Online or Distance Education Course Policy for F-1 Students

International students on F-1 visas are required by Federal Regulations to maintain full-time status (12 hours undergraduate or 9 hours graduate - fall and spring semester; 6 hours - summer semester*). 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

Traditional Class - Requires regular 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-Cinco Ranch, Sugar Land and Northwest Campus. These classes are the same as classes offered in the same formats on campus and are not restricted by the regulation listed below.

Text from 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. If the F-1 student's course of study is in a language study program, no on-line or distance education classes may be considered to count toward classroom hours or credit. |

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.

For Example: 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. If the student enrolls in 15 credit hours, 9 of those credit hours must be taken as through traditional classes (on-campus or off-campus), but the additional 6 credit hours may be taken online or through DE classes that do not require regular attendance. 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 traditional classes and 3 or more additional credits may be online.

Another Example: If the start date to begin a new program on a student’s I-20 is for the summer semester, 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 (of no more than 3 credit hours) can be online.

Additional restrictions

In addition to the restriction on the number of credits/classes that may be taken online each semester, there are additional 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 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.

*First Semester- If the program start date on the I-20 is for the summer semester, the student is required to complete 6 credit hours for the summer session.