Introduction:

Below, please find a summary of Graduate School, institutional, UW-System, and national trends and policy regarding minimum graduate student enrollment requirements. Currently, the Graduate School requires students to enroll in a minimum of two credits each semester in order to continue with student status. Advance Your Career (AYC) programs have questioned this requirement, prompting Graduate School staff to explore the foundation of this policy and whether it may be amended or not.

Research outlined will show that the two-credit minimum credit enrollment policy required for graduate students is not substantiated by any broader university or UW-System policy and is a more stringent requirement than those our peer institutions implement. Thus, this policy can and perhaps should be amended.

Graduate School Policy:

The Graduate School requires their students to enroll in a minimum of two credits each semester in order to continue with student status. This policy stemmed from a memorandum on 22 April, 1960 detailing summer sessions registration:

“The Administrative Committee of the Graduate School has specified a minimum credit load for graduate students of two credits regardless of appointment or status in a degree program. For students who need full residence credit and course work, the normal load of work continues to be 5-6 credits of research or course work. All graduate students using the facilities of the University (Professor’s time, field work, libraries, laboratories, etc.) must be registered. In no case will a program of less than 2 credits be approved.”

In a memorandum on 5 June, 1969 from Dean Robert M. Bock in the Graduate School, this policy was upheld:

“In order to have as uniform a policy as possible for all students attending summer school who hold research assistantships, project assistantships, or fellowships (University or Federal), the minimum credit registration required (effective summer 1969) is TWO CREDITS. This does not affect calculations for completion of residence requirements or for other purposes; many students will want and need to register for a full course load. It does, however, remove the requirement that fellowship holders be registered for at least 5 credits. …”
It appears that this requirement was decided by the Graduate School staff in order to have a uniform minimum enrollment level.

**Institutional Policy:**

Evidence from campus partners such as the Office of the Registrar, the Bursar’s Office, and Academic Planning and Institutional Research shows that this policy is not based in any broader university policy on enrollment.

**UW-System Policy:**

The UW-System does not require Wisconsin graduate students to enroll in a minimum number of credits per semester. This is evidenced by different UW-System campuses requiring different enrollment minimums for their graduate students. For example: UW-Milwaukee requires graduate students to enroll in a minimum of one credit each semester while UW-La Crosse has no minimum enrollment requirement.

**National Trends:**

Peer institutions have varying requirements for minimum graduate student enrollment. Most common requirements include: no minimum semester requirement, program dependent requirements, or one credit per semester. Please see the chart in the appendix outlining trends in enrollment requirements of peer institutions.
APPENDIX

Peer Institutions’ Minimum Graduate Student Enrollment Requirements:

- University of Iowa
- Rutgers University
- University of Michigan
- Indiana University
- Ohio State University
- Northwestern University
- Vanderbilt University

- University of Maryland
- Michigan State University
- University of Nebraska
- Purdue University

- University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign
- Penn State University
- University of Minnesota
- Stanford University
Graduate Faculty Meeting Historical Records on the “2 credit minimum”

Administrative Committee, July 8, 1953

Present: Deans Elvehjem, Herriott, Brogden; Professors Angevine, Barr, Heffner, Langer, Penn, Peterson. Absent: Daniels.

“...Mr. Elvehjem outlined some of the problems involved in the pre credit registration during the summer session. There was considerable discussion regarding the number of credits for which a student should register. It was suggested that after a student has fulfilled his residence requirements, the amount of credit to be carried should be determined by the major professor.”

[Context: at this time students rarely enrolled at part-time status. Also, Elvehjem was Dean of the Graduate Faculty at this time.]

Administrative Committee, November 24, 1954


“...The question of per credit registration was then discussed. Mr. Elvehjem stated that a committee from the Biological Division had met with him and had raised a serious question regarding this proposal—namely, that it placed a very heavy burden on the professor to decide the number of credits which the student should carry. After considerable discussion, it was moved by Professor Daniels and seconded by Professor Penn that any graduate student who has completed his normal residence requirement and passed his preliminary examination and wishes to carry on research under the direction of his major professor shall register for a minimum of one credit plus infirmary fee during the summer session and for a minimum of two credits plus infirmary fee during the regular session. It was understood that it would be possible for individual departments to require greater registration in special cases.”

[Context: I believe the infirmary fee covered health services, based on research. At a different university the policy in 1947 stated: “Offsetting the increase in the infirmary fee is the provision of disability insurance with benefits up to $500 for each disability. Beginning with the fall term, each student will receive the new insurance protection in addition to infirmary care, regular nursing service at the infirmary, ordinary medicines, and the services of the college physician.” This may be the origin of segregated fees.]

Graduate Faculty Meeting, Tuesday, December 7, 1954

28 members of the faculty were present.

“...Dean Elvehjem then asked permission to discuss two other items in order that they may be included in the minutes and distributed to the faculty.
1) Per Credit Registration. Dean Elvehjem reported that the Administrative Committee, at the request of the Graduate Biological Division, considered the problems of per credit registration by students who have completed the residence requirements for the Ph.D. degree and who have passed the preliminary examinations. In order to provide for a more uniform practice, the committee is making the following recommendation to the University Administration:

A student who has completed his normal residence requirement and passed his preliminary examinations and wishes to carry on research under the direction of his major professor shall register for a minimum of one credit plus infirmary fee in the summer session and for a minimum of two credits plus infirmary fee in the regular semester.

He noted that University regulations require all graduate students to register if they are using the University libraries and laboratories. Among the reasons for this regulation are University liability in case of accidents, the necessity for complete records on students, and an adequate measure of the faculty load in teaching graduate students.

He also reported that a plan is under consideration which, if adopted, will allow per credit students the option of paying a Union fee.”

**Administrative Committee, July 23, 1959**

**Present: Deans Willard, Herriott, Westing, Clodius, Freeman; Professors Barr, Burris, Trewartha, Shea, Rollefson**

“...Considered the policy of the appropriate credit load to require for graduate students during the summer session.

It was recognized that all students who are using the facilities of the University should be registered during the period of their use.

It was moved that the minimum credit load permissible during the Summer Session for all graduate students using the facilities of the University, regardless of appointment or status in a degree program, shall be 2 credits. Action: Approved.”

**Memo, “To the Graduate Faculty – Summer Sessions Registration”, April 22, 1960**

**Credit Loads**

The Administrative Committee of the Graduate School has specified a minimum credit load for graduate students of two credits regardless of appointment or status in a degree program.

For students who need full residence credit and course work, the normal load of work continues to be 5-6 credits of research or course work.

All graduate students using the facilities of the University (Professor’s time, field work, libraries, laboratories, etc.) must be registered.
In no case will a program of less than 2 credits be approved.

**Administrative Committee, October 10, 1960**


“...Dean Willard stated that the question has been raised as to whether students who take their preliminary examinations late in the summer or during the first week or two of school should be permitted to enroll under the regulation that permits a Ph.D. candidate who has satisfied the residence requirements and passed the preliminary examinations to register on a per credit basis for as little as two credits and still hold a research assistantship or fellowship. It was agreed by the Committee that, effective the first semester, 1961, any students who has completed his residence requirement, passed his preliminary examinations and satisfied all other requirements for the Ph.D. except the dissertation and whose signed warrant has been returned to the Graduate School Office by October 7 would be eligible to come under the two credit rule. A student who registers for two credits in anticipation that he will meet the October 7 dead line, but who does not succeed in doing so must change his registration to a full load if he holds a research assistantship or fellowship, or if he does not hold such an appointment but is pursuing a full-time course of research and study at the University.”

**Memo, “Summer Session Registration for Graduate Students”, June 5, 1969**

From: Dean Robert M. Bock, Graduate School

“In order to have as uniform a policy as possible for all students attending summer school who hold research assistantships, project assistantships, or fellowships (University or Federal), the minimum credit registration required (effective summer 1969) is TWO CREDITS. This does not affect calculations for completion of residence requirements or for other purposes; many students will want and need to register for a full course load. It does, however, remove the requirement that fellowship holders be registered for at least 5 credits. ...”
ENROLLMENT REQUIREMENTS

ALL of the following credit requirements (except F-1 and J-1 visa requirements) must be satisfied by graded courses taken at 300 or above; courses numbered below 300, audit, and pass/fail do not satisfy enrollment requirements.

Full-time enrollment: The Graduate School considers full-time enrollment to be 8-15 graded credits taken at 300 or above, excluding pass/fail and audit, during the fall and spring semesters, and 4-12 credits* during the summer term. If students elect not to enroll as full-time students as defined by the Graduate School, they are responsible for knowing about possible obligations that may require full-time status. Such obligations may include visa eligibility, fellowships, assistantships, financial aid, external funding agencies, and program satisfactory progress requirements.

Maximum enrollment: The Graduate School considers full-time enrollment to be 8-15 graded credits taken at 300 or above, excluding pass/fail and audit, during the fall and spring semesters, and 4-12 credits* during the summer term. Any exceptions to the maximum credit load permitted must be obtained via the Overload Request form.

Minimum enrollment: Non-dissertator minimum credit load is 2 credits* during the fall and spring semesters. Graduate students must be enrolled at least at the minimum requirement in the semester in which they receive a degree; master’s degree students expecting a summer degree must enroll in a minimum of 2 graduate credits* in any summer session*. Graduate students who do not need to maintain full-time status (including TAs and PAs) have a 2-1 credit enrollment minimum during fall and spring semesters. Minimum requirements must be fulfilled by courses taken for a grade (not pass/fail or audit) and must be taken at 300 or above.

Underload: During the fall and spring semesters, non-dissertators must enroll for a minimum of 2 credits* . Audit and pass/fail courses do not satisfy this enrollment requirement. Dissertators are required to enroll for 3 graded credits taken at 300 or above and directly related to their dissertation research.