



Proposal to the Senate Educational Policy Committee and the Council of Student Conduct Expectations and Accountability

1. **PROPOSAL TITLE:** Revise the Policy for Full-Time Enrollment for Graduate Students
2. **SPONSOR NAME AND EMAIL:** Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko, Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate College
3. **CONTACT NAME AND EMAIL:** Allison McKinney, Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs, Graduate College
4. **BRIEF DESCRIPTION:** This proposal seeks to revise the definition of full-time enrollment for Graduate students. Full time enrollment in a fall or spring is currently defined as 12 hours or 8 hours for those holding a 25-67% assistantship appointment. This revision proposes to remove the employment qualifier and define full time enrollment for all graduate students as 8 hours in a fall or spring semester and 4 hours in the summer semester.
5. **DESIRED EFFECTIVE TERM:** Fall 2025
6. **JUSTIFICATION:** The definition of full-time enrollment is established by the institution and used to meet a variety of determinations such as: eligibility for federal financial aid, student visa status, Veteran's Affairs benefits, NCAA student athlete eligibility, and any other entities relying on the institution's definition for full time enrollment. Awareness of issues graduate students can face in meeting the enrollment requirements has prompted a review of the current policy.

The objectives we hope to meet with this revision include:

- Aligning academic load with course enrollment to establish equity amongst graduate students.
- Promoting wellness and work/life balance for graduate students.
- Removing needs for students to add additional hours beyond what their program requires to meet established definition of full-time enrollment.
- Align our policies with peer definitions and closer to the IPEDS definition of full time enrollment (which is 9 hours).

The Graduate College is dedicated to promoting equity and wellness for graduate students, acknowledging the diverse experiences they bring. Graduate students often balance academic responsibilities with work, family, and personal commitments. This proposed revision will

establish a single definition for full time enrollment for all graduate students, irrespective of their program or employment status.

The current campus definition for full time enrollment for graduate students considers graduate *assistantship* employment as part of the academic load. In some cases, work performed as part of an assistantship may contribute toward degree completion. In other cases, the employment aspects, while contributing to professional development, may not contribute toward degree progress directly. The employment categories that are considered toward full time enrollment definitions under current policy are:

25-67% FTE Research Assistantships
25-67% FTE Teaching Assistantships
25-67% FTE Graduate Assistantships
25-67% FTE Pre-Professional Graduate Assistantships

No other employment categories (for example, graduate hourly) are considered toward academic load under current policy.

The proposed revised policy would define full-time enrollment for graduate students as 8 credit hours per fall or spring semester and 4 credit hours during the summer semester. This revision would revise the current practice of calculating assistantship effort toward academic load and define full-time enrollment based solely on number of credit hours the student is enrolled in. Full time enrollment could be achieved by enrolling in two 4-credit hour courses in a fall or spring semester. Students enrolled in programs using a 3-credit hour per course model will be considered full-time when registered for 8 or more hours, though practically they will likely enroll in 3 three-hour courses (9 hours) per semester to meet full-time registration. The revision will remove motivations for students who do not hold a assistantship appointment to enroll in courses that are not needed for their academic program simply to meet the full-time registration requirements.

Revising the institutional definition of full-time enrollment would not have an adverse effect on time to degree policies. Students who maintain 8 credit hours registration would be able to complete a 32-credit hour master's program in 4 semesters. Doctoral students who are required to complete 96 credit hours would be able to complete the program in 12 semesters (6 years) and doctoral students who are required to complete a 64-credit hour program would be able to do so in 8 semesters (4 years). These timeframes do not include summer enrollment. Academic programs will continue to advise students on the course load and sequence necessary to progress through the program and may advise students to take additional hours.

When reviewing how peers define full time enrollment, it became clear that this revision would align our campus more closely with practices at other institutions. Peer definitions of full-time enrollment can be found in the appendix section of this proposal.

