



Rules for Taking Online or Distance Education Courses if You Are an International Student in F-1 Status

Online courses have become increasingly popular for students. Many colleges and universities, including SUNY Canton, have greatly expanded their online and distance education course offerings in the past few years. But, the U.S. federal government limits the number of online courses that an F-1 student can count towards a full-time course load during a required term.

Here is the text of the federal regulation:

“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 toward the full course of study requirement if the class is taken online or through distance education and does not require the student's physical attendance for classes, examination or other purposes integral to completion of the class. An online 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, satellite, audio conferencing, or computer conferencing.”

What does this mean?

For SUNY Canton F-1 students, a full-time course load is required only during the Fall and Spring semesters. There is no requirement that students be enrolled during the Summer or Winter sessions, which are optional. Thus, an F-1 student can take as many online or distance education courses from SUNY Canton or from another institution as they wish (with SUNY Canton's approval) during Summer or Winter session. But, during the Fall and Spring semesters, an F-1 student is limited to only one online or distance education course that can be counted towards a full-time course load, whether it is a SUNY Canton course or a course offered by another school.

If the course requires the student to come to the sponsoring university's location for a class, examination, or some other purpose integral to the completion of the course, then it is not considered “online” or “distance education” for the purposes of the federal definition and is not subject to the federal limit. But, if the course is conducted solely “online” with no requirements to come to the sponsoring university's location, then no more than one such course can be taken in the Fall or Spring semesters if the student is physically present in the United States.

Confused? Don't be. Send your questions regarding online or distance education courses to the International Programs Office at international@canton.edu.