The education system of the

United States

described and compared with
the Dutch system
This document contains information on the education system of the United States. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from the United States for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

Disclaimer
We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.

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Background

- **Country**: United States (US), officially the United States of America (USA).
- **Responsible for education**: The U.S. Department of Education (ED or DoEd). Responsibilities of the State Boards of Education include statewide curriculum standards and high school graduation requirements.
- **International treaties**: The Department of Education (ED) has several bilateral relationships and agreements with other countries on cooperation and knowledge sharing.
- **Compulsory education**: 5/6/7 to 16/17/18 years, it varies from state to state.
- **Language of instruction**: English.
- **School year**: starts between mid-August and the end of September and ends between mid-May and the end of June (varies from state to state).
- **Academic year**: September to May/June.
Flow chart: education system United States

- Elementary school (primary education)
- High School Diploma (secondary education)
- SAT/ACT (entrance examinations)
- Associate’s degree (AS/AA/AAA/AAS) (junior college/community college/college/university)
- Bachelor’s degree (BS/BA/BBA) (university/college)
- Master’s degree (MS/MA/MA) (university/college)
- GREs/LSAT/GMAT/MCAT (entrance examinations)
- Doctor of Medicine (MD)
- Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS)
- Juris Doctor (JD) (university)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (university)
- Duration of education
Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the chart below lists the most common qualifications in the United States. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree or qualification</th>
<th>Dutch equivalent and NLQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Educational Development diploma</td>
<td>VMBO-T diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>usually a HAVO diploma, but at least VMBO-T diploma and at most a VWO diploma</td>
<td>2-4+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree (‘terminal/vocational program’)</td>
<td>usually an MBO diploma (qualification level 4)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s degree (‘transfer program’)</td>
<td>an associate degree, but in some cases a VWO diploma</td>
<td>5/4+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>usually an HBO or WO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>usually an HBO or WO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
- The information provided in the chart is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
- NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework. EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
- The EQF/NLQF level is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person’s knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
- Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).
- The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB), evaluates statements on foreign qualifications and training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.
In the United States, elementary/primary education lasts 6 years. Secondary education also lasts 6 years. There are both public and private schools.

How these 12 grades are divided varies from one state or district to another. The following divisions are common:
- 6 + 3 + 3 (elementary + junior high + high school);
- 6 + 2 + 4 (elementary + middle school + high school);
- 8 + 4 (elementary + high school).

At any rate, secondary education begins in the 7th year, i.e. when students start receiving instruction in individual subjects from subject teachers.

Secondary education
Secondary education is predominantly general in nature. There are differences according to the high school and region. For example, students can sometimes take vocational-technical subjects as well.

Subject areas
The core curriculum consists of the following subject areas:
- English
- mathematics
- science
- social science/social studies
- art
- foreign language
- physical education

Mandatory subjects
Mandatory subjects, or in American: ‘mandatory courses’ or ‘core courses’, are offered in each subject area. Each year, students study 1 ‘course’ at an ever higher level. In the case of mathematics, for example, students generally start with algebra 1, and then geometry and finally algebra 2.

Elective subjects
As well as ‘mandatory courses’, there are also ‘elective courses’ (electives) which students can take in all subject areas. Electives for English include creative writing, world literature and film study, while electives for mathematics include trigonometry or computer math. At good schools, the choice of electives can be quite broad. Students can study electives at an ever higher level.
Choice of subjects

The subjects (‘courses’) chosen will depend on students’ abilities and interests. If students plan to go on to higher education, they must always exceed the minimum requirements for the High School Diploma.

Advanced Placement (AP)

Advanced Placement (AP) is a College Board programme that offers college-level courses to high school students (for information on colleges, see Higher education). The AP programme gives students the opportunity to obtain college credits early and sometimes enables them to enter an undergraduate programme at a college at a higher level.

