

Online/Distance Education Course Policy for J-1

International students on J-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 DS-2019. Classes that are delivered through online and distance education modalities cannot be used to satisfy the full course of study.

Definitions:

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

Hybrid Class - Combines traditional classroom instruction with a significant amount (over 50%) of instruction delivered online. Hybrid courses meet less frequently than a traditional face-to-face as it includes course presentations, interactions, activities, and exercises through various electronic means (online). J-1 Students are not allowed to use these courses to meet the face-to-face requirements.

Online class (Asynchronous/Synchronous) - The course material is delivered online (Blackboard, etc.). Asynchronous have no regularly scheduled meeting time while synchronous has a scheduled meeting time in a "virtual" classroom setting. There are no face-to-face classroom requirements.

HyFlex Class – These classes have a safe number of students face-to-face in a socially distanced classroom, with lectures being live-streamed to allow students to participate in the class remotely. A student can choose to attend a class virtually or in person. As there is no restriction or requirement to attend the class face-to-face, it cannot be counted to meet the face-to-face requirement as per the federal regulations and is thus defined as online.

Instructional Campuses – UH offers a number of face-to-face and hybrid classes at UH Sugar Land/Katy campuses for certain degree programs. These classes are offered in the same formats, and classes that are traditional face-to-face can be considered as meeting the J-1 requirements.

Federal Regulation: 22 C.F.R. § 62.2 full course of study

Full course of study. Full-time enrollment in an academic program of classroom participation and study and/ or doctoral thesis research at an accredited academic institution as follows:

(2) College and university students must register for and complete a full course of study, as defined by the accredited academic institution in which the student is registered, unless exempted in accordance with § 62.23(e).

Even though the regulations do not expressly say no to online enrollment, it does require that the minimum hours for full-time enrollment to be with classroom participation. These courses cannot be used to meet the minimum required hours since online classes do not allow classroom participation. Online enrollment above the minimum required hours can be online.

Example 1: A graduate student wants to take 12 hours for the fall term and three of those hours are online. As the 3 hours online are additional to their minimum 9 hours, they are maintaining their J-1 status. The student begins to struggle in one of their face to face courses and decides to drop it. They end up with 9 hours of enrollment, though 3 of those hours would be online. This is a violation of their status as the student did not maintain 9 hours of face to face or hybrid courses.

Example 2: If the start date to begin a new program on a student's DS-2019 is during the summer, he or she is required to complete 6 credit hours for the first summer semester to maintain their status. Of the 6 credit hours, both courses cannot 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 a 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 30 day grace period.