Full-Time Status Requirements for International Students

This document is an advisory for graduate and undergraduate deans, directors, department heads and faculty members regarding federal regulatory requirements for F-1 and J-1 student full-time enrollment.

Potential End to Online Study Accommodation for International Students

In March 2020, the federal regulations limiting online study for F-1 and J-1 international students were suspended because of the COVID emergency. This suspension was then extended through fall 2020 and again for spring 2021. No announcement has yet been made regarding the fall 2021 semester. Such an announcement could come at any time from now until later this summer. As colleges and universities return to their usual methods of instruction and as students return to campuses for face-to-face classes, it is possible that the COVID accommodations will end and international students will once again be subject to regulatory limitations governing online study.

As Mason schools, colleges, and academic departments plan courses and instructional methods for the fall semester, please keep in mind that international students may not be permitted to enroll in fully online instruction. Therefore, it will be essential to offer sufficient face-to-face and hybrid courses for these students to comply with the regulations.

Full-Time Enrollment is Required for F-1 and J-1 International Students

**All F-1 and J-1 students must be enrolled full-time in fall and spring semesters. The definition of “full time” is aligned with the Registrar’s definition, and can be found on the Registrar’s website and in the University Catalog.**

F-1 and J-1 students may enroll in online courses, with the following limitations:

* F-1 students may count only one online course toward the credits required to be full-time. Example: F-1 graduate student must take 9 credits, typically 3 courses, for full-time status. Only one of those courses may be online. The other 2 courses must be face-to-face (F2F) or hybrid. Additional credits (over 9 may be in any format.)
* J-1 students may not count any online courses toward the credits required to be full-time. Once a J-1 student meets the full-time status requirement with F2F or hybrid classes, additional credits (over the number required for full-time status) may be in any format.

Exceptions to the full-time status requirement:

* A student who is experiencing an illness or other medical condition which prevents full-time enrollment.
* A student in the first year in the United States, experiencing difficulty with English language, or unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or reading requirements.
* A student who has improperly enrolled in a course at the wrong level of study given the student’s level of preparation and readiness.
* A student in his or her final semester in a program and who is enrolled in all remaining credits required to complete the program. (At least one of the classes must be F2F or hybrid.)

NOTES:

* Documentation is required prior to issuance of RCL authorization.
* RCL authorization is always made in writing.
* Academic exceptions for J-1 students are somewhat more flexible than for F-1 students, and may be authorized for a documented academic reason after consultation with the J-1 advisor in OIPS and with documentation from an academic advisor or dean.
* Details about requesting an RCL authorization can be found on the OIPS website <https://oips.gmu.edu> in the Self-Service Center under “Reduced Course Load.” Written authorization from OIPS is required for RCL.

At any time, feel free to contact us for consultation, questions, and guidance. You can reach our office at oips@gmu.edu or e-mail any of us directly.

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