



Sub-term Courses and Your Visa Status

This frequently asked questions form has been provided by the International Student Services Office (ISSO) to provide F-1 international students guidance on how the sub-term courses may affect their visa status. Please be sure to contact the ISSO at intl_stu@tamuc-commerce.edu or 903-886-5097 with any questions or concerns. Do not trust in the advice of well-meaning friends.

How do the sub-term courses work? Some academic departments at A&M-Commerce (College of Business, College of Education and Human Services, Technology Management) divide the semester into two sub-terms (sub-term 1 and sub-term 2 for fall and spring) and offer different courses within these sub-terms.

*For example, during the spring semester the academic department may offer courses during **sub-term 1** that begins January 17 and ends March 12, and then offer new courses during **sub-term 2** that begins March 16 and ends May 11.*

Students in academic programs that provide sub-term courses will need to contact their academic department to confirm the dates and requirements for sub-term courses as they may vary.

I am a new international student to A&M-Commerce, can I start my courses in sub-term 2? No. All new international students to A&M-Commerce must report to the campus in time to attend the mandatory international student orientation, check-in with an international advisor, **AND** enroll in courses for sub-term 1. New international students to A&M-Commerce **CANNOT** begin their academic program in sub-term 2.

What about the full-course of study requirement? USCIS requires an F-1 international student to enroll in a full course of study each fall and spring semester. For graduate students this is a minimum of nine (9) semester credit hours (**sch**) with at least six (6) hours face to face and for undergraduate students this is a minimum of twelve (12) semester credit hours (**sch**) with at least nine (9) hours face to face. **Students may use all the courses they enroll in within both sub-terms to meet USCIS requirements for a full course of study.**

For example, a graduate student is enrolled in six (6) semester credit hours (sch) of face to face courses sub-term 1 and a three (3) sch online "W" course sub-term 2. This is nine (9) sch and satisfies USCIS requirements. STUDENTS MAY NOT TAKE ALL OF THEIR COURSES IN ONE SUB-TERM.

Can I take all my courses in one sub-term? No. **Students MUST enroll in courses for both sub-terms per USCIS guidelines and ISSO requirement.** If you are a graduate student and enroll in nine (9) sch or more, then you must take courses in both sub-terms. If you are an undergraduate student and enroll in twelve (12) sch or more, then you must take courses in both sub-terms.

*For example, graduate student is enrolled for 9 semester credit hours in sub-term 1 and no classes for sub-term 2. The ISSO **WILL NOT** allow this student to enroll course for just one sub-term per USCIS guidelines. This student would need to add a course in sub-term 2.*

What if I am in my final semester and only have 3-6 semester credit hours (sch) (graduate) or 3-9 sch (undergraduate) left to graduate? You may take your final course(s) (3-6 sch graduate, 3-9 sch undergraduate) in either sub-term. USCIS will not penalize a student for taking their final courses (3-6 sch graduate, 3-9 sch undergraduate) in the second sub-term. Be sure to submit the [Report Less Than Required Hours](#) form prior to your final semester. Please note that if you have one course left to graduate this course must be face to face and cannot be online.

For example, student only has two courses left to graduate. This student may take a course each sub-term, both courses in sub-term 1, or both courses in sub-term 2.

If you ***only take sub-term 1 courses*** then this will ***have an affect upon any on-campus employment and/or your OPT*** due to your official program end date. Please see questions below for more information.

If you are only enrolled for ***sub-term 2*** courses then you will need to consult the graduate school (GA's) or Human Resource office (student worker) to confirm your employment.

If I am only enrolled in courses for sub-term 1 will this affect my I-20 program end date? According to USCIS regulations, the program end date for an F-1 international student is "the date of actual completion of all requirements for graduation." ***This is the last day of your last registered course unless you have any further course requirements beyond this date (example...thesis, dissertation defense).***

USCIS does not take into consideration the official day of graduation, date grades are posted, or official end of the semester. ***If you are in your final semester and you are only enrolled in sub-term 1 course(s) then your program end date for your I-20 (line 5) will be the last day of your course(s) in sub-term 1.***

For example, a student only has one course left to graduate in spring (must be face to face) and the student enrolls in one sub-term 1 course that ends March 12. The student does not have any other requirements to graduate. Even though this student will not officially graduate until May their program end date on their I-20 per USCIS rules is March 12.

This will impact a student's eligibility for on-campus employment and their OPT start date and the timeframe of when they need to apply for OPT. Please see next question(s) for more information.

If I am in my final semester and only enrolled sub-term 1 course(s), will this affect my OPT? If a student is in their final semester and only enrolled in sub-term 1 course(s) (3-6 sch graduate, 3-9 sch undergraduate) then their program end date for their I-20 will be the end of sub-term 1. ***The student will need to apply for OPT before the end of sub-term 1 and their OPT start date will need to be within 60 days of the end date of sub-term 1.***

*For example, student is **only** enrolled for the spring semester in sub-term 1 course(s) that end March 12. This student's program end date for their I-20 is March 12, they need to apply for OPT before March 12, and their OPT start date will need to be within 60 days of March 12.*

Consult an international student advisor or attend the OPT workshop for more information. Please note that if you have one course left to graduate this course must be face to face and cannot be online.

What if I am in my final semester and enrolled in sub-term 2 course(s) ONLY, will this affect my OPT?

No. This is allowed by USCIS for students who have less than required hours (3-6 sch graduate, 3-9 sch undergraduate) and the student will be maintaining their status if they are only enrolled in sub-term 2 course(s). The program end date for the I-20 will be the last day of sub-term 2 which is the end date of the regular semester. Please note that only enrolling in sub-term 2 course(s) in your final semester may affect your on-campus employment. Please contact the graduate school (GA's) or Human Resource (student worker) to discuss your situation.

When will I be able to apply for OPT if I am only enrolling in sub-term 1 courses ONLY? The ISSO will open up appointments early **ONLY** for students who are enrolled in sub-term 1 course(s). ***Students will need to confirm they are in their final semester and do not have any further requirements outside their sub-term 1 course(s) before they apply for OPT.*** If problems arise where a student may not finish in the sub-term 1 this will lead to serious complications with their OPT application.

What if I am only enrolled in sub-term 1 course(s) to complete my program, apply for OPT, but then find out I have other course requirements and have to take another class in sub-term 2? This will have a direct impact upon a student's OPT authorization and can create difficulties. While the student's visa status will not be directly threatened their OPT authorization may be delayed and/or jeopardized due to USCIS timeframe for applying.

If I am in my final semester and ONLY enrolled in sub-term 1 course(s), will this affect my on-campus employment? Yes. USCIS rules state that an F-1 international student cannot work beyond their program end date. If a student is in their final semester and only enrolled in sub-term 1 courses then their program end date for their I-20 will be the end of sub-term 1. The student will not be allowed to work on-campus beyond the end date of sub-term 1 unless they enroll in a course(s) for sub-term 2.

How will the sub-terms impact traveling outside the U.S.? I am in my final semester and only enrolled in sub-term 2 course(s) for the spring semester (3-6 sch graduate, 3-9 sch undergraduate) and I plan to not return to the U.S. until closer to March 16. Is this OK? In this case, the ISSO would strongly recommend the student request a letter from their instructor(s) providing the details of the course including the official start date for the course in March. If a travel signature is required from the ISSO then the letter(s) would be required per the instructions on the [Travel Signature Request form](#). The student would need to understand that even with the letter(s) from their instructor(s) port of entry may have concerns and detain a student until they can verify their status.