

MEMORANDUM

TO: Graduate Advisors; Chairs, Graduate Studies Committees; Graduate School Staff

FROM: Philip Cohen, Dean, Graduate School

RE: Revised Full Enrollment and Assistantship Policies for Graduate Students

DATE: 24 September 2002

cc: George Wright, Executive Vice President and Provost; Deans; GRAB Members; Chairs; Judy Young, Director, International Office

A better understanding of INS policies on international graduate students has led to me to revise part of our policy on graduate students holding assistantships and full enrollment. All graduate students holding assistantships and taking dissertation and thesis hours may now petition for reduced enrollment in the semesters before their final semester as long as no INS policies are being violated. I have highlighted the revised passages in the memo. This memo supersedes the recent September 16th memo on this matter.

Increased scrutiny of international students at the federal level, especially from the INS, has led me to review our process for implementing our Graduate School requirement that graduate students be fully enrolled in order to hold teaching or research assistantships. As many of you already know, the INS's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) will track which international applicants colleges accept, the dates on which they enter and leave the United States, and what they are doing while in the country. Universities with international students must be recertified by January 30th, 2003. Along with this recertification could come an INS audit of current records and practices. The new electronic system will allow the INS to monitor in real time student and institutional compliance with its rules concerning the enrollment, employment, and timely progress towards degree of international students. For example, an institution must report within 10 days an international student who is no longer in full-time status unless one of six conditions is met. In future, the INS will recognize only one exemption from full-time enrollment based on a last semester of study. Because international students violating these policies may be subject to deportation and penalties and universities violating them may lose their ability to issue an I-20, UTA cannot afford to run afoul of them. The International Office will provide departments and students with clear instructions on the new regulations as soon as they are published in final form. In the meantime, I am implementing the following procedure for requesting an exemption for a student to our policy of full enrollment in order to hold an assistantship.

The 02-04 Graduate Catalog, p. 38, contains the following policy on full enrollment and assistantships:

Course Load

Graduate assistants may register for and must complete no more than 12 semester hours and no fewer than nine semester hours per semester. They may register for no more than 12 semester hours and no fewer than six semester hours for the three summer sessions. Upon written recommendation of the department and approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies, the minimum registration limit may be reduced to six semester hours for students who have completed all coursework, are registered for thesis or dissertation only, and have filed an approved program of work. A load of more than 12 semester hours must be approved in advance by the Dean of Graduate Studies.

In practice, we have interpreted “approved program of work” to mean an approved final program of work on file in the Graduate School. Please note that students holding assistantships should be enrolled either in organized courses relevant to their program of work or in thesis or dissertation hours in the semesters in which they are employed. Please also note that all students, including those holding assistantships, must comply with our registration requirements and credit for thesis and dissertation hours governing thesis and dissertation students in their defending semesters (02-04 Graduate Catalog, p. 35) and with our requirements for students in their final semester (02-04 Graduate Catalog, p. 36).

Should a student seek an exception to our policy of full enrollment policy in order to hold an assistantship, the student’s graduate advisor should have the student petition the Graduate School for this exception in the following manner. A non-thesis master’s student holding an assistantship with only 3 or 6 hours of organized coursework left to complete a program of work in his or her final semester may also apply for an enrollment waiver by means of this process as well.

International Students:

1) Student gets “Less Than Full course Waiver” form from International Office and delivers it to the student’s graduate advisor. Graduate advisor completes form, making sure to state the academic reason why the student cannot be enrolled full time, the estimated completion date, and the name(s) of the course(s) in which the student will be enrolled during the semester of less than full enrollment.

2) Graduate advisor or student returns this form to the International Office. International Office then checks the student’s progress towards degree, enrollment history, previous waiver history, and confers with graduate advisor, if necessary, before approving less than full time enrollment. This approval will satisfy INS requirements.

3) International Office then sends a copy of the waiver approval to the student's graduate advisor.

4) Graduate advisor helps student complete the Graduate School petition for less than full course enrollment and retention of assistantship. This petition must include the following information: student's academic standing, specific courses to be taken semester of less than full time enrollment, verification that the student has an approved final program of work on file in the Graduate School, indication of any previous reduced enrollment approvals from the Graduate School for that student. A copy of the approved waiver from the International Office should be attached to the petition.

5) Student submits a copy of the Graduate School's approval of student's petition for less than full course enrollment to the International Office before the International Office completes Payment Request Form for the Payroll Office and the Employment Eligibility Letter for the Office of Human Resources.

US Students:

Graduate advisor helps student complete the Graduate School petition to hold an assistantship with less than full course enrollment. This petition must include the following information: student's academic standing, specific courses to be taken semester of less than full time enrollment, verification that the student has an approved final program of work on file in the Graduate School, indication of any previous reduced enrollment approvals from the Graduate School for that student.

To enable us to process a petition for holding an assistantship with less than full enrollment, please ensure that the student submits a complete package of these documents to the Graduate School. Graduate advisors should especially coach international students to go through this process in a timely fashion because the INS now requires international students enrolled in less than a full course of study to be reported to INS within 10 days of the "event": 10 days from census date or from the date a course is dropped, unless the student has completed the waiver process and been approved prior to that deadline. Thus the first two steps in our process must be completed by all international students seeking a waiver to full enrollment even if they do not have an assistantship. I apologize for asking graduate advisors to help students compile a complete package. Unfortunately, the Graduate School only has one staff member in certification, and that person cannot process the growing number of these petitions.

Please be aware that international students must satisfy INS policies governing enrollment, employment, and timely progress towards degree, and that the International Office can advise students on these matters. Thank you for your help in ensuring that UTA complies with INS policies.