AP subjects:
- are the only secondary education subjects with an external examination (developed and administered by bodies outside of the school), so the examinations are more like European secondary school examinations;
- can be taken by students even if they do not sit the examination;
- have examination grades from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

See also the College Board’s overview of AP Courses and Exams.

Evaluation of High School Diploma

Due to the differences in programme content (the levels of the subjects and the subjects chosen), a High School Diploma can equate to anything from a VMBO-T diploma to a VWO diploma in the Netherlands. Generally speaking, the level is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

HAVO-level High School Diploma

A combination of the following characteristics can result in a High School Diploma being evaluated as HAVO level:
- a completed ‘college preparatory program’ (see details below), in which students have ideally (but not mandatorily) studied subjects at an advanced level, e.g. AP or ‘honors’;
- consistently good results; see grades and Grade Point Average (GPA).

College preparatory program

A ‘college preparatory program’ means that students:
- have studied mathematics, science and social science for a minimum of 3 years (have obtained 3 credits) and English for 4 years (4 credits).
  NB If students want to study science, social science or mathematics at the higher education level, they should ideally have studied this subject for 4 years (i.e. have obtained 4 credits);
- have studied a foreign language and an arts subject (1 credit per subject);
- have taken an elective in a field of study for which they have already obtained the mandatory number of credits (for graduation).
VWO-level High School Diploma
In order to be admitted to a more selective university or college, students must have followed a highly academic high school curriculum and achieved good results. By highly academic curriculum, we mean an extra challenging college preparatory curriculum.

Nuffic recommends for a High School Diploma to be classified as VWO level if students meet 1 of the following 3 requirements:

1. Students have obtained a grade of 3, 4 or 5 in at least 4 AP subjects in the AP examinations. **Note:** This requirement only applies to AP subjects concluded with an official AP examination. In addition to the official transcript, the AP exam score report is required. This document will be forwarded by the College Board (the organisation that manages the examinations).

2. Students have not sat the AP examinations set by the College Board but:
   - have passed at least 4 AP subjects;
   - have additionally taken several ‘honors’ subjects;
   - have consistently obtained very good results.

3. Students have not passed any AP or ‘honors’ subjects, but the curriculum comprises a combination of the following characteristics:
   - In the case of mathematics, the requirements of algebra 1 and 2 and geometry have been supplemented with calculus or trigonometry.
   - In the case of science, the subjects biology, chemistry and physics (or earth science) have been supplemented with another science elective such as environmental science or geology.
   - At least 18 credits have been obtained in academic subjects, including 4 credits in mathematics, 4 in science, 4 in social studies, 4 in English and 1 in foreign language.
   - A Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0 or above has been obtained.
   - A high score has been obtained in the SATs or ACTs, i.e. the college readiness tests which measure students’ aptitude for mathematics and English, among other things.

VMBO-T level High School Diploma
A High School Diploma is not often classified as a VMBO-t level diploma. Indications include:
- an inadequate score in the general subjects;
- a very simple range of subjects with a very low GPA;
- a low score in the SATs or ACTs.
Homeschooling
Homeschooling entails that the parents or another designated adult educate students at home. While homeschooling is legal in the United States, the regulations vary significantly from one state to another. For example, less than half of states require homeschooled children to undergo any form of evaluation or examination. Parents often use a pre-defined curriculum, or they create part or all of their own curriculum, e.g. faith based learning. The parents produce and sign the final diploma and associated list of grades themselves.

Note: Since the quality of the education received by homeschooled students is not guaranteed by a specific body, Nuffic cannot assess the level achieved by these students.

Online schools
Although there are many similarities between online schools and homeschooling, there are also differences. The main difference is that online schools have teachers who manage students’ education remotely (online). This management takes place within a structured curriculum, which is developed by the online school (also known as a virtual school). Parents can play the role of supervisor alongside the online teachers. In the case of public online schools, the curriculum is not based on religious principles. Public online schools use the standardised tests. Students can only be awarded the diploma from a public online school if they meet the graduation requirements set by the state.

