

Universities

France's 83 publicly financed universities are well distributed around the nation, from the Sorbonne in Paris (founded in 1257) to the high-tech campus of the University of Nice-Sophia-Antipolis. Private schools and institutes play an important but relatively small role in French higher education.

The universities offer programs in all disciplines,

including the sciences (mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology), technology (computer science, engineering, electrotechnics, materials), literature, languages, the arts, the social sciences, law, economics, business, health and medicine, and physical education. All of the nation's universities are public.

The universities offer programs at every level; their graduates receive nationally regulated degrees known as national diplomas: the *licence* (3 years), *master* (5 years), and *doctorate* (8 years).



Research, a key function of the universities

Energized by 62,000 research faculty, 300 doctoral departments spread throughout the nation's universities manage research programs in close cooperation with more than 1,200 university-based laboratories. France's doctoral departments have always been open to international exchanges, but the pace of internationalization has accelerated markedly in recent years. **Of 67,000 doctoral candidates in French institutions in 2008, more than 25,000 came from outside France.**



France's system of higher education enrolls 2.2 million students, two-thirds of whom attend the country's 83 public universities.

The nation's universities have responded to the needs of today's world by developing degree programs that prepare graduates for careers, including many in technical fields.

- **University-based engineering programs** now confer 60% of the engineering degrees awarded in France each year.
- **Career-oriented *licence* degrees**, known as *licences professionnelles*, are available in 700 different areas.
- **Technical programs** are offered in 25 specialty areas in university-based institutes of technology (IUTs, *instituts universitaires de technologie*).
- **Management programs** are available in university-based institutes of business administration (IAE, *instituts d'administration des entreprises*).
- **Programs in political science and economics** are based in university-based institutes of politics (IEP, *instituts d'études politiques*).
- **Journalism and communication** are taught in specialized institutes in several universities. Examples include CELSA at the University of Paris-Sorbonne and the Centre Universitaire d'Enseignement du Journalisme at the University of Strasbourg.

Note

What are *diplômes d'université* (DU)?

In parallel with the system of national diplomas, which do not vary from one university to another, individual universities offer degrees that are not regulated at the national level. These have a variety of names, the most common of which is *diplôme d'université* (DU). Another is *diplôme d'études supérieures d'université*, or DESU. DU and DESU programs reflect academic orientations specific to the university or respond to regional economic imperatives. **They are not national diplomas**, but they offer international students many opportunities to gain university-level knowledge and experience in very specific areas.

Training in medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry is provided only in the universities, which operate in close cooperation with major teaching hospitals, known as CHUs (*centres hospitaliers universitaires*). Education in these fields is organized around a common curriculum.

International students and medical education in France

It is not possible to enter the general medicine curriculum mid-way through. Unless they have already obtained a medical degree in their home country, international students from outside the European Union wishing to study medicine in France must, regardless of their academic preparation, enroll in the first year of the first cycle of medical education, known as PCEM, and must pass the examination given at the end of that year. Students who pass that examination may then jump to the level that they had reached in their home country, subject to an assessment by the program's administrators of the equivalence of the student's prior preparation. It is also possible to take the *concours d'internat de médecine à titre étranger* (internship exam for foreign candidates), but the number of places is very small. Information is available from France's embassy in your country. Specialized degree programs have been created for international medical students and graduates. Beginning in fall 2010, the DFMS (*diplôme de formation médicale spécialisée*, 1–2 years) and the DFMSA (*diplôme de formation médicale spécialisée approfondie*, 6 months to 1 year) replace the old AFS (*attestation de formation spécialisée*) and AFSA (*attestation de formation spécialisée approfondie*). Developed in cooperation with a number of countries to meet their needs for advanced medical training, the degrees are recognized in the graduates' countries. All these programs require a good knowledge of French, evidence of which may be required.

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