



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. *What makes this program different than the Court of Master Sommeliers?*

The Court of Master Sommeliers is an UK based program that is based on a three-tier system. Our degree is the equivalence of their third tier in principle although the examination standards are far more stringent. The program is based on short seminars (in their first two) with the bulk of the education done by the individuals themselves (primarily on the third level) and consequently has a tremendously high failure rate by the third level. Our course is designed as a complete in-class education, the training and every other facet is done through the personalized guidance of expert instructors with the goal of having a high success rate. We are also the only Sommelier organization that is licensed by the various state boards of education.

### 2. *What makes this program different than the WSET system and diplomas?*

The WSET program, another English based series of degrees, is essentially based on theoretical study of wines and spirits. Our degree is hospitality based and therefore we offer about 40% more volume of education in hospitality and career based information such as wine management, service, food and wine pairing etc. Like the Court of Master Sommeliers, it is based on short classes with the bulk of the education done by the individuals themselves and consequently has a tremendously high failure rate. Their courses are in four tiers, Intermediate Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Diploma A, Diploma B, and Master of Wine. Our degree is on par with their Diploma A & B.

**Intermediate Certificate-** Is an eight week course consisting of:

- 1) Seven three hour lecture sessions comprising of lecture and tastings
- 2) Examination of 1 hour - 50 multiple-choice questions
- 3) Topics include major growing regions, basics of viticulture, viniculture, history and the law of the wine and spirits trade, as well as the development of a systematic approach to wine tasting and analysis paired with a palate development portion.

**Advanced Certificate-** Is a thirteen week course consisting of:

- 1) 11 three hour lecture sessions comprising lectures and tastings
- 2) Examination of 2 hours- 100 multiple-choice exam plus a blind tasting of one wine.
- 3) Topics include all of the above, building upon basics learned in the Intermediate Certificate. Each major wine region is explored in depth and wines tasted each session illustrate the regional and stylistic characteristics. Palate development and the systematic use of a disciplined tasting technique refines blind tasting skills. The Advanced Certificate is a prerequisite for the Diploma Program.

**Two-year Home Study Diploma A, Diploma B-** Self-directed study commencing in January of each year with exams in early June

- 1) 7 units of study to be completed in a maximum of 6 years and a minimum of 2 years
- 2) Units include Viticulture, Viniculture, Still, fortified and sparkling wines, spirits and liqueurs, beer and cider, submission of Tasting Notes, and an individual research project.



3) Examination consists of practical blind tasting papers, essay papers and submission of an individual research project.

The Diploma is the final prerequisite before undertaking the Master of Wine Program.

3. ***A. What makes this program different than other national Sommelier programs?***

Most national Sommelier organizations (French, Italian, etc.) strictly teach their own country's wines; therefore they have no ability to function with the rest of the world. We do a complete education of every single winemaking region in the world, however small. Thus, we educate individuals to become a complete packaged Sommelier with the ability to have professional mobility in other countries as well.

***B. What makes this program different than the Sommelier Society of America (SSA) and American Sommelier Society (ASS) programs?***

The SSA is a New York organization operating only in NYC since 1954. The ASS is a loose group of Sommeliers formed in 1999 and they boast of regular weekly quizzes. In both cases short weekly seminars are followed by a self proclaimed rigorous exam. For the higher level (Master Sommelier) one needs to be invited just to be allowed to write the exam as opposed to being based on previous qualifications and merit. Curriculum is not consistent and exams are two hours of multiple choice questions followed by blind tasting of three wines simply to identify them by dominant grape variety. Both boast an average of 33% plus of students not even writing the exam out of intimidation and in excess of 50% of the remaining failing (30% pass rate overall). Ambiguity in examination is another factor as standards are not based on education and levels of knowledge but rather on trick or vague questions requiring an avoid the mines approach mentality. Both provide an excessive amount of lecturers, specialist, vintners and wholesalers and so on, their level of expertise may be questionable at times but more importantly subjects may not be taught objectively as many are selling specific products. Standardization is not available with both systems, may vary from year to year. \*(Excerpt from NY Times article 2001).

4. ***What is ASI (Association de la Sommellerie Internationale)***

The ASI is a Sommelier club loosely established in 1969 by a group of Sommeliers based in Europe now run out of the Province of Quebec, Canada. Their focus is to promote affiliation to their organization through enforced membership. Membership is mandatory for inclusion in a sponsored competition called the World Best Sommelier held once every three years since 1983. ASI is not an education based organization. There are no examination criteria or standards of adherence for members. There is only one designated club per country – selection is capricious. They do however support the Sommelier profession by mass marketing of the event and affiliate clubs represent 39 countries.

The objective of the ISG is to provide wine and spirit education that is recognized as the industry benchmark on an international scale. The ISG is not a Sommelier club representing any one particular country but rather a global organization interested in supporting international wine communities and as such, our graduates are not permitted to participate in the competition.



5. ***What do you study in the program?***

Wine making (from the vine up), all the wine regions of the world, all distilled spirits (Cognac, Grappa etc.), beers, classical and traditional food and wine pairings, and wine management (cellaring, liquid investments, designing of wine list, staff training etc.).