7. BUDGETARY AND STAFF IMPLICATIONS:

Students in range-based (on campus) tuition assessed programs would be considered full time at Range II tuition assessment: <https://registrar.illinois.edu/tuition-fees/tuition-fee-rates/tf-rates-term/g-tuition-cr-2324/>. We do not anticipate changes in the total cost of the degree for students, as modeled below:

Resident			Resident		
	Enrollment	Tuition Assessment		Enrollment	Tuition Assessment
Semester 1	8	\$ 4,684	Semester 1	12	\$ 7,026
Semester 2	8	\$ 4,684	Semester 2	12	\$ 7,026
Semester 3	8	\$ 4,684	Semester 3	8	\$ 4,684
Semester 4	8	\$ 4,684			
Total Hours	32	\$ 18,736	Total Hours	32	\$ 18,736
Non-Resident			Non-Resident		
	Enrollment	Tuition Assessment		Enrollment	Tuition Assessment
Semester 1	8	\$ 10,119	Semester 1	12	\$ 15,178
Semester 2	8	\$ 10,119	Semester 2	12	\$ 15,178
Semester 3	8	\$ 10,119	Semester 3	8	\$ 10,119
Semester 4	8	\$ 10,119			
Total Hours	32	\$ 40,476	Total Hours	32	\$ 40,475

However, it was noted that due to the range-based tuition assessment model, tuition collected can already vary by degree program, depending on course selection and a student's desired pace as tuition assessment is capped at 12 hours. No additional tuition is assessed for students who enroll in more than 12 credit hours in on-campus programs.

There will be no impact in tuition revenue in online programs, as those are all assessed tuition in a per-credit-hour format.

No changes are proposed to the maximum hours that a graduate student can take in a semester (currently at 20 hours). No changes are proposed to any tuition ranges.

8. CONSULTATIONS WITH COLLEGES AND CAMPUS UNITS

The Graduate College has consulted with the Office of the Provost, Office of the Registrar, Office of Student Financial Aid, Division of Management Information, Council of Deans, Graduate College Executive Committee and Council of Associate Deans for Graduate Education to seek feedback and explore any university-level impacts of a change in the full-time definition. Their input has been incorporated into this proposal.

9. NEW/REVISED POLICY STATEMENT:

<https://studentcode.illinois.edu/article3/part3/3-301/>

3-301 Number of Hours Required

a. All Students

1. For undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, the minimum program required for receipt of maximum educational benefit payments under the Veteran's Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 and receipt of Social Security benefits as a dependent is 12 hours in a semester (six hours in the summer term).
2. Twelve credit hours and above in a semester constitute a full program of study for tuition and fee assessment; in the summer term, the number of hours is six and above. (See § 3-501(b) on credit ranges.)

3. Registration requirements for certification purposes in individual semesters, if the student is registered, are as follows:

Undergraduate and Professional Students

Semester	Full-Time	Half-Time
Fall	12 credit hours	6 credit hours
Spring	12 credit hours	6 credit hours
Summer	6 credit hours	3 credit hours

Graduate Students

Semester	Full-Time	Half-Time
Fall	8 credit hours	4 credit hours
Spring	8 credit hours	4 credit hours
Summer	4 credit hours	2 credit hours

For purposes of load calculation, English as a Second Language courses required or recommended by the English as a Second Language Placement Test will count as four hours even if the registration is listed in the student registration systems as zero hours.

~~Registration in at least 12 credit hours in a semester is required for certification as a full-time student with one exception. Graduate students with assistantship appointments of 25–67%, inclusive, for a semester will be considered full-time for certification purposes when they are registered for at least eight credit hours. For purposes of load calculation, English as a Second Language courses required or recommended by the English as a Second Language Placement Test will count as four hours even if the registration is listed in the student registration systems as zero hours. Registration in at least six credit hours is required for certification as a half-time student in a semester. In the summer term, registration in at least six credit hours is required for full-time certification.~~

3.4. For university academic terms of other lengths, the number of hours are determined proportionately in accordance with the above principles.

