



## Information for students who require a reduced course load during a Spring or Fall Semester or who enter as an F1 in a summer semester.

International students who are admitted to the United States in F-1 status are required by the Department of Homeland Security or DHS (formerly INS) to maintain the terms and conditions of their nonimmigrant status. Failure to do so can result in deportation. One of the requirements for maintaining F-1 status is to pursue a "full course of study" every semester, not including the summer break. A "full course of study" is considered full-time study, which at SHSU is defined as **9 credit hours for graduate and non-degree graduate students** and **12 credit hours for undergraduates**.

A course load that falls below the full-time requirement, i.e. a reduced course load, requires approval from a DHS Designated School Official (DSO). F-1 students must first complete this form and return it to the Global Engagement Center to request authorization to drop a course.

DHS makes an allowance for two primary sets of circumstances in which international students may drop below full-time hours and still maintain legal status. Most situations involve dropping below full-time hours after having enrolled in a full course of study. The Global Engagement Center is required to report to the DHS students who drop below full-time hours for the reasons specified in #1 and #2 below.

### 1) Academic Reasons

- a) Initial difficulty with the English language and/or reading requirements or
- b) Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or the US educational system.
- c) Improper course placement. (This means that after enrolling in the course, you discover that you do not have the proper background for the course. Failing grades (Fs) in the course can be considered evidence of improper course placement.)

✘ Authorization for a reduced course load based on an academic reason listed above may be used only once during your degree program. If you use an academic reason more than once, you will violate the terms of your F-1 status and must apply for reinstatement to DHS or leave the U.S. and reenter using a new I-20.

### 2) Medical Reasons

If a physician or licensed clinical psychologist will recommend that you drop below full-time hours for health reasons, then you may do so for up to a cumulative total of 12 months and still be considered in status.

✘ **Counseling Center Procedures:** Any student, who has been to the Counseling Center at college for any number of sessions, including an initial consultation, may request a letter stating the dates/number of sessions attended, however this is not considered "medical documentation". Apart from this information, it is up to each individual counselor to determine whether it is appropriate to write a letter of support/documentation for a given client. Students would need to request to be assigned to a psychologist if they wanted to pursue the possibility of having CC staff complete the required documentation for a reduced course load. Students should not expect to receive documentation of a medical condition unless seeing a psychologist regularly.

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Besides the two primary types of circumstances mentioned above, there are several other circumstances in which international students can be below hours yet still be considered full time and still maintain legal status. These cases often occur when you are unable to initially register for full time hours. The Global Engagement Center is not required to report to the DHS students who are below full-time hours for reasons #1 through #5 below.

- 1) You are concurrently enrolling at another school (LSCC, for example) for a combined total of credit hours that amounts to a full course of study.
- 2) Evidence of completion of the coursework will be required.
- 3) You are a graduate student who has completed all required coursework, and are completing a thesis or comprehensive exams. **Please note:** you must continue to maintain normal progress when completing your thesis or exams.
- 4) You are completing your final semester and need fewer courses to complete your course of study.
- 5) You are participating in full-time authorized practical training (Curricular Practical Training or Optional Practical Training).

**Please note: If the above descriptions of types of circumstances do not clearly address your situation, you may need to make an appointment through Campus Connect to speak with an international advisor about your options.**