# International Student Training
For Faculty & Academic Support Staff
Frequently Asked Questions

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Maintaining Status

- Generally, what happens if a student violates his/her F-1 status and the situation cannot be remedied? Is there anything a faculty or staff member should do?

Extending an I-20/DS-2019

- How long is an I-20/DS-2019 issued for initially?
- Under what circumstances could a student get a program extension?
- What if the student’s Stevens funding was pulled—e.g., when a Ph.D. student has his or her assistantship removed after 5 years?
- What is the deadline for applying for a program extension?
General F-1 and J-1 Information

Are we (as faculty and staff) legally responsible to the DHS for following these rules for F-1 and J-1 students?

Stevens as an institution and the Designated School Officials and Alternate Responsible Officers in the ISSS office are all held legally responsible. The reason for this training is to enable faculty and staff to advise students well, for the good of everyone who is held accountable, including the student. If you tell a student they can do whatever they want, you are not helping them or the university. The ISSS will eventually find out about violations of status and will have to work to help the student amend things, or Stevens and the student will suffer the repercussions of the violation. It will also save you a headache to advise students properly from the get-go. For example, if you put an F-1 student in an online course and then discover that the student is taking too many online courses that semester, it's going to be frustrating for you and for the [other] faculty if you have to quickly shift the student over to an on-campus course, and the on-campus course is already full. Also, if an F-1 student comes down to his or her last semester and the only class left is an online course, the student would have to register for an extra on-campus class he or she didn't need in order to maintain F-1 status. So, helping a student come up with a study plan that takes the restrictions of his or her status into consideration will prevent a student being forced to pay more tuition for a class he or she does not need.

How do we know if a student is F-1 or J-1?

We hope that information will eventually be available in Web for Faculty, but for now, just make it a habit to ask students whether they are in F-1/J-1 status before you tell them what they are allowed to do, and if you have any doubt whatsoever about the rules for international students, refer them to the ISSS office.

Where would one encounter a J-1 student? Are they sponsored by their country’s government?

It depends. Some of them have government sponsorship. The motivation behind the Exchange Visitor (J-1) program is the government of one country in an exchange relationship with the government of the United States. We have a very small population of J-1 students sponsored by Stevens but a much larger J-1 student population at Stevens that are in Fulbright programs or have come through the Institute for International Education. Some J-1 students are in what one would think of as a traditional exchange program, but others come on their own. Regardless, they must fulfill the Department of State’s requirement to participate in cultural exchange—to share their culture with the people they encounter in the United States and use their experience to enhance their home country upon their return.

What is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)?

SEVIS “is the web-based system that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uses to maintain information on F and M students in the United States and the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-certified schools that enroll them” (studyinthestates.dhs.gov). Designated staff in the ISSS office are responsible for reporting information (like name, address, enrollment status, employment information, etc.) about F-1 students in SEVIS by the reporting deadlines designated by the DHS.
Course Registration and Reduced Course Loads

How many online courses may F-1 and J-1 students take?

F-1 students in their last semester:

- With **one class remaining**: the class must be **on campus**.
- With **two classes remaining**: student may take **one online and one on campus**.
- With **three or more classes remaining**: please see below.

F-1 graduate students may only take one online course out of the total courses needed to be full-time (9 credits; usually three courses but may be more). If they are taking additional courses above the full-time requirement, those courses may be online.

F-1 graduate certificate students may only take one online course out of the total courses needed to be full-time (6 credits; usually two courses). If they are taking additional courses above the full-time requirement, those courses may be online.

F-1 undergraduate students may only take one online course out of the total courses needed to be full-time (12 credits; usually four courses but may be more). If they are taking additional courses above the full-time requirement, those courses may be online.

J-1 graduate and undergraduate students

**None** of the required courses (9 credits for graduate students, 12 credits for undergraduate students) may be taken online. If a student is taking additional courses above the full-time requirement, those courses may be online.

What if the student's last semester of study is in the summer? Could the student take all online courses since F-1 and J-1 students are not required to study in the summer?

A student taking a final course or completing a thesis/dissertation in the summer would do so by choice. Since F-1 and J-1 students are not required to study during the summertime, it is a common misconception that they can take whatever classes they want if summer is their last semester. If a student is in his/her last semester of study in the summertime, the rules are the same as if the student were studying in the fall or spring. This includes students in thesis/dissertation status, who need to register for D-999 in they are completing during the summer.

What if the student appears to be in an on-campus course on paper but has an agreement with the instructor to participate in the Web Campus version of the course?

This is not allowed. Please do not allow a student to register for an on-campus course but participate in the online course; to do would be a violation of status for the student because what is most important to the DHS is the spirit of the regulation—not what it looks like on paper. The point of the regulation governing online courses is that students came the U.S. to study, so they should be doing so in person. If they’re going to take online courses, they could do so from back home.
We have to be extremely careful that we do not aid students in violating status because this can come back to bite both the student and the institution, even years down the road. For instance, if the student is applying for a work visa or a green card, they can receive a Request for Evidence from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services that asks for any number of things, including proof that the student actually studied on campus.