4.5. Study Abroad students shall be considered full-time for academic purposes at the university when they are enrolled for at least the minimum full-time academic load as defined by the international institution. However, federal regulations require that students must take and transfer back 12 or more University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign hours to be considered full-time for financial aid purposes.

b. Undergraduate Students

1. Each student is required to pursue a normal program of studies. The number of hours varies with the college and curriculum. More or less than a normal program may be permitted only by authority of the dean of the college or designated representative.
2. In most colleges, 12 semester hours are required for Dean's List recognition. (See § 3-401.)

CAMPUS WORKFLOW NOTIFICATION


Unit Representative Name and Signature

Date



Graduate College Representative Name and Signature

Date



Provost Representative

Date

Educational Policy Committee Representative

Date

Appendix

Peer Institution Definitions of Full Time Enrollment for Graduate Students

University	Definition of Full Time	Source
Northwestern	3 course units (quarter system)	https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academic-policies-procedures/policies/general-registration-policies.html
Penn State	9 credits	https://aappm.psu.edu/policy/n-5-enrollment-status
Minnesota	6 hours	https://onestop.umn.edu/academics/full-time-credits
Nebraska	9 hours	https://registrar.unl.edu/academic-standards/student-status/
Ohio State	8 Hours	https://gradsch.osu.edu/all/graduate-school-handbook-gsh#book-section-3
Purdue	8 for FA/SP, 6 for Summer	https://www.purdue.edu/registrar/currentStudents/enrollCert.html
Michigan	8 hours	https://ro.umich.edu/student-records/enrollment-verification/enrollment-status
Michigan State	9 for Masters, 6 for PhD Stage I-II, 1 for Stage III	https://reg.msu.edu/academicprograms/Print.aspx?Section=346
Iowa	9 hours FA/SP, 5 in summer	https://registrar.uiowa.edu/full-time-half-time-enrollment-status
Wisconsin	8 hours	https://policy.wisc.edu/library/UW-1208
Maryland	8-12 hours depending on courses	https://academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/registration-policies/#text
Rutgers	9 Hours	https://catalogs.rutgers.edu/generated/smlr_current/pg32.html



Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs & Provost

Office of Student Financial Aid
620 E. John St., MC-303
Champaign, IL 61820

February 28, 2025

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko
Graduate College
507 E Green St, Suite 101
Champaign, IL 61820

Dear Dean Chodzko-Zajko:

I am writing to express my support for the proposal to reduce the definition of full-time enrollment from 12 credit hours to 8 credit hours for graduate students. This adjustment is an important and necessary step to better accommodate the needs of graduate students.

Currently, students must be enrolled in a minimum of 12 credit hours to be considered full-time. Under the proposed change, students who are enrolled in as few as 8 credit hours would still be recognized as full-time students. To be eligible for federal student aid funds students must be enrolled $\frac{1}{2}$ time during the semester. This adjustment will allow students enrolled in a 4-credit hour course to meet the criteria to be eligible for federal student loans. At present, students must be enrolled at least 6 credit hours to qualify for these loans, but by reducing the threshold for full-time enrollment, we can expand access to financial aid for those students pursuing fewer credit hours.

This change will be particularly beneficial for graduate students who may have other professional or personal commitments, but who still need financial assistance to help cover the costs of their education. By providing more flexibility in how students can structure their schedules, we can help ensure that they have the financial support needed to succeed in their studies while still maintaining manageable course loads. Additionally, this proposal better aligns our institution with the practices of our Big Ten peers.

I believe that this proposal will serve the best interests of graduate students and support their academic and professional goals in a way that aligns with the evolving demands of higher education. I support the Graduate College's proposal to reduce the full-time enrollment requirement to 8 credit hours.

Thank you for considering this important change. I look forward to the positive impact it will have on our graduate student population.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michelle K. Trame'.

