MAINTAINING F-1 STUDENT STATUS

What does it mean to be in F-1 student status?

- You entered the U.S. with an F-1 visa (or, if Canadian, used only an I-20 to enter the U.S.)

OR

- You entered the U.S. with a different visa, and subsequently applied for and were granted a change-of-status to F-1 by the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS).

THEREFORE, your primary purpose for being in the U.S. is to study.

How do I remain in lawful F-1 student status?

To maintain your F-1 status, you must comply with ALL of the following requirements:

- Keep your passport valid at all times. **While you are in the U.S., you must always have a valid passport.**

- **Maintain a valid and accurate I-20**
  - Check section 5 of your I-20. The *date of expected completion of studies* must not have passed. **If the expiration date is approaching and you have not finished your program, you must apply for an “Extension of Stay” before the expiration date.**
  - To re-enter the U.S., you must have a valid travel signature on page 3 of your I-20. The travel signature should be renewed every year. Exception: Students on OPT must get a new travel signature every six months. **Note:** Only Designated School Officials (DSO’s) are allowed to sign your I-20.

- Attend the school you are authorized to attend. **This means that you must report to the school whose I-20 you used to enter the U.S. or to which you transferred.**

- **Study full-time and make normal progress toward your degree.** **Note:** You can only register for 3 credit hours of online courses per semester.
  - Register for 12 credit hours each semester (except during summer vacations).
  - Register for 9 credit hours each semester if you are a graduate student who holds an assistantship.
- Register for 1 or more credit hours each semester if you have **Certification of Full-time Status** from the Graduate School (Capen Hall 408, North Campus) while working on your thesis or dissertation.
- Do not drop or resign courses so that you are no longer registered for a full course load.
- Do not register for more than one distance education class (or 3 credits) each semester.
- **Note:** If you were admitted to start a degree program during a summer session, you are required to register for a minimum of 6 credits during the first summer session in which you were admitted.

- **Never work off-campus unless authorized by the USCIS and/or DSO at your school**

- **Notify UB of a Change of Address through the HUB Student Center within 10 days of your move.** ISSS will then notify the Department of Homeland Security. If you are on OPT, you must report your Change of Address by logging on to [https://ubiss.buffalo.edu/](https://ubiss.buffalo.edu/) using your UBIT Name and Password. Once you have logged on, enter your current residential address on the “Update OPT Student Contact Information” E-form.

**Are there any EXCEPTIONS to the full-time course registration requirement?**

There are some exceptions to the full-time course registration requirement:

- **During summer or winter break** (ONLY for continuing students who intend to register for the next term)
  - **Note:** Students who have initial I-20’s to start a degree program in the summer or winter must be enrolled.

- During your final semester if you need fewer than 12 credits to finish your degree requirements and graduate
  - **Note:** You must obtain prior authorization from a Designated School Official to reduce your course load. ISSS also requires a written recommendation from your advisor / professor.
  - **Note:** You may not register only for Distance Education courses in your final semester. You must be physically present and taking (a) course(s) at UB.

- One time per degree level due to difficulties with the English language or reading load, unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods or improper course placement
  - **Note:** You must obtain prior authorization from a Designated School Official to reduce your course load. ISSS also requires a written recommendation from your advisor or professor.
  - **Note:** You must be registered for at least 6 credit hours to be eligible for this Reduced Course Load.

- While suffering from a medical condition or illness
  - **Note:** You must obtain a written recommendation from a licensed medical professional (e.g. physician, osteopath or licensed clinical psychologist) and authorization from a Designated School Official to reduce your course load. The
medical recommendation must include the reason for the recommendation, the
number of courses you may take and the length of time such a reduction is
necessary.

- **Note:** You may have a maximum of 12 months of Reduced Course Load Due to
  Medical Condition per degree level.

**PLEASE NOTE:** A Medical Leave of Absence is different from a regular Leave of Absence. If you take a Leave of Absence from the University, you must depart the U.S., whereas a Medical Leave of Absence (when approved by a Designated School Official) allows you to remain in the U.S. and maintain your status while seeking medical treatment inside the U.S.

If you cannot register for any classes due to a medical condition, you should apply for a Medical Leave of Absence from UB. To apply for it, you will need to meet with your Academic Advisor as well as an International Student Advisor.

Failure to comply with these requirements is a violation of your F-1 status, which may result in serious consequences, including your termination in SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitors Information System), inability to re-enter the U.S., and detention and deportation from the U.S. Please direct all questions regarding your F-1 student status to ISSS, Talbert Hall 210, North Campus.