature.

**Q. I am a doctoral student and I have completed the 24 dissertation hours. I am defending this fall semester and expect it to be my last semester. I plan to enroll in 3 credit hours. Which form do I need to submit?**

A. The Confirmation of Full Course Load form. After completing the 24 dissertation hours, 3 credit hours are considered a full course load. If you submit the RCL-final term form and we authorize a reduced course load and you subsequently find that you do not finish your degree, this can cause complications in the next semester (see next question).

**Q: I am a graduate student and I applied for RCL-final term based on my graduation this semester. If I am not able to graduate because my defense did not go well or I need to**

**enroll next semester to finish making changes to my thesis/dissertation, can I apply for RCL-final term again? And how many hours do I need to enroll in?**

- A. If the reason is something beyond your control (one of your advisers went on sabbatical, etc.), then you need to submit a letter from your adviser to explain the situation, apply for RCL again, and enroll in the minimum allowed. If you did not finish because you were too optimistic in thinking you could complete this term, or if the department didn't approve your defense, then you must apply for RCL and enroll in 3 hours if you are a doctoral student, and 2 hours with the dean's approval if you are a Masters student.

**NOTE:**

- If you applied for post-completion OPT, we will have shortened your program end date to the end of the semester so that you will need to request an I-20 extension. Apply for an extension as soon as you find out that you will not complete your degree as expected.
- If you did not request an extension and your I-20 expired, you will be out-of-status and will require reinstatement. In this case, your OPT – whether pending adjudication or approved -- must be rescinded, i.e., it will be canceled.

**Q. I am an undergraduate and I applied for RCL based on final term - I graduate this semester. If I don't graduate, what do I need to do the next semester?**

- A. If your inability to complete was due to circumstances beyond your control, you need to submit a letter from your adviser to explain the situation, apply for RCL again, and enroll in whatever courses you need to complete your degree. If the problem was something you could control, then you must enroll in a full course of study, i.e., 12 credit hours. You will not be able to request for a RCL authorization.\*

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- If you did not request an extension and your I-20 expired, you will be out-of-status and will require reinstatement.
- Whether or not you require reinstatement, your OPT – whether pending adjudication or approved -- must be rescinded, i.e., it will be canceled.

**IMPORTANT:** Immigration regulations now state:

*“If the student is not required to take any additional courses to satisfy the requirements for completion, but continues to be enrolled for administrative purposes, the student is considered to have completed the course of study and must take action to maintain status. Such action may include application for optional practical training, application for change of status, or departure from the U.S.”*

A missed application deadline for graduation or a late defense that occurs before the beginning of the next semester would not defer completion for immigration purposes. A student must have legitimate corrections, revisions, or other work to complete during the final semester of enrollment.