Nuffic can assess the High School Diploma of an online school if the school has been regionally accredited in the United States. In order to estimate the level that the student has reached with reasonable accuracy, Nuffic uses SAT or ACT scores.

Overview of High School Diploma
- Duration: 4 years (grades 9-12).
- Content: core curriculum, electives and AP or ‘honors’ subjects; assessment varies according to the subject and the school.

In terms of level, a High School Diploma from an accredited school is generally comparable to a HAVO diploma, but the evaluation can vary from a VMBO-T diploma to a VWO diploma, depending on the content and the results.
General Education Development test
Anyone who did not finish school but still wishes to obtain a secondary school diploma can sit an examination known as a GED test. This test enables them to obtain a High School Equivalency Diploma or General Educational Development credential, also known as a GED credential or GED for short.

- Duration: a series of tests.
- Content: a multiple-choice test in 4 subjects – mathematics, science, social science and reasoning through language arts.
  - Diploma: High School Equivalency Diploma or General Educational Development credential (GED credential).

In terms of level, a High School Equivalency Diploma or GED credential is comparable to a VMBO-T diploma (theoretical track).

High school outside the US
A fair number of students who apply for Dutch universities of applied sciences and research universities have obtained a High School Diploma from an international school abroad (having completed an American curriculum). These programmes largely correspond to an American high school programme. Where a diploma is obtained abroad, paying careful attention to accreditation is particularly important.

Further information on the accreditation of American schools in the US and elsewhere can be found in the section on Accredited and quality assurance.
Admission to higher education

Since the level and quality of American higher education institutions varies significantly, there are also major differences in admission requirements. These requirements vary from extremely low to extremely stringent.

Low or no requirements
Institutions with an open doors admissions policy have low requirements or no requirements at all.
• No diploma requirements: anyone aged 18 and over is welcome.
• Low requirements: anyone with a High School Diploma or GED is welcome.

Selection sometimes takes place during the programme rather than during the admissions process. In that case, the institution admits almost anyone but only a small percentage of students actually graduate.

Average requirements
Most institutions fall between low and stringent admission requirements.
• Requirement: a High School Diploma obtained following a college preparatory curriculum, plus average scores in the SAT or ACT college readiness test.

Stringent requirements
A relatively small number of institutions select the best students based on:
• level, content and performance during the last 4 years of high school;
• scores in the SAT or ACT college readiness test.

In addition, these institutions take into account:
• involvement in extracurricular activities;
• evidence of leadership;
• essays;
• letters of recommendation.
Higher education

The American higher education system is based on the principle that almost anyone with a secondary school diploma should be able to follow a higher education programme. To establish the value of a diploma from the United States, it is important to establish at which institution and what level the person studied.

Types of education
There is no difference between higher professional education and higher academic education. Students can follow both types of education at the same institution. Consequently, they can always supplement a professionally-oriented major with academic subjects and vice versa.

Types of institution
The US has over 4,000 higher education institutions. These institutions are either public or private. The fact that an institution is public or private is no indication of the quality or level of the institution. It is important that all institutions are accredited; see Accreditation and quality assurance.

Colleges and universities
The terms college and university are used interchangeably. The quality of education at a college or university can be both good and not as good. In this description, college is taken to mean a four-year college. Four-year colleges offer 4-year undergraduate programmes (bachelor’s programmes), whereas junior colleges or community colleges generally offer 2-year undergraduate programmes (associate degree programmes) only.

Although there are many exceptions, the main differences are generally as follows:

- A university offers both undergraduate programmes (‘associate and bachelor’s programs’) and graduate programmes (‘master’s and doctoral programs’).
- A college mainly offers undergraduate programmes.

