



Structure of the U.S. Education System: First-Professional Degrees

First-professional degrees represent a category of qualifications in professional subject areas that require students to have previously completed specified undergraduate coursework and/or degrees before enrolling. They are considered graduate-level programs in the U.S. system because they follow prior undergraduate studies, but they are in fact first degrees in these professional subjects. Holders of first-professional degrees are considered to have an entry-level qualification and may undertake graduate study in these professional fields following the award of the first-professional degree. Several of these degrees use the term "doctor" in the title, but these degrees do not contain an independent research component or require a dissertation (thesis) and should not be confused with PhD degrees or other research doctorates.

A first-professional degree is an award that requires completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 2 years of college work prior to entering the program; and (3) a total of at least 6 academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself.

All first-professional degree programs are closely regulated by recognized professional and specialized accrediting agencies. See [Accreditation and Quality Assurance](#).

FIRST-PROFESSIONAL DEGREE TITLES

First-professional degrees may be awarded in the following 10 fields:

- Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.)
- Doctor of Dental Science (D.D.S.) or Doctor of Dental Medicine (D.M.D.)
- Doctor of Jurisprudence or Juris Doctor (J.D.)
- Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)
- Doctor of Optometry (O.D.)
- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine/Osteopathy (D.O.)
- Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.)
- Doctor of Podiatric Medicine/Podiatry (D.P.M., D.P., or Pod.D.)
- Master of Divinity (M.Div.), Master of Hebrew Letters (M.H.L.) or Rabbinical Ordination (Rav)
- Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.).

For graduate-level research degrees in these fields, consult the degree lists under [Master's Degrees](#) and [Research Doctorate Degrees](#).

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