

5 Things Academic Advisors Need to Know about International Students

1. Full-Time Enrollment

F-1 students are required to maintain full-time enrollment while studying in the US. This means registering full-time from the beginning of the semester through the end of the semester. Dropping below full-time is a status violation, so it is imperative that students speak with an international student advisor before dropping below full-time.

F-1 Undergraduate Students:

- A minimum of 12 units every Fall and Spring semester

F-1 Graduate Students:

- 9 units every Fall and Spring semester
- 6 units every Fall and Spring semester if a student is engaged in a paid university assistantship
- 3 units at the 900 level of thesis or dissertation units every Fall and Spring semester if a student has completed all coursework and ONLY has thesis or dissertation units left to complete the degree (student is required to submit a "Graduate Coursework Completion Form" to ISS prior to the first day of semester)
- 1 unit at the 900 level of thesis or dissertation units every Fall and Spring semester if a student has completed all coursework including thesis or dissertation unit requirements and is NOT receiving university financial support, except for Thesis/Dissertation Waiver (student is required to submit a "Graduate Coursework Completion Form" ISS prior to the first day of semester)

Notes:

- Summer and Winter classes will not count toward full-time enrollment in the Spring and Fall semesters. Undergraduate students who start during Summer I must take 6 (in-person) units, and 3 (in-person) units if they start during Summer II. Graduate students who start during either Summer I or Summer II must register for at least 1 unit.
- A grade of A, B, C, D, E, F, I (incomplete) will count toward full-time enrollment, however, a grade of W (withdraw) does not.
- Audit and correspondence/outreach classes will not count toward full-time enrollment.
- Students must be registered for dynamically-dated classes from the beginning of the semester (even if they don't start until several weeks later) for the classes to count towards full-time enrollment.
- Only one class or three credits of Web-based class will count toward full-time enrollment (Web-based class is not the same as a correspondence class). However, exchange students (semester or year-long) are not permitted to count any online classes towards full-time enrollment.
- Exchange students must obtain permission from ISS in order to count independent study units towards full-time enrollment.
- Effective Spring 2013, international students are only allowed to take classes at Pima above and beyond 12 units at the UA during the Fall and Spring semesters. As a result of the policy change, enrollment in Pima classes for Fall and Spring will no longer be limited to in-person classes (method of delivery). Students who want to take classes at Pima must submit a completed Concurrent Enrollment form, signed by their academic advisor, to ISS for approval. A hold (R17) will be placed on their account after the 2nd week of class to prevent them from dropping classes. This hold does not restrict registration for the current or future terms.

2. Normal Progress

Immigration regulations require students to make normal progress towards completing a course of studies. ISS advisors defer to academic advisors and university policy for determination of "normal progress" since this is beyond the scope of what we can advise students on. To verify a student is making normal progress, ISS requires a letter or signature from academic advisors for a variety of requests, including: Program Extensions, Optional Practical Training, Curricular Practical Training, Concurrent Enrollment, Full-Time Enrollment Exemption, Graduate Coursework Completion and Concurrent Enrollment.

3. Program Extensions

Students who will not complete their degree by the end date listed on their immigration form I-20 or DS-2019 must apply to ISS for a program extension in the semester prior to the end date. Included in the required documents, ISS requires students to provide a letter from their academic advisor that explains, in detail, the reason for the program extension and the student's expected program completion date. Students who subsequently apply for additional program extensions should provide a letter from their academic advisor that provides even greater detail as to why the student did not complete their degree by the anticipated date. For graduate students, details regarding dissertation title, committee members, and a month-by-month timeline of activities may also be requested.

4. Dropping Below Full-Time

F-1 students can be exempted from full-time enrollment if they experience certain specific documented medical or academic difficulty conditions and obtain prior written authorization from ISS.

Last Semester

Students needing units less than full-time enrollment to complete his or her degree in the final semester may submit the Full-Time Enrollment Exemption form to maintain status. Exemption must be authorized before the first day of classes. Once authorized, a student must register for a minimum of 1 unit. If a student takes exemption in the final semester but failed to complete his or her degree, the student (**may**) be considered out of status.

For immigration purposes, students in their final semester must enroll in at least one (in-person) class at the University of Arizona to complete their degree (exception: graduate students completing their dissertation during the Winter or Summer terms may not be required to register for any units).

Important: A student's immigration status will be terminated if he or she drops classes to below full-time enrollment without prior written authorization from ISS. If terminated, a student must file for reinstatement or leave the country immediately.

5. CPT v. OPT

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a type of authorization that allows students to accept paid or unpaid work experience or internship in their major field of study. To be considered for CPT, the opportunity must not only be related to the student's major field of study, but also must be either required or an integral part of the academic program, fulfilling a curricular academic objective. Immigration regulations prohibit the authorization of CPT issued for the primary purpose of facilitating employment or career development. CPT is employer specific; students must have an employer at the time that they apply for CPT. Normal processing time is 10 business days. **CPT can only be utilized while a student is still working towards his or her degree.**

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide students with the opportunity to gain actual employment experience in their chosen profession for a maximum of one year (STEM students may be eligible for an additional 17 months). Its purpose is to complement students' academic work. Students most commonly utilize OPT after they graduate (Post-Completion OPT); students who wish to apply for Pre-Completion OPT should meet with an international student advisor at ISS to determine eligibility. **Unlike CPT authorization, which can be granted by ISS, OPT authorization is granted by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a process which normally takes 3 months (students must first apply to ISS before submitting an application to USCIS). Students do not need to obtain employment prior to applying for OPT; however, all employment undertaken while on OPT (paid or unpaid) must be in students' field of study and commensurate to their degree level.**