

White Rose University Consortium: College of Arts and Humanities

Arts and Humanities Research Culture in Spain

Universities

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Higher Education

There are 77 universities in Spain, of which two thirds are public-funded and the others private, including several run by the Catholic Church. There is a guide to each university on the state-run [Universidad.es](#) website.

The oldest university in Spain is the Universidad de Salamanca, which was founded in 1218. The UNED, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, is the Spanish equivalent of the Open University (although there are other distance-learning institutions).

The public-funded universities are mainly based in the provincial capitals, although larger cities, such as Madrid, Barcelona and Seville, have several universities.

The [Ministry of Education](#) also provides a tool that enables you to search for university courses.

It is important to highlight the linguistic diversity of Spain and that some universities, to greater or lesser degrees depending on the university and the region, teach in other co-official languages, such as Catalan, Basque and Galician.

A growing number of universities offer postgraduate courses taught in English, although this is more common in the sciences, technology and business studies.

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University Departments

Universities structure their Arts and Humanities faculties and departments in slightly different ways to one another. There is often a Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Faculty of Philosophy and Arts) which groups together many of the main arts and humanities departments, although sometimes disciplines have their own faculty. E.g. in the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, there is a Facultad de Geografía e Historia (Faculty of Geography and History), Facultad de Filología (Faculty of Philology [literature and language]), Facultad de Filosofía de Ciencias de la Educación (Faculty of Philosophy and Educational Sciences), etc.

Within the faculty, departments are organised according to discipline and/or sub-discipline. For example, History is often, but not always, divided into separate departments according to period and even region of study, such as: Departamento de Historia Antigua (Department of Ancient History), Departamento de Historia Medieval (Department of Medieval History), Departamento de Historia de América (Department of American History), etc. These divisions and subdivisions depend on the structure and size of each university.

There are some key differences with respect to the organisation of departments in the UK. For example:

- Archaeology is generally considered to be an area within History.
- Film studies forms part of History of Art.
- Classics are included within Philology.
- *Historia moderna* corresponds roughly to Early-Modern History and *Historia contemporánea* to Modern History in the UK.

There is generally a main office for the faculty and a specific office with its own secretary for the department.

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Studies

In the last few years, the Spanish university system has undergone radical changes to bring it into line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA or EEES in Spanish), otherwise known as the Bologna process.

Undergraduate Level

Most students attend their local university and the number of students has increased over the last few years.

As part of the 'first cycle' of education after school, students usually study a 4-year course known as a *Grado* which has recently been introduced to replace the 5-year *Licenciatura*, which are being phased out.

The main differences with regards to the UK:

- An emphasis is on the breadth of knowledge; there are generally fewer optional modules.
- Less variety of courses, although this is starting to change as a result of reforms in line with the European Higher Education Area.
- Many students spend a semester or even a year abroad.
- Access is via an exam, not a selection process.

Most students are admitted to university via the [PAU](#) (*Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad*, University Access Test), informally known as *selectividad*. The PAU (or PAEU) consists of a series of exams in the summer of year 13. These exams are set by the local university but the mark is valid

for the whole country. The average mark on 1-10 point scale obtained in the *PAU* is combined with the mark from school (based on exams, coursework, etc.), with the latter worth 60% and the former 40% of the final mark. To be admitted to a university course, this combined mark is then compared with the cut-off mark for the desired university course.

The university year is structured around two *cuatrimestre* (semesters). There are exam periods at the end of each (in January and June), in addition to a re-sit period in July or September.

Generally speaking, there are more timetabled hours for each module than in Britain. Students are taught the majority of what they are expected to know in the classroom itself and rely more on these notes rather than materials from the library. Lectures have traditionally been considered the preferred teaching method, although seminars, cooperative learning and projects are increasingly used along with more emphasis on continuous assessment, such as via *prácticas* (workshops or practical sessions).

As in the UK, *asignaturas* (modules) are worth *créditos* (credits), and students need to have completed a certain number of credits to finish their studies: a *Grado* consists of 240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. Students that fail modules are allowed to retake them in subsequent years.

Tuition fees are fixed every year by each Autonomous Community, rather than the state. A certain amount is charged per credit. Different prices are fixed for different disciplines or courses, but tuition fees are a great deal less expensive than in England.