**What if a master's student has completed all other coursework and only has a six-credit master's thesis remaining? Could he or she do three credits one semester and three credits the next?**

No. The student would need to register for six credits in the initial semester and D-999 in the last semester.

**Do students have to complete paperwork if they want to withdraw from a course (making them less than full-time), or if they are doing D-999 or are in their last semester of study?**

Yes, they must complete the Reduced Course Load Request form, which must filled out and signed by their academic advisor.

**Is it okay to assign an F-1/J-1 student an incomplete, and if so, what happens next?**

Yes, it is okay, but the student would have to maintain a full-time course load the following semester unless he or she qualified for a reduced course load or had no other credits to take—in which case, the student would register for D-999 to maintain status.

**With regard to Reduced Course Loads (RCLs), who initiates this process—the faculty or the student?**

It is fine for the faculty to initiate the process—to say to the student, “I think that you need to withdraw from one of these classes because you’re not reading at the right level/you don't seem to understand the structure of the American system/you didn’t have the prerequisite knowledge/coursework to take this class/etc.” However, it is imperative that you make it clear to the student that he/she should not withdraw (and you should refrain from signing a Drop form) unless the ISSS authorizes the RCL. An F-1 student will know that his or her RCL is authorized because an ISSS advisor will send the student an e-mail confirming the authorization and telling the student to pick up his/her new I-20, which will have the RCL reason designated on the second page. A J-1 student will know that his or her RCL is authorized because an ISSS advisor will send the student an e-mail confirming the authorization; there is no RCL designation on the DS-2019.

**With regard to the Reduced Course Load Request form, can an F-1 student withdraw if they're just failing a class?**

Only if the student’s reason for falling behind in the class falls into one of these categories:

- Initial difficulties with the English language
- Initial difficulties with the American academic system
- Initial difficulties with reading requirements
- Improper course placement
- Documented temporary illness or medical condition

Also, a reduced course load for academic reasons is allowed only one semester per program (i.e., degree/certificate listed on the I-20). Unfortunately immigration regulations do not make room for the student who is just doing poorly academically—even if the student gave it his or her best. So, a student in this situation would either have to take the grade and possibly repeat the class or be in violation of status by withdrawing from the class. On the (slightly) positive side, As long as a student is not a willful violator—failing classes due to nonattendance or non-participation—it would be fine for ISSS to grant the student a program extension to retake a class.

Does the above apply to J-1 students as well?

More or less, but the regulations are less specific about the reasons that J-1 students may need to reduce course load.

With regard to the Reduced Course Load Request form, when is “improper course placement” an appropriate reason that the student needs to withdraw from a course?

Our understanding of the regulation is that the student had some prerequisite that wasn't met-- either a stated prerequisite or an implied one. So either there's a class that they should have taken first that they somehow didn't take first. Or back home, in their home country, they should have had some sort of foundational piece of their education in order to do well in this particular class, and they don't have it. So they didn't have basic chemistry. And they need that in order to take this other class.

With regard to the Reduced Course Load Request form, why is there a two-term limit for studying for the qualifying exam?

When we say two-term limit, we don't mean that everyone automatically gets to have two terms to study for the qualifying exam. Students take one term to study for the quals, take the quals, and if they don't pass, are allowed a second term to study and attempt to pass the exam again, which would be only with the advisor's recommendation. We have had one or two instances of a student being given a third semester for the quals, but that was due to a medical condition of some sort: the student wasn't able to sit for the exam the first or second time.

Maintaining Status

Generally, what happens if a student violates his/her F-1 status and the situation cannot be remedied? Is there anything a faculty or staff member should do?

Faculty and staff should only refer students to the ISSS office for assistance; they should not advise the student in any way if the student appears to be violating status.

F-1 students typically have two options if they violate status. The first is to stay in the U.S. and via a formal application, request for the government to give them their status back. This is called reinstatement, and the process is currently taking about 10-14 months. While the student is waiting for their reinstatement application to be adjudicated, he or she cannot work or travel outside the U.S. The second option would be
for the student to leave the U.S., get a new I-20, and apply for a new F-1 visa. We usually refer to this process as “travel and reentry.” However, when the student goes to the consulate to apply for a new visa, the consulate is going to have access to the student’s record and will likely know whether the student had a termination before. Depending on the termination reason, the student could have trouble getting a new visa or be denied a visa altogether.

**Extending an I-20/DS-2019**

**How long is an I-20/DS-2019 issued for initially?**

- Bachelor’s – 4 years
- Master’s – 2 years
- Certificate – 2 years
- Ph.D. – 5 years

**Under what circumstances could a student get a program extension?**

When a student’s delay in program completion is caused by “compelling academic or medical reasons, such as changes of major or research topics, unexpected research problems, or documented illnesses” [8 CFR § 214.2(f)(7)(iii)].

**What if the student's Stevens funding was pulled—e.g., when a Ph.D. student has his or her assistantship removed after 5 years?**

The student would still be eligible to apply for a program extension but would have to show an alternate source of funding, such as personal funds or funds from a sponsor.

**What is the deadline for applying for a program extension?**

The absolute deadline is the end date on the student’s I-20/DS-2019, but we recommend that students apply at least two weeks before that date to give the ISSS advisor enough time to process the application and create the new I-20/DS-2019.