

SPANISH ACADEMIC SYSTEMS

Revised July 2011

Spain is in the process of adapting to the new academic system designed in the Bologna Agreement. Its goal is to create a European higher education area, with academic exchange and international academic cooperation. As a result, the traditional European academic systems are being phased out in exchange for the new one. In Spain's case, the new plan should be fully implemented at the undergraduate level by the year 2013.

This shift involves almost all aspects of the educational system: academic calendar shifts, types of credits, assessments, teaching methodology, degree and curricular changes. For a general overview, read below and see the video: http://youtu.be/FwE_QNNvQvM.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRADITIONAL ACADEMIC SYSTEM (BEING PHASED OUT):

MOST UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS ARE COMPOSED OF 3 CYCLES:

- **Cycle I** (Primer ciclo) - This cycle extends for the first two (or three) years. Concentrates on providing basic and general information and completing requirements for advanced courses.
- **Cycle II** (Segundo ciclo) - This cycle extends for the 3rd and 4th (or 4th and 5th) year courses. Concentrates on more specialized courses to provide in-depth knowledge and to prepare students for professional performance.
- **Cycle III** – Doctoral level programs.
 - **Curso:** Is the year of the specific degree program (1, 2^o, 3^o, 4^o, 5^o).

DEGREE PROGRAMS

- **Licenciatura:** A 4-5 year undergraduate/master degree program. Spanish students enter the university with their major decided, and take courses almost exclusively in this area. Each *licenciatura* has a very specific *plan de estudios*, which stipulates the courses that students must take, as well as the year they must take these courses in. Most classes are based on lectures with one final exam. Little class participation or papers/projects are expected. The traditional teach-learn approach. Upon completion, the degree is roughly equivalent to an American master degree.
Licenciaturas de Segundo Ciclo: Some departments offer only 2nd cycle courses. Students who have completed the first cycle in a similar discipline and have all the requirements established by the department may undertake this program. Graduates of other fields who have the appropriate background can also enter second cycle programs. Political science is an example of such departments at UAM and U. de Salamanca.
- **Diplomatura:** a 3 year degree program, roughly equivalent to an American undergraduate degree.

COURSE CATEGORIES (for students pursuing a *Licenciatura* in a Spanish university)

(Materias = asignaturas = cursos)

- **Materias troncales:** Mandatory courses for all students in a *licenciatura* regardless of the university they attend in Spain. These are established by the professional authorities in the field. Classes are assigned to specific *cursos* or years.
- **Materias obligatorias:** Mandatory courses for students attending a specific university within a particular *licenciatura*. Classes are assigned to specific *cursos* or years.

- **Materias optativas:** Optional courses offered by a department to students in a *licenciatura*. Students must complete a certain amount of these credits in their *licenciatura* (similar to major electives). Classes are assigned to *ciclos*.
- **Materias de libre elección, libre configuración o genéricas:** Each department will assign some of its courses as *libre elección* or free electives. These are open to students from different *licenciaturas*, and different *cursos* because they are either not as in depth as the other types of courses or their content is very specific.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEWLY ADAPTED ACADEMIC SYSTEