

High School Diploma vs. GED

International students and parents occasionally ask about the GED test in the USA and how it compares to a high school diploma. The following Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are designed to provide clarification on this issue.

What is the difference between a high school diploma and General Educational Development (GED)?

A high school diploma signifies that the student has attended and successfully completed all required courses in a traditional classroom setting. The GED is a set of 5 exams that determines whether the test-taker has a high school graduate's level of knowledge. Receiving a high school diploma is the more common educational path for the average student, while the GED is generally obtained by those who left high school due to family obligations or other personal issues and therefore could not complete the high school program.

How will my country view a GED versus an actual high school diploma?

The US high school diploma is the official credential awarded when a student completes secondary education in the United States. Most foreign governments recognize the U.S. high school diploma in some way, but may or may not recognize the GED since it is not the 'official' secondary document. Recognition of the diploma by a student's home country could be very important, depending on where they are from. A student is much safer earning the diploma rather than earning the GED.

Do course subjects vary between the two?

Required coursework in high school includes reading, writing, social studies, math, and science. These same topics are covered in the GED exam. High school also offers the opportunity to take coursework in other areas of interest including music, art, or foreign language studies. It is important to note that the completion of high school also provides experiences (both mentally and socially) to create a more well-rounded skills set that will better prepare you for university life and beyond.

What is the benefit of having a high school diploma when applying for admittance into a US university?

While many four-year colleges and universities will accept students with a GED, others may be more hesitant. A high school diploma is universally accepted at colleges and universities. Students who have a diploma and have demonstrated good grades will often be eligible for financial aid that individuals with a GED cannot get. In most instances, a diploma will be viewed as superior.

How will this decision affect me once I've been accepted into college or university?

Studies show that high school diploma holders are more prepared for college and score higher on placement exams. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, less than 5% of GED holders will actually receive a Bachelor's Degreeⁱ. 77% of students with a GED do not continue past the first semester of collegeⁱⁱ.

What is the benefit of having a high school diploma when applying for jobs?

A high school diploma will allow you to operate in many entry-level positions. Generally, those with diplomas will earn significantly more than those without. In labor industries, a GED is often seen as the equivalent to a diploma. However, some employers will see the GED as an indicator that the applicant lacks the ability to complete a program – a negative mark on your application. For example, if two applicants are equally qualified, the applicant with the high school diploma is generally preferred to the GED holder.

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How will receiving a high school diploma affect my future opportunities?

Having a high school diploma will enhance your future prospects. Colleges, universities, and businesses are more interested in accepting and hiring diploma holders. Statistics show that you will be better prepared for college and therefore are more likely to complete a four-year degree, which in turn will increase your career opportunities. For those who do not wish to pursue a Bachelor's Degree, the benefits of a diploma versus a GED are still prevalent. On average, those with a high school diploma earn \$1,600 more than those holding a GED. Diploma holders also avoid the stigma often attached to those with a GED, who are sometimes perceived as lacking persistence, motivation, and reliability.

Why should I choose the High School Completion Plus program at Seattle Colleges?

Most U.S. universities require applicants to have a high school diploma. Finishing the High School Completion Plus program at one of the Seattle Colleges (North Seattle, Seattle Central, or South Seattle College) allows you to receive a high school diploma issued by the State of Washington and – at the same time – complete your Associate's Degree at an accredited institution of higher education. After completing the High School Completion Plus program, you will have many choices of transfer universities across the United States. In most cases, your chosen university will evaluate college credits earned at Seattle Colleges and change your enrollment status to sophomore or junior. Depending on the university, you could already be halfway to completing your Bachelor's Degree!

ⁱ U.S. Census Bureau: <http://blogs.census.gov/2012/02/27/ged-recipient-holders-have-lower-earnings-are-less-likely-to-enter-college/>

ⁱⁱ American Council on Education: <http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/e248d9c38a9dc05883770deecab2261a.pdf>