

Online/Distance Education Course Policy for F-1

International students on F-1 Visa are required by Federal Regulations to maintain full-time status (12 hours undergraduate or 9 hours graduate - fall and spring semester; 6 hours for summer if it's the first semester in new degree program). They must also make normal progress towards the educational objective listed on their I-20. Online or Distance Education (DE) classes may help them meet these requirements. However, Federal Regulations limit the number of online or DE classes.

Definitions:

Face-to-Face/Traditional Class - Requires regular/weekly attendance.

Online class - The bulk of the material is delivered online (Blackboard, etc.). Face-to-face sessions are discouraged but acceptable up to 15% of instructional time (maximum of four 1 ½ hour meetings during a long semester).

Hybrid Class - Combines traditional classroom instruction with a significant amount (over 50%) of instruction delivered through educational technology. Hybrid courses meet approximately half of the time in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment with the remainder of the course presentation, interaction, activities, and exercises delivered through various electronic means (online). Because students are required to attend regular class meetings these classes are not restricted by the regulation listed below.

Off-Campus Class – Distance Education offers a number of face-to-face and hybrid classes at UH Sugar Land. These classes are offered in the same formats on campus and are not restricted by the regulation listed below.

Federal Regulation: 8 C.F.R. § 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G)

For F-1 students enrolled in classes for credit or classroom hours, no more than the equivalent of one class or three credits per session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter may be counted if taken on-line or through distance education in a course that does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. An on-line or distance education course is a course that is offered principally through the use of television, audio, or computer transmission including open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, or satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing.

Even though the regulations do not limit the amount of online courses a student can take, it does put a limitation for how many can be used to match the full course of study requirement. As a portion of the student's "full course of study," only one 3 credit course may be taken online or through a DE class that does not require regular attendance.

Example 1: An undergraduate student who is required to take 12 credits in the spring and fall to maintain their status may take one 3 credit course online in each semester as the first 9 hours has to be Face-to-Face/Hybrid. If the student enrolls in 15 credit hours, 9 of those credit hours must be Face-to-Face/Hybrid, but the additional 6 credit hours may be taken online. Though, if the undergraduate student drops one of the Face-to-Face/Hybrid courses, they will have 12 hours enrolled and 6 are online which would be a violation of their status. In the same principle, a graduate student is required to complete 9 credit hours of graduate level courses in order to maintain the F-1 status. The student must take at least 6 hours through Face-to-Face/Hybrid and 3 or more additional credits may be online.

Example 2: If the start date to begin a new program on a student's I-20 is during the summer, the student is required to complete 6 credit hours for the first summer semester to maintain their status. Of the 6 credit hours, only one of the classes (no more than 3 credit hours) can be online.

Other Restrictions: In addition to the number of credits/classes that may be taken online each semester, there are situations where international students may not take online classes.

Final Semester – If a student needs only one class to complete their program of study, it may not be taken online. The student must apply and receive the RCL authorization prior to the start of the semester.

Mini Sessions – If a student is taking the first or last class in their course of study, they may not take the class in the mini session – they must register in the regular session for the semester. Taking the last course in a mini-session that ends earlier than the regular session will immediately begin the 60 day grace period.