As with most of the Spanish education system, universities use a 10-point scale for assessment, with 5 considered a pass. According to the Department of Education grade comparison chart: 9/10 is equivalent to a first class degree, 7.5/10 is a 2.1, 6/10 a 2.2. In Spain, the final degree classification, however, is according to a 0-4 system in which 1 is a pass (a '5' on the 10-point scale) and 4 is a *mátricula de honor* (the best mark available). To apply for an FPU scholarship a final mark of at least 1.6 is often requested.

For more information see the [Eurydice](#) website.

MA Level

After a *Grado*, the next step is a *Máster*. This is a one or two year course, consisting of 60-120 ECTS credits.

There are 'official' and 'non-official' Master's degrees. Official Master's are accredited by the state, via ANECA, and are necessary for posterior admission to a PhD programme. *Títulos propios* (literally 'own qualifications') are managed by the universities themselves and are typically more professionally-oriented, more flexible in terms of its duration and also in its number of credits. For an official Master's the assessment system is similar to undergraduate level and a *trabajo fin de máster* (dissertation) is necessary.

An MA is considered to offer the necessary training in preparation for a PhD.

Glossary

Academic titles

Alumno / Alumna - Student

Becario / Becaria - Scholarship holder (PhD not required)

Catedrático / Catedrática - Senior Professor (Highest position, PhD, holds a chair, status of civil servant, selection process)

Decano / Decana - Dean (Head of a particular faculty)

Estudiante / Estudiante - Student

Jefe de departamento / Jefa de departamento - Head of department

Profesor emérito / Profesora emeriti - Emeritus Professor

Profesor titular / Profesora titular – Senior lecturer (Status of civil servant, PhD, selection process)

Profesor contratado doctor / Profesora contratada doctora - Lecturer (PhD, not civil servant status, selection process)

Profesor ayudante doctor / Profesora ayudante doctora - Lecturer (PhD, temporary contract (maximum of 8 years), selection process)

Profesor asociado / Profesora asociada - Associate lecturer (Depends on each case, usually part-time)

Profesor visitante / Profesora visitante - Visiting lecturer/professor (Limited period of time)

Profesor ayudante / Profesora ayudante - Associate tutor/Assistant lecturer

Rector/ Rectora - Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor (Lead role at the university both educationally and administratively, elected from the teaching body from within the university)

Academic abbreviations and acronyms

Aprobado: Pass

Asignatura: module

Aula, aula magna: Classroom/seminar room lecture theatre

Bachillerato: A-levels

Campus: Campus

Carrera: Degree course

Cátedra: Chair (official, senior academic post)

Clase: Seminar, lecture

Clase magistral: Lecture

Cuatrimestre: semester

Curso: Academic year or a short course taking place over a couple of days

Departamento: Department

Director, directora: Head (of department), supervisor (of a doctoral student)

Enseñanza: teaching

Escuela universitaria: University College

Expediente académico: Academic record

Facultad de filosofía y letras: Faculty of Arts

Grado: Undergraduate degree of 4 years (in Arts and Humanities)

Jefe, director: Head...

Licenciatura: Now extinct 5-year undergraduate course

Máster: Master's

Matrícula de honor: 'outstanding'

Nota/puntuación: Mark

Notable: 'good'

Oyente: Auditor

PAU: *Prueba de acceso a la universidad* = exams taken to gain access to university for undergraduate study

Plan de estudios: Programme of study, syllabus

Prácticas: Exercises, or work experience

Salón de actos: auditorium

Secretaría: Departmental Office

Sobresaliente: 'very good'

Suspense: Fail

Título: qualification

Universidad: University

Universidad politécnica: Polytechnic

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Web Links

The [77 Spanish universities](#) (ES)

[A guide to each university](#) (ES, EN)

[A tool for searching for university courses](#) (ES)

The [UK Department of Education grade comparison chart](#) (EN)

The [PAU](#) (Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad) (ES)

[Eurydice-Higher Education in Spain](#): The information from the European Encyclopaedia of National Education Systems related to Spain. (ES, EN)

[Universia](#): Universia is a network of Spanish and Latin American universities. There is a great deal of information and resources related to higher education, including information on courses, career progression and scholarship opportunities. (ES)

[Universidad.es](#): This portal is run by the Spanish government and aims to improve the international profile of the Spanish university system. There is information on different courses, different levels of study and links to every university, specifically designed at foreign students. It provides information on [admission requirements](#) and on the [recognition of foreign qualifications](#) (ES, EN)

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