Michelle K. Trame
Executive Director



Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs & Provost

Office of the Registrar
140 Admissions & Records, MC-063
901 W. Illinois St.
Urbana, IL 61801-3028

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko
Graduate College
507 E Green St, Suite 101
Champaign, IL 61820

February 26, 2025

Dear Dean Chodzko-Zajko:

I am writing to express support of the Graduate College proposal to revise the definition of full-time enrollment to eight hours for all graduate students. This change will establish an equitable academic load expectation and reduce the confusion that currently exists because some students are required to enroll in twelve credit hours while others only need eight credit hours to maintain full-time status. It will be much easier for staff to respond to student questions about full-time status requirements.

Defining full-time status as eight credit hours will more closely align Illinois with our Big Ten peers and will benefit students who need to meet eligibility requirements for federal financial aid, military benefits, student visa status, NCAA participation, and any other requirements based on full-time status. Additionally, this will eliminate the need for students to enroll in courses that may not be required by their program in order to meet the twelve-hour requirement. Finally, this policy change removes a potential barrier to enrollment for working professionals, students with family commitments, and others attempting to balance outside responsibilities with their academic goals.

I have no concerns about redefining full-time status to eight hours for all graduate students. I believe this will simplify communication of the policy, will benefit many students, and will allow more students to pursue their academic goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Meghan Hazen'.

Meghan Hazen
Registrar



ILLINOIS INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

International Students & Scholar Services | Student Branch
432 Turner Student Services Building, MC-306
610 E. John St.
Champaign, IL 61820-5717 USA

26 February 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

International Student and Scholar Services strongly supports the Graduate College proposal to redefine full time enrollment for graduate students to 8 credits.

International graduate students must maintain full time enrollment at the University of Illinois, but the Department of Homeland Security does not have a specific definition of what full time status is for graduate students. Instead, they allow each individual school to determine their own definition and apply it uniformly to international and domestic students alike. Therefore there are no immigration concerns with this proposed definition change, but there are some significant benefits.

Each semester, ISSS must track and report to USCIS on the enrollment status of every international student. Failing to maintain full time status results in the termination of the student's visa status, and unfortunately this happens to a small number of graduate students every year. ISSS expects that lowering the full time bar from 12 to 8 will also decrease the amount of F-1 status terminations due to failure to maintain full time enrollment, and decrease the amount of time ISSS advisors need to spend following up with individual students.

ISSS believes that removing barriers to international students' academic success should be one of the goals of the university, and this proposal would be one way in which we could help international students succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin McFarlane', written over a horizontal line.

Martin McFarlane
Director, PDSO/RO



Executive Committee

March 13, 2025

2024-2025 Members

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko
Dean & Chair
Graduate College

TO: Senate Educational Policy Committee

RE: Definition of Full-Time Enrollment for Graduate Students

Members

Manisha Basu
English

Daniel Bodony
Aerospace Engineering

Jennifer Cromley
Educational Psychology

Wawrzyniec Dobrucki
Bioengineering

Melita Garza
Journalism

Liviu Mirica
Chemistry

Robert Morrissey
History

Laura Rice
Health and Kinesiology

Aric Rindfleisch
Business Administration

Sandra Rodriguez-Zas
Animal Sciences

Kristin Romberg
Art & Design

Nathan Schroeder
Crop Science

Harsh Taneja
Advertising

Helga Varden
Philosophy

Latashia Key
Recreation, Sport and
Tourism

Dear Members of the Senate Educational Policy Committee,

The Graduate College Executive Committee has reviewed and discussed the proposal to revise the definition of full-time enrollment for graduate students at our March 12th meeting.

The committee is supportive of the revision but would like to recommend to the Council on Student Conduct Expectations and Accountability that they consider adding some additional text in section 3-301 of the Student Code to clarify the purpose of the definition of full-time enrollment and that students need to work with their academic programs to understand registration requirements for their program.

We now forward this proposal for your review and consideration.

Sincerely,

Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and
Dean of the Graduate College