Junior colleges and community colleges
A junior college is an institution that offers 2-year undergraduate programmes. Community colleges are mainly public junior colleges which offer 2-year associate degree programmes and various certificate programmes. Students who plan to continue in the third year of a bachelor’s programme (undergraduate programme) must complete a so-called ‘transfer program’ offered by community colleges.
University and higher professional education

Institutions in the United States do not make a distinction between higher academic education (WO) and higher professional education (HBO). In this section, we provide an overview of the most commonly awarded degrees, which students can obtain at both academic and higher professional level:

- Associate’s degree
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
- Advanced professional degrees

Associate degree

Students can obtain an associate degree from:
1. a two-year college (junior college or community college); or
2. a four-year college; or
3. a university

- Duration: 2 years.
- Admission requirements: usually an open doors admissions policy, but there is often some form of selection for specific programmes, e.g. technical specialisations, nursing and most ‘transfer programs’.
- Content: there are generally 2 types of associate degree programmes:
  1. a ‘terminal program’ or ‘vocational program’, which mainly prepares students for employment;
  2. a ‘transfer program’ (vocationally oriented or general), which prepares students for admission to the 2nd or 3rd of a bachelor’s programme;

➢ Diploma: Associate Degree. The name of the degree is often followed by an indication of whether it is an arts or science programme:
  - Associate in Arts (AA); Associate in Applied Arts (AAA);
  - Associate in Science (AS); Associate in Applied Science (AAS).

In terms of level, an associate degree obtained following a ‘terminal program’ or ‘vocational program’ is generally comparable to an MBO diploma at qualification level 4.

In terms of level, an associate degree obtained following a ‘transfer program’ is comparable to an associate degree or to a VWO diploma in some cases, depending on the content.
Bachelor's degree
Students can obtain a bachelor’s degree from a four-year college or a university.

- Duration: usually 4 years.
- Admission requirements: a high school diploma + additional requirements, where appropriate.
- Content:
  - usually introductory subjects in various fields (liberal arts), electives, a major and sometimes a minor;
  - in Year 4, where appropriate, a research methodology module and a research project (occasionally a bachelor’s thesis);
  - sometimes a work placement or internship, which is often no longer than a few months.

➢ Diploma: Bachelor's Degree; Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BS).

NB As students in American bachelor’s programmes do not usually choose a major until their second year, the first year of the programme is broad in scope.

In terms of level, a bachelor's degree is generally comparable to a bachelor's degree from a university of applied sciences (HBO) or a research university (WO), depending on the nature of the programme.

Master's degree
Students can obtain a master’s degree from a graduate school of of a college or university.

- Duration: usually 1-3 years; 2-3 years for a professional master’s programme.
- Admission requirements: a bachelor’s degree in all cases, plus additional requirements such as GPA score, required subjects and entrance examinations [GRE/GMAT/LSAT/MCAT].
- Content:
  - research: a thesis or capstone project (often case studies or 'program evaluations');
  - professional: while a professional master’s may include a thesis and/or comprehensive examinations, the emphasis is on practising a profession (at a high level).

➢ Diploma: Master's Degree; Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MS), Master of Business Administration (MBA), Master of Social Work, Master of Public Health, and so on.
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Students follow a PhD programme at the graduate school of a university.

- Duration: 4-6 years.
- Admission requirements: a good master’s degree, although the more selective research universities sometimes admit promising students with a bachelor’s degree.
- Content: at least 1 year of instruction; having passed extensive oral and written examinations (qualifying exams), students are given final approval to conduct research as well as to write and publicly defend a dissertation.
  - Diploma: PhD (written as Ph.D. in American English).

Advanced professional degrees
Advanced professional degree programmes form a separate category. These programmes prepare students for specific careers, e.g. in medical sciences and law.

- Duration: 1 to 5 years; for example: 3 years (law), 4 years (medical professions).
- Admission requirements: usually a bachelor’s degree with a number of compulsory subjects, such as a pre-medicine, pre-engineering or pre-law programme, supplemented with entrance examinations and the selection criteria for master’s programmes specified above.
- Content: a combination of theoretical subjects (e.g. basic science courses, advanced theory courses, seminars), practical subjects (professional development courses, clinics, mock trials) and work placements (e.g. internship, externship, field experience, clinical clerkships, directed research project).
  - Diploma: Juris Doctor, J.D. (law), Doctor of Medicine, M.D., Doctor of Dental Surgery, D.D.S. and Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, D.V.M.

