

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 are limited to one per semester.

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). These courses are considered as Face-to-face for J-1 Students.

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 can be considered to meet 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, further communication from Department of State (Guidance Directive 2023-1) does explicitly say that J-1 Students can enroll in one online course per semester.

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 allowed to take, 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 would not be considered a violation of their status as the regulations allow for one online course per semester.

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.