6. ***What level of knowledge is required in order to succeed?***

Basic fundamental understanding of winemaking, professional background in the service industry with some basic food knowledge, and our prerequisite courses (Wine Fundamentals Level 1 and Wine Fundamentals Level 2). Previous completion of the following certificates can be used as a guide to assist students considering challenging WFCL1: Court of Master Sommeliers Certificate and Advanced Certificate, or WSET Intermediate and Advanced Certificates, or CTHRC Wine Services Certification, or an equivalency degree from a post secondary hospitality program having the Board's approval. For those students interested in challenging WFCL2, a telephone interview with an ISG representative is strongly recommended to ensure your previous education and experiences are parallel with the requirements for your examination success.

7. ***How long is the course?***

Wine Fundamentals Level 1 is 24 hours long followed by Wine Fundamentals Level 2 which is a further 48 hours long; both courses are delivered sequentially over 12 weeks in total (6 hours per week). The Sommelier Diploma is 22 weeks long, 188.5 hours in class instruction, weekly one entire day with a two-day exam on the 23rd week.

8. ***What are the examinations like and how long are they?***

Wine fundamentals Level 1 has a one hour multiple choice exam with one blind tasting wine. Wine Fundamentals Level 2 has three , 100 multiple choice questions followed by six short essays and then followed by a four blind wine tasting exam (varietal identification and qualitative analysis is divided equally in the marking). The Sommelier Diploma has five separate exams plus a sixth component consisting of a term project. The first exam is three hours with 200 multiple choice questions. The second exam is three hours with ten essay questions. The third exam is 90minutes split into three subsections; 75 minutes for 2 essays on wine management, menu designing and staff training, 75 minutes for a full classical and a full contemporary menu pairing to wines and lastly an oral justification of wine and food pairing to a judge. The fourth exam is two hours of tasting, 22 products (spirits and defective wines are included) and marking is based equally between varietal identification and qualitative assessment. The fifth exam is service divided equally between one sparkling wine service and one decanting wine service in front of judges.

9. ***How much is the program and how do I pay?***

Both prerequisite courses are \$1,500.00 US combined; the Sommelier diploma is \$3,100.00 US. This includes student textbooks, wines for tasting, the examinations and the certificates/diplomas. Payments may be made by certified check, money order, or Visa.



10. ***How do I apply?***

Go to our web site at [www.internationalsommelier.com](http://www.internationalsommelier.com) and follow the online instructions. If applying to the Sommelier Diploma Program, do not forget to include in the space provided on the application form a current resume as well as a full cover letter.

11. ***When does the course begin?***

Typically prerequisite courses are delivered three times annually while the Sommelier Diploma is held once a year in the fall. Check the website for course start dates at [www.internationalsommelier.com](http://www.internationalsommelier.com) . Day of lecture will always be between Sunday and Wednesday.

12. ***For the Sommelier Diploma, what are they looking for in the cover letter?***

The reason why the individual wants to pursue this degree as well as what they are hoping to get from it and what would they like to do with the degree.

13. ***Should I do anything to prepare for the Sommelier course?***

YES! Try as many structured blind tastings as possible, if they do not have the option than practice at home, perhaps with some friends. Every week taste a few wines blindly and try to identify varietals. Read wine encyclopedias, Jancis Robinson or Tom Stevenson are excellent.

14. ***What are the other important dates?***

Application and tuition deadlines for the all courses are posted on our website at [www.internationalsommelier.com](http://www.internationalsommelier.com) . We should encourage people to apply right away – we cap class size at a maximum of 24 students. Upon application a time and date stamp is applied and prerequisite classes are filled chronologically. The SDP uses the chronology when reviewing between candidates with lateral experience/education. Let students know they do not need to submit tuition at the time of application but rather at the tuition deadline.

15. ***Which textbooks are referenced?***

Wine Fundamentals Certificate Level 1 Wine- An Introduction by Joanna Simon and Vines, Grapes and Wines by Jancis Robinson. Wine Fundamentals Certificate Level 2 The World Atlas of Wine 5th Edition by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson. The Sommelier Diploma The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia by Tom Stevenson, The Oxford Companion to Wine by Jancis Robinson, Wine with Food by Joanna Simon, Larousse Gastronomique by Jennifer Lang and The World Encyclopedia of Cheese by Juliet Harbutt.

16. ***What is the passing grade?***

60% for WFCL1 and WFCL2 although a 70% requirement in WFCL2 is required for diploma entrance and the SDP 70%.

17. ***Does each section have to be passed independently?***

Yes, it is NOT a combined average.

18. ***What if you fail a section, do you have to re-write the whole exam again and/or retake the course?***

No, individuals must wait one year and then they can come back and re-write the portion that they failed. They need to check the web site for the tuition cost for re-



writes. There is a three year cap before an individual must retake all components if they have not been successful in their rewrite(s).

19. ***What is the average success rate?***

Wine Fundamentals Level 1 95%, Wine Fundamentals Level 2 between 65%-70% success. The Sommelier Diploma averages approximately 55%-60%% and in some years even higher .