Note 1. In this case, the term Doctor is a professional title, not an academic doctorate as in a PhD.
Note 2. These diplomas are required for admission to a licensing examination, which enables students to obtain a ‘professional license’ in one of the states. Students can only be officially permitted to practise the profession in that state if they have obtained this ‘license’.
Assessment systems

Grading system
In secondary and higher education, institutions use letter grades to assess results. The meaning of the letters used is as indicated below, unless specified otherwise in the notes to the transcript (there are many different variations).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In figures (GPA)</th>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>excellent/superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>very good/above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common abbreviations on transcripts, particularly in higher education, include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>pass: no grade awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>satisfactory: no grade awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>incomplete: student did not satisfy all of the requirements by the end of the semester (the requirements must be met within the prescribed period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>withdrawn: student has stopped taking a subject (with permission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NC</td>
<td>no credit: no credits have been awarded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>repeat: a subject being taken for the second time because the student did not pass the first time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Credit system
There are a number of different credit systems, which are all based on the number of contact hours rather than on the study load as a whole. Below, we describe the most common systems in secondary and higher education.

Secondary education
- 1 credit for a subject that involves 5 hours of lessons per week over 1 academic year (of approximately 36 weeks).
  Note: the school sometimes awards 5 credits for this period rather than 1 credit. For example: if students take physics for 5 hours a week, they will be awarded 1 credit or 5 credits at the end of the school year, depending on the system used by the school.
Higher education
- Theory: 1 credit = approx. 1 hour of teaching + 2 hours of preparation time.
- Practice: 1 credit = 2-3 hours of laboratory work, practical or work placement.

It is important to establish whether an institution divides the year into semesters or quarters. An academic year has:
- 3 x 15-16 week semesters (‘fall’, spring and summer); or
- 4 x 10-12 week quarters (‘fall’, winter, spring and summer).

How the year is divided affects the value of the number of credits. This value is usually clear from the transcript (or from the notes to the transcript):
- 1 semester credit = 1 contact hour per week over the course of 15-16 weeks; a total of 120 semester credits for a bachelor’s degree (30 credits per year).
- 1 quarter credit = 1 contact hour per week over the course of 10-12 weeks; a total of 180 quarter credits for a bachelor’s degree (45 credits per year).

Accreditation and quality assurance
Accreditation indicates that the institution or programme meets certain minimum criteria for quality assurance. In the United States, there are 2 types:
- accreditation of institutions, regional or national (institutional) accreditation;
  - accreditation of higher education institutions (see box on page 18);
  - accreditation of high schools (see box on page 19);
- accreditation of programmes in higher education, professional (programmatic) accreditation.

Accreditation of higher education institutions
The main aim of the accreditation of institutions – regional (institutional) accreditation – is to establish the extent to which an institution is capable of fulfilling its mission. Where necessary, the institution will be given suggestions for improvement.

In the United States, there are 7 regional accrediting organisations which accredit higher education institutions:
- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSCHE);
- New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE);
- Higher Learning Commission (HLC);
- Northwest Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (NWCCU);
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC);
- WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC);
- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges, Western Association of Schools and Colleges (ACCJC).
There are 2 organisations which recognise these regional accrediting bodies and supervise their work:

- the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) defines most of the standards for accreditation;
- the Department of Education (ED) primarily deals with issues relating to the award of government funding.

In the case of higher education institutions, it is important to be certain that an institution has been accredited by 1 of the 7 regional accrediting bodies.

CHEA has a database of higher education institutions that have been accredited by recognised, American organisations.

National (institutional) accrediting organisations

As well as the 7 regional accrediting organisations, there are a number of other bodies recognised by CHEA or ED which accredit institutions. These are known as national (institutional) accrediting bodies. They are often responsible for accrediting institutions that primarily offer single-purpose education (education in a specific sector, such as art or business), or faith-based programmes.

