

## Academic Advising Tips for International Students FALL SEMESTER 2009

- FULL-TIME STATUS and REDUCED COURSE LOADS

Immigration regulations require international students to be enrolled full-time:

- Graduate: 9 credits
- Undergraduate: 12 credits
- However, there are exceptions. Students in the *first semester* may seek authorization for a Reduced Course Load for the following reasons:
  - Difficulty with the English Language
  - Difficulty with Reading Requirements
  - Unfamiliarity with American Teaching Methods
  - Improper Course Level Placement

The minimum number of credits required to maintain status is 6 for both undergraduates and graduates after a first-semester RCL.

- Students in any semester may seek authorization for a Reduced Course Load for documented medical reasons (students may drop to 0 credits) or improper course level placement (students may drop only the course in which they were improperly placed).
- Students in their last semester DO NOT have to take extra classes to “fill up” their schedule. Immigration regulations allow them to take only the credits they need to graduate (even if it is only 3 credits) as long as they seek authorization from the ISO for a Reduced Course Load (RCL) before finalizing.
- Students seeking a Reduced Course Load for any reason should see the ISO for instructions.

- INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION and the ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY REQUIREMENT

International students are admitted as regular, full-time students on the basis of their academic qualifications.

- Those *who meet the University standard* for English language competence, usually documented through test scores such as for TOEFL or IELTS, or by transcripts/certificates indicating participation in an ESL program or other English-language instruction program, may begin course work in their chosen field upon arrival.
- Those *who do not meet the University standard* for English language competence must take a language skills assessment exam (reading, writing, listening and speaking), this fall scheduled for Friday, August 21. The results of the assessment will be available by Monday, August 24. Students with low scores will likely be enrolled full-time for the first semester in ESL courses only. Students who achieve higher scores may be enrolled in a mix of ESL and degree requirement courses. Those who achieve a level demonstrating proficiency will be allowed to enroll in degree requirement courses without additional ESL instruction.
- Despite having mastered certain aspects of the English language, many internationals will still experience challenges in the classroom as they grapple with academic language and American pedagogical practices. The ISO can authorize a Reduced Course Load for the reasons outlined above.

- A full schedule of ESL course for international students is on offer through Gannon's Center for Adult Education. The courses are measured in clock hours, rather than credits. A full course load for ESL only classes is at least 18-22 hours of instruction per week. Clock hours and credits may be combined to create a full course load according to the following formula.
    - 5 hours equals 3 credits for Undergraduates and Graduates
  - Instructors should consider issues such as allowing for extra time to complete an exam or the use of dictionaries during class together with the respective college dean.
  - Although the Writing Center can assist international students in proofreading essays and theses, and in planning or restructuring them to better communicate salient points, tutors are not able to assist students with remedial instruction in English grammar, orthography, and vocabulary.
  - ISO maintains a library of ESL CDs that any student may check out for up to a week at a time.
  - ISO together with other university departments offer opportunities for students to meet with native English speakers through collaborative classroom projects and the Conversation Partners Program.
  - ISO forms study groups and assists in seeking tutors for those who may require additional support for course work.
- **MATHEMATICAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT**  
 Although international secondary school transcripts may indicate coursework in mathematics, many students admitted as undergraduates may not come fresh from high school or may have mastered only very basic skills.
    - The Mathematics Department has developed a math skills placement test that will be administered to all first-year international students on August 21, 2009. The results will be available by Monday, August 24.
    - Although students do not receive credit toward their degrees for courses listed at the "0" level, MATH 055 might help students prepare for higher level coursework.
    - The Mathematics Center can assist international students through tutoring.
- **TIMELY COMPLETION OF THE DEGREE PROGRAM**  
 Students must complete their program of study by the end date on their I-20. Extra time has been allowed for students coming to the University without having met the English Language Proficiency Standard. Although there may be compelling reasons to both shorten a program end date or extend it (shorten for early completion of degree requirements; extend for change of major, difficulties in research, loss of credits on transfer, medical condition), failing a course or having a low GPA is not deemed by immigration regulation as sufficient cause for an extension.
    - NOTE: Most graduate students at Gannon are allowed 4 semesters to complete 10 classes (30 credits, split up each semester as 9, 9, 9, and 3). A student who has failed a class or two will have an opportunity during the summer or at the end of the curriculum to re-do a course. Unfortunately, students who have a failing grade or take an incomplete cannot extend the end date on their I-20.

- **IMPACT OF ONLINE OR DISTANCE COURSEWORK ON IMMIGRATION STATUS**  
International students may take no more than 1 course (3 credits) toward meeting the full course load requirement.
  - Although not regulatory, the SEVP (Student and Exchange Visitors Program) has advised that students who have only one course remaining toward completion of a degree program may not take this course online or at a distance and must maintain a physical presence in the classroom.
  
- **RELIGIOUS OBSERVATION AND CLASS ATTENDANCE**  
Instructors with international students should consider what they will accept in terms of class absences on the basis of religious and cultural practice and clearly outline in syllabi the procedures for making notice of a class absence, along with any consequences or requirements for making up missed work.
  - Southern Indian students often cite participation in home religious festivals and marriage ceremonies (for which there are auspicious seasons) as a reason to miss up to the first two weeks of a semester.
  - Muslim students will observe the lunar month of Ramadan, a period of fasting, prayer, and service, in August/September 2009. If you are advising Muslim students, it is prudent to steer them toward courses that conclude before evening when students break the fast that begins each day at sunrise and ends at sunset. Because of the long summer hours of daylight, students will sometimes go 14 hours without food or drink. If students must participate in evening classes, they will need a time to break fast.
  
- **CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING WORK AUTHORIZATION**  
The ISO may authorize students in F-1 status to work under Curricular Practical Training during the school year and on official breaks, on or off campus, only if the employment is required as part of the curriculum for an established degree program or track within the degree program. Generally speaking, students do not qualify for CPT until they have attended at least two full semesters. The exception is for graduates who are required to begin employment in CPT as a condition of their degree and its requirements. Advisors and students should discuss with an ISO staff member how best to seek authorization for any practicum work, required internships, etc. whether paid or unpaid.