

Summary

In order for F-1 and J-1 students to maintain legal immigration status in the United States, various U.S. government agencies charged with enforcing visa regulations expect several rules regarding enrollment to be followed. Because these rules are sometimes complex and difficult to navigate, the ISSO has created the guidance below. For individual advising, always consult an advisor in the ISSO.

Full-Time Enrollment

- International students in F-1 or J-1 visa status are expected to enroll in a *full course of study* each fall and spring semester. Summer enrollment is optional unless it is the student's first term of study at UNC Charlotte.
 - A *full course of study* is defined as a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester for undergraduate students and a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester for graduate students.

Online and Hybrid Classes; Covid-19 Adaptations for Fall 2020

- Normally, only 3 credit hours per semester of *online classes* can count toward the minimum fulltime enrollment calculation. In other words, international undergraduate students in F-1 or J-1 visa status must be enrolled in a minimum of 9 credit hours of *face-to-face* coursework per semester and international graduate students in F-1 or J-1 visa status must be enrolled in a minimum of 6 credit hours of *face-to-face* coursework per semester.*
 - *Face-to-face* coursework means that the class has a scheduled day/time and physical classroom assignment.
- Some online courses at UNC Charlotte are called *hybrid courses*, meaning partially online and partially face-to-face. As long as there is some in-person component to the course that meets face-to-face, it will count as face-to-face and therefore count toward fulltime enrollment.
- For students with ONE class remaining in the final semester, that class must meet face-to-face rather than online.*
- F-1 or J-1 students in the U.S. are not eligible to enroll in purely *online degree programs*.*

*The US government has temporarily suspended these requirements for continuing students (students who were enrolled as of Spring 2020) till the end of Fall 2020. For these students in particular, all courses may be online. Students who are newly admitted for Fall 2020 must enroll in at least one in-person/hybrid course.

Exceptions to Full-Time Enrollment

- SEVP allows an International Student Advisor to authorize a reduced course load if the student meets one of the four criteria below. Other than illness, the student's Academic Advisor must approve the course reduction.
 - If the student's reason for requesting approval of less than full-time enrollment meets one of the four following requirements, the student completes the request for a [Reduced Course Load](#) and meets with both his/her Academic Advisor and his/her International Student Advisor for approval before dropping below full-time enrollment.
- International students are required to be registered for a full course load of classes before the 30th day after the semester starts. If the student qualifies to drop below full time, the academic advisor completes the Reduced Course Load form before the 30th day of the semester.

Enrollment Requirements and Maintenance of Immigration Status for F-1 and J-1 Students

- Illness or other medical conditions: U.S. doctor must recommend a reduced course load for one semester at a time.
- Difficulty understanding the English language or unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or reading requirements: This exception is generally only allowed during the first semester in an academic program in the U.S. academic advisor must recommend a reduced course load before dropping below full-time enrollment.
- Improper course level placement: Academic advisor must confirm that the course level is an improper placement for the student.
- Student will graduate at the end of this semester and needs less than the full-time credit load to complete coursework: Academic advisor must confirm this request.

Graduate Students Enrolled in a Doctoral Program with a Dissertation or in a Master's Program and Pursuing the Thesis Option:

International Master's thesis and Doctoral students MUST maintain a full course load of 9 credit hours until they qualify for enrollment in GRAD 7800/9800 or GRAD 7999/9999 (see descriptions below). This also applies to students who hold GA, RA, or TA positions. **NOTE: Enrollment in these classes is at the discretion of the Graduate School. For further clarification on enrollment policies, contact the [Graduate School](#).**

GRAD 7800/9800 are non-graded research courses designed for students who have completed all of the credit requirements and milestones for the degree program, but have not yet defended their master's thesis or doctoral dissertation.

- Master's thesis students in this category who have a thesis proposal defense on file with the Graduate School may be eligible to enroll for GRAD 7800.
- Doctoral students in this category who have a qualifying exam report and a dissertational proposal defense form on file with the Graduate School may be eligible to enroll for GRAD 9800.

GRAD 7999/9999 are non-graded 'finishing courses' designed for graduate thesis/dissertation students who have a scheduled final defense date on file with the Graduate School which falls within the first 4 weeks of the semester.

Normal Progress Toward Degree

International students in F-1 or J-1 visa status are expected to make *normal progress* toward their degree.

- Maintaining *normal progress* toward a degree is defined as successfully completing courses and other educational objectives that meet the degree requirements in a *reasonable period of time*. This is determined by the academic department's published degree timeline included in the university catalog. Students must also maintain the minimum GPA requirement to continue the degree program.
- If a student fails to maintain normal progress toward degree, he/she will be deemed to be "out of status" for immigration purposes 8 C.F.R 214.2(f)(5)(i). International students who are experiencing academic difficulty are strongly encouraged to consult with their Academic and International Student Advisors to avoid further complications.
- Students may NOT postpone graduation to a future semester unless there is a valid academic reason to do so. Career-related reasons are not considered valid academic reasons to delay graduation.