In the US, however, students who have studied at a non-regionally accredited institution are often not eligible for exemptions or for admission to (further) studies at a regionally accredited institution.

High schools

The 7 regional accrediting bodies have a separate commission, which monitors the quality of secondary education. In the case of American secondary schools outside the US in particular, it is important to check whether the school has been regionally accredited in the US.

The commissions for the accreditation of secondary education are as follows:

- Accrediting Commission for Schools, Western Association for Schools and Colleges (ASCWASC).
- AdvancED was created from the merger of 3 commissions: the North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA CASI), the Northwest Accreditation Commission (NWAC), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (SACS CASI). AdvancED is called Cognia since the merger with Measured Progress in 2019.
- Commission on secondary schools of the Middle States Association (MSA-CESS).
The 3 separate commissions of the New England Association of Schools and College (NEASC) are described on the NEASC website:
- Independent Schools PK-12
- International Education PS-12
- Public Schools K-12

In the case of **high schools in the US**, it is important to be certain that they:
- have been regionally accredited by 1 of the commissions; or
- have been recognised (accredited) by the state.

Note: **Public schools** are accredited by a regional accrediting body and/or by the state.

The State Boards of Education are responsible for accreditation by the state. Terms for this accreditation include state-approved, ‘state-recognized’ or state-accredited. A state’s State Board of Education can be found through ‘State Profiles’ on the State Board Insight website of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).

Other bodies are also involved in the accreditation of high schools. It is often unclear whether their work is monitored. In the case of private schools in particular, other (non-regional) bodies are responsible for accreditation.

**High school outside the US**
American schools abroad are often, but not always, regionally accredited. If they are not regionally accredited, schools may be accredited by other organisations such as:
- the Council of International Schools (CIS); or
- the National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA).

Accreditation by these 2 organisations is accepted in the US and usually in the Netherlands as well.

**Accreditation of programmes**
Besides organisations that accredit institutions, there are also organisations that accredited study programmes in certain fields in the US. This recognition is known as professional accreditation, or programmatic accreditation or ‘specialized accreditation’. Among other things, it includes programmes in business, engineering and medical/paramedical sciences.

Programmatic accreditation or ‘specialized accreditation’ is important for professions in the US where this type of accreditation is required, such as engineers, architects and medical/paramedical professions. This accreditation is also important for practising these types of professions in the Netherlands.
Checking documents

When evaluating an American diploma, the diploma alone is **never** sufficient. The related list of grades, which is known as an official transcript or academic record, is also required.

This official list of grades:
- indicates the level of both secondary and higher education;
- provides information on the content of the study programme, grades, credits and the date of graduation;
- must have been issued by the institution where the study took place.

Dutch educational institutions receive this official transcript in a sealed envelope or through a secure, electronic delivery service, so it is clear that the document is reliable. The College Board must also send the results of Advanced Placement examinations (high school), as well as the official transcript, directly to the Dutch institution.

**Authenticity**

In principle, having the official transcripts sent by the US institutions themselves ensures that the educational documentation is authentic. However, it is important to note that degree mills or diploma mills issue official transcripts that are not legitimate. Diploma mills are businesses posing as education institutions, which sell certificates from high school to PhD level without any (serious) education having been completed. The format and content of these documents often give the impression that the transcripts have been issued by recognised US institutions, which is not actually the case. It is a simple matter to check whether an institution exists and/or has been accredited via the [CHEA website](https://www.cheainfo.org).

When in doubt, always contact Nuffic. In the Netherlands, Nuffic has created the Coordination Centre for Information on Diploma Mills (Coördinatiepunt Informatieverstrekking Diploma Mills) together with the Education Executive Agency (Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, DUO) to provide information on diploma mills.

**Credential evaluation**

Overview higher education institutions

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) provides a database with higher education institutions which are accredited by recognised, American accrediting organisations.

Useful links

- U.S. Department of Education (ED or DoEd).
- U.S. Network for Education Information (UNSEI), the American ENIC, part of the U.S. Department of Education.
- Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a.o. databases with accredited institutions and programmes.
- College Board provides information about Advanced Placement examinations.
- State Boards of Education.

Glossary

- ACT: a standardised college readiness test, which measures aptitude for mathematics and English language skills (and science and history).
- AP: Advanced Placement, a programme of the College Board that offers high school students subjects at college level.
- Certificate programme: a (short) programme, usually at a community college, that does not lead to a degree, but to a certificate.
- ‘College preparatory program’: a programme that prepares students for American higher education during high school. They can take advanced courses, such as AP or ‘honors’. This is not mandatory, but it is recommended for selection at a university or college with strict admission requirements.
- Duration: the official length of the full-time programme (not part-time) without study delay.
- GMAT: Graduate Management Admission Test, a standardised test that measures basic verbal, mathematical and analytical skills.
- GPA: grade point average is the student’s average of the grades in all years and/or per year, based on a scale of 0 to 4.0.
- Graduate programme: a programme leading to an advanced academic degree (i.e. master’s or doctoral degree). See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: graduate.
- Graduate school: a school that offers graduate programmes (i.e. master’s and doctoral programmes). Graduate schools are part of a university or college; they are usually not separate schools.
- GRE: Graduate Record Examinations, a test that is used as an admission requirement for students who want to pursue a master’s degree in the United States. The GRE is based on 3 elements: verbal reasoning, quantitative...
reasoning and analytical writing. The GRE test score is also often asked by students who want to pursue a master's degree abroad.

- ‘Honors’ subjects: subjects at a higher level than the core subjects of the high school; more material is offered at a faster pace. Especially for students who can handle more challenges. The more ‘honors’ subjects the student takes, the greater the chance of admission to a selective institution. ‘Honors’ subjects are often seen as less challenging (‘academically rigorous’) than AP subjects.

- Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC): the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, was drafted in 1997 by the Council of Europe and Unesco to facilitate and promote fair recognition among Parties of the Convention. Read more on the website of the Council of Europe.

- LSAT: the Law School Admission Test is part of the admission to degree programmes in law.

- MCAT: the Medical College Admission Test is an exam that is used as a condition for admission to degree programmes in medicine.

- Official transcript: an official (personal) document with an overview of the subjects taken, exam results and credits obtained.

- SAT: Scholastic Assessment Test, a standardised admission test for colleges and universities in the US.

- ‘Transfer program’: a liberal arts curriculum offered by a community college. Students who complete a ‘transfer program’ may continue their studies in the third year of a bachelor’s programme at a higher education institution in the same state.

- Undergraduate programme: a programme for an associate degree or bachelor degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: undergraduate.
Examples of diplomas

High School Diploma
High School Diploma
Official transcript

The weighted average is computed as follows:

Advanced Placement courses are weighted 1.1
Honors courses and College level courses are weighted 1.05
Regents and all other courses are weighted 1.0

There are two averages printed on student transcript: weighted and unweighted. The weighted
rank constitutes Sachem's official class rank, and is based on the weighted average. This average
only includes courses in the five academic areas: English, social studies, mathematics, science
and languages Other Than English. The course weighting appears only in the weighted
average and rank shown on the bottom of the transcript and not in the grades listed for each
individual course. Off-track class rank is determined after six semesters. A numerical rank is listed
for students in the top 25% of the class; percentile ranks are available for all other students.
The unweighted average is cumulative and includes all courses taken, with the exception of Pass/Fail
graded courses.

Four-Year-Old 2018

Education system United States | Nuffic | 2nd Edition, June 2010 | Version 6, July 2019
Bachelor’s degree
Bachelor's degree
Official transcript, page 1
Bachelor’s degree
Official transcript, page 2

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Term GPA: 3.962

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Spring 2015

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Term GPA: 4.000

End of Transcript