



Examination of Supplemental Driver Training And Online Basic Driver Education Courses

The first six months of unsupervised driving are the most hazardous in a novice driver's driving experience. Most States adopted graduated driver licensing (GDL) systems to give novice drivers experience in a protective environment, gradually introducing them to riskier driving conditions as they gain experience. While most GDL programs advocate the use of post-license driver training, most States do not mandate further training. Many States now accept online basic driver education training. NHTSA conducted a study to examine supplemental driver training programs found in the United States and around the world and reviewed online basic driver education courses available in the United States. For supplemental programs, the focus was on programs that covered knowledge and skills beyond those normally found in traditional driver education as delivered in the United States.

Supplemental Driver Training

Two separate research teams examined supplemental programs in the United States and around the world. Upon closer inspection, many of these programs were simply basic driver education programs that offered training similar to that found in traditional driver education courses in the United States. The United States study team held discussions with 56 separate providers. Most (77%) of these providers had been in existence for more than 5 years; 23% had been in existence for 21 years or more. Most (59%) providers operated in only 1 location, 13% in 2 or 3 locations, and 21% in at least 4 locations. Most of the programs (66%) reported that they served a limited region, such as a State or within a radius of 500 miles or less. The remainder served a greater area, national, or international markets.

About half (52%) of the programs had a minimum age restriction usually based on the States' minimum driver permit age. Three out of four (73%) programs allowed students who held only a driver permit to take the course while another 21% required that the driver have an unrestricted license. Only 5% of the programs required that the student must take a previous course in the series before taking the supplemental course. The majority (94%) of programs allowed parents to attend the course.

When describing the reasons why students take their supplemental training programs, most programs (86%) listed safety as the main reason. Most programs (81%) also reported that students took the training because their parents made them. Other reasons included obeying court orders (30%), removal of points (20%), and thrill seeking (20% overall and 44% of racetrack programs). About half (55%) listed insurance discounts as a major reason for taking a course, especially for the Basic Driver Education Plus programs.

Class size varied from less than 10 students (16%), 11 to 20 students (41%), 21 to 30 students (11%), 30-100 students (16%), to unreported (16%). Pupil-to-instructor ratio for the in-vehicle portion of the training ranged from 1:1 (39%), 2:1 (11%), 3:1 (23%), 4:1 (2%), to a remote instructor (9%) at closed-course and racetrack programs.

Most U.S. programs offered multiple types of courses, for example, a combination of basic driver education and thrill-seeking training. Eleven of the courses were standard driver education programs with some other training included, such as skid recovery training. Nineteen used a private driving facility with some form of road course or other "driving area" where on-road training took place. Sixteen programs conducted their instruction at a racetrack facility, and two mobilized programs traveled to different venues to deliver the course. Two programs were for corporate employee drivers and two programs used simulators or other non-traditional technology.

Of the supplemental training programs to increase driver safety, topics often included advanced vehicle handling and control, vehicle dynamics, and cognitive and perceptual techniques to identify and respond to potential hazards. Cost ranged from free to over \$1,000, with most \$250 to \$450. While all the program providers asserted that their courses improved driver safety, no formal research evaluations of the safety effects had been conducted, and there was virtually no oversight of the courses by some external body.

International Supplemental Driver Training

The international research team gathered information from 59 supplemental programs outside the United States. Most of the programs were in Canada (28) followed by the United Kingdom (15), Australia (8), New Zealand (4), and one each in Austria, Ireland, Israel, and Kenya. Over half (61%) of the providers had been operating for 10 years or more. Most providers addressed a market of individual, general drivers, followed by corporate employer drivers, performance motoring enthusiasts, and those who sold “wholesale” programs for use and delivery by local providers.

Most of the courses followed similar training approaches and covered the same topics as those in the United States. One difference was that some countries required, or strongly suggested, that drivers take a supplemental program. Cost ranged from \$250 to \$1,000 USD. Similar to the United States, no truly independent evaluations of the safety effects of the individual programs had been conducted.

Number of Providers by Category

Program Category	United States	International
Fleet-Driver-Oriented	2	18
Motorsports-Driver-Oriented Race Track (U.S.)	--	13
General-Driver-Oriented Basic Driver Educ. Plus	11	--
Closed Course	19	--
Wholesale Program Suppliers	0	3
Technology	6	0
Traveling	2	0
Total	56	59

Skills and Knowledge Covered in Programs

Skills and Knowledge	United States	International
Basic Vehicle Control	83.9%	71.2%
Advanced Braking	89.3%	83.1%
Skid Control	85.7%	67.8%
Hazard Identification	89.4%	89.8%
Hazard Avoidance	91.1%	88.1%
Alcohol/Drug Impairment	60.7%	--
Night Driving	51.8%	--
Physics of Driving	82.1%	50.8%
Managing Distractions	82.1%	70.4%
Laws	37.5%	--

Online Basic Driver Education

Currently, 15 States accept online driver education in lieu of a standard classroom program. Forty individual program providers in these 15 States provided information about their programs, and 14 of the 15 States helped document the States’ practices related to online driver education.

Although the content was consistent across courses, they varied greatly in training approach. The primary distinguishing factor among the courses was how much student engagement was involved with the training. Some courses required little engagement and a student could complete it quickly while others required high engagement, often including some form of interaction with a person through a virtual training environment.

Other than the initial curriculum approval, there was no significant oversight for most courses. Two States did not provide the number of approved online providers. To date, no definitive evaluations have examined the effectiveness of the online programs against some benchmark programs.

States Approving Online Driver Education

State	Number of Approved Courses/Providers
California	Unknown
Colorado	9
Florida	6
Georgia	5
Idaho	1
Indiana	3
Kansas	Unknown
Nebraska	4
Nevada	17
Oklahoma	6
Pennsylvania	Approx. 22
Texas	5
Utah	3
Virginia	4
Wisconsin	2

Conclusions

There is an absence of significant oversight and regulation of the training programs and a clear need to evaluate the effect of supplemental and online programs on young driver safety. The report includes a literature review and case studies of each type of training.

How to Order

Download *Examination of Supplemental Driver Training and Online Basic Driver Education* (69 pages, plus appendices), prepared by Dunlap and Associates, at www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/nti/pdf/811609.pdf.

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