



International Student & Scholar Services

J-1 EXCEPTIONS TO FULL COURSE OF STUDY

J-1 students are required to maintain full-time student status every semester they are in the United States. Undergraduate students are expected to complete 12 hours of course work during the fall and spring semesters. Graduate students are expected to complete 9 hours of course work during the fall and spring semesters. Students may carry a less than full-time load for the reasons listed below:

- **Summer vacation** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(5)(iii)]. During the summer, J-1 students are not required to be enrolled for any classes if the student is eligible and intends to register for the next term (i.e., summer cannot be student's first semester).
- **Undergraduate students or graduate students in their final semester** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(B)]. An undergraduate or graduate student who needs fewer than 12 credit hours or 9 credit hours to complete his or her program of study is considered to be pursuing a full course of study if the student only enrolls in the number of credit hours necessary to complete the program in his or her final semester.
- **Graduate students on a teaching or research assistantship** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(iii)] and [Supplementary Information to 8 CFR 214, Federal Register, 29 October 1991, pp. 55609-10]. To clarify its regulatory statement that "on-campus employment pursuant to the terms of a scholarship, fellowship, or assistantship is deemed to be part of the academic program of a student otherwise taking a full course of study", the Department of Homeland Security has declared that "students who are assigned teaching or research responsibilities pursuant to the terms of a scholarship or fellowship may carry a reduced course load. For example, a student enrolled in a master's program [may be] normally required to carry 9 semester hours [to be classified as full time]. However, it is a common practice among educational institutions to restrict students awarded teaching or research assistantships to 6 semester hours." **Requirement:** *Verification from the academic advisor that the student is an RA/TA and that the academic policy in the department allows RA/TAs to be classified as full-time when taking fewer than 9 semester hours.*
- **Graduate students who have completed formal course work** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(i)(A)]. Students who have completed all course work can be considered to be in full-time status while working on their thesis or dissertation, if this is a standard academic policy in their department. **Requirement:** *Students are required to verify their full-time status with a form from their academic advisor.*
- **Medical problems** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(5)(iv)]. A student who is compelled by illness or other medical conditions to interrupt or reduce a full course of study is considered to be in status during the illness or other medical condition. The student must resume a full course of study upon recovery. **Requirement:** *Valid medical excuses must be documented with an official letter from a medical professional (e.g., medical doctor, licensed psychologist, etc.) that includes a brief diagnosis and a recommendation for the student to drop one or more classes. As of January 1, 2003, new laws stipulate that students may not be on medical leave for more than a total of 12 months per degree program.*
- **Valid academic reasons** [8 CFR 214.2(f)(6)(iii)]. Under new laws effective January 1, 2003, students cannot be authorized to be less than full-time for more than one semester per degree program for academic reasons. A J-1 student may be considered to be pursuing a full course of study even though enrolled for less than a full course of study when authorized by an International Student Adviser for the following reasons:

- **Initial difficulties with the English Language or reading requirements.** Usually this exception is applied for the beginning semester(s) in the U.S.
- **Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods.** Usually this exception is applied for the beginning semester(s) in the U.S.
- **Improper course level placement.** Generally this refers to a student not having the proper prerequisites or preparation for a particular class. *In very limited cases*, this exception may be applied to students on the verge of failing a class.