International Students and Online/Distance Learning Courses

OVERVIEW
F-1 students are required to be “full-time” students. This means that undergraduates must be registered for at least **12 credits** every semester (at least **8 credits** for graduate students).

For undergraduates, at least 9 of these 12 credits must be in-person, face-to-face classes that physically meet. This means that only 3 credits of online coursework can be counted toward an international student's full-time course load requirement.

Students in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program are not allowed to count any online or distance learning coursework toward their full-time requirement. This means that they must always be enrolled in 12 credits of face-to-face, physical classes.

THE PROBLEM
Some academic departments at Kent State University have developed programs of study that offer the possibility of online coursework or require it. This scenario is problematic for international students because their academic program may not offer enough face-to-face, physical classes in any given semester to satisfy the regulatory requirement heretofore described.

THE REGULATIONS
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. See 8 CFR § 214.2(f)(6)(i)(G).
WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?
From the United States federal government’s perspective, an international student should be issued an I-20 and given permission to study in the United States if their academic program requires their presence in the United States on an American campus. If a student in India wants to enroll in an academic program that is offered entirely online, then, there is no compelling reason for the student to be in the United States. The coursework can be completed from India. This philosophy forms much of the rationale behind this regulatory requirement.

AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT, WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?
There are several options available to you if you are enrolled in a program or interested in a program that is partially or entirely online.

1) Meet with your academic advisor or graduate coordinator to map out your coursework for the duration of your studies. Try to break up your online course requirements so that you are only taking one online course per semester.

2) Check with your academic department to see if you can take required online courses during the summer session, when you are not required to be taking a full-time course load.

3) Check with your academic department to see if you can take face-to-face versions of required classes at a partner institution and transfer the credits back to Kent State.

4) Supplement your schedule with additional face-to-face, physical classes of interest to you that ensure you meet the minimum number of required in-person credits. For instance, if you are an undergraduate student and have only two face-to-face classes scheduled (6 credits) and two online courses (6 more credits), enroll in another face-to-face three-credit course, even if it is outside your program of study, to maintain your F-1 status.

5) Return to your home country while you complete the online course requirements, especially if all of your remaining course requirements are offered online.