

## THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF SOUTH AFRICA



### Structure of South Africa's Educational System

Academic Year: January to December

Primary School: Reception to grade 6

Secondary School: Junior Secondary, Grades 7-9; Further Education and Training (10-12)

Higher Education

Certificates and Diplomas (generally 1-2 years of study)

Bachelors' Degrees (from 3 years to 6 years of study, depending on course)

Honor's Degrees (1 further year of undergraduate study, requiring a thesis)

Master's Degree (2 years of post-graduate study)

Doctorate (variable in duration with a minimum of 2 years, following a Master's)

### Language of Instruction

South Africa has 11 official languages, but schools and universities generally use either English or Afrikaans as the language of instruction. Students who have attended an English-medium high school or university and have performed well academically can reliably be granted a waiver from the TOEFL.

### Secondary Education

Schooling is compulsory through grade 9, but under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) students may opt at the successful completion of grade 9 to obtain their General Education and Training Certificate and to pursue employment or technical training at Further Education and Training (FET) institutions. Those continuing into senior secondary school for grades 10-12 sit the nationally set and moderated matriculation examinations, or an approved alternative such as the Independent Examinations Board (IEB) test series, to obtain the National Senior Certificate (NSC) at the end of grade 12. From grade 10, senior secondary students must take 7 subjects, 4 of which must be English, a second South African language, Life Orientation, and either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy. The remaining 3 courses are selected from 27 options, which range from Accounting, Art (which includes theory and history), Business Economics and Computer Technology, to Tourism and Woodworking. Courses in science (Physical or Life Science) are optional, as are the social sciences (History, Economics and Geography). Students wishing to pursue university studies, however, are often constrained in their choices at tertiary level unless they take the more rigorous Mathematics (rather than Mathematical Literacy), and Physical or Life Science. The notion of a Liberal Arts and Sciences education is very foreign to most South African students, and thus they often focus early on in their high school years on a particular set of subjects.

With a total population of approximately 49 million people, South Africa has 6000 secondary schools. In 2009, 580 577 candidates wrote their matric final exams. Of these, 61% passed to obtain the National Senior Certificate. Of these, just over half achieved a 'bachelor's pass' making them eligible to apply for university study in South Africa. A bachelor's pass requires, at a minimum, a rating of 4 (or a C) in four subjects from a designated list of subjects.

The Outcomes based Education (OBE) curriculum in place since the mid-2000's aims to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to success at tertiary level. Due to the legacy of apartheid and resource constraints, however, many public schools are severely challenged to meet the bars set for introducing 'OBE'. This can be seen in the fact that among independent or private schools, students achieved a 97% pass rate, with over 75% of students achieving a bachelor's pass. Reports show that the average achieved for most examinations in most subjects across South Africa is now between 50% and 60%. Any mark over 70% is considered to be very good and a result over 80% is excellent and rare. The new grading scale using numbers instead of symbols appears below:

US Grade	A	B+	B	C	D	F	F
SA Grade*	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Based on SA Score of	80-100%	70-79%	60-69%	50-59%	40-49%	30-39%	20-29%

\*Note the Higher Grade/Standard Grade distinction of earlier years has been dropped.

## **Higher Education in South Africa**

South Africa's higher education system consists of 23 publicly funded universities, consolidated since 1994 down from 36 separate institutions. Some of these are considered comprehensive and others are universities of technology (see [www.studysa.co.za](http://www.studysa.co.za) for a complete list). Both types of institutions offer Bachelor's, Honors, Masters and Doctorate degrees, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate diplomas. Several of South Africa's comprehensive universities are internationally recognized for their research in areas such as astronomy, business, paleontology, and public policy in Africa, as well as the caliber of student produced. The Higher Education Act of 1997 stipulates that all higher education institutions come under the authority of the national government, while the FET colleges (listed at [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)) report to the provincial governments.

Together, these institutions enroll over a million students per year, many from neighboring African nations. Students are admitted on a competitive basis, upon their admissions points score (APS) calculated from their matriculation examination marks. The required APS varies from course to course, and between universities. Students without the matriculation endorsement, or bachelor's pass, from Umalusi (South Africa's council for quality assurance) may enroll at universities of technology.

## **Education Contacts in South Africa:**

Higher Education of South Africa: <http://www.hesa.ac.za/>

Council on Higher Education: [www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za)

South African Qualifications Authority: [www.saqg.org.za](http://www.saqg.org.za)

Umalusi: [www.umalusi.org.za](http://www.umalusi.org.za)

National Qualifications Framework: [www.nqf.org.za](http://www.nqf.org.za)

The Matriculation Board: [www.sauvca.org.za/mb](http://www.sauvca.org.za/mb)

South African Department of Education: [www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za)

Minister of Basic Education: Mrs Angie Motshekga Tel: 27 12 (012) 357 3000

Minister of Higher Education and Training: Dr Blade Nzimande (012) 357 3000

The International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA): [www.studysa.co.za](http://www.studysa.co.za)

EducationUSA South Africa: <http://southafrica.usembassy.gov> or [www.EducationUSA.info](http://www.EducationUSA.info)

## **South Africans in the United States**

According to the 2009 *Open Doors*, there were 1703 South African students enrolled for study in the US in the 2008/09 academic year, 57 % of which were undergraduates. This overall figure represents an increase of 5.1 percent from the previous year. The Opportunity Funds Program began in South Africa in 2008, enabling three students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds to pursue studies in the US.

## **Testing in South Africa**

The SAT is offered six times a year in nine locations around the country, and the TOEFL, GRE and GMAT are offered in Cape Town and Johannesburg twice weekly.

## **Education USA in South Africa**

The Education USA advising centers in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban are based in the Public Affairs Sections of the respective US Consulates. Together, the advisors serve approximately 24,000 students a year by equipping them to assess themselves for US study, to select institutions for application, to prepare sound applications, and to receive pre-departure orientation, at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. They also provide assistance to visiting US university representatives conducting outreach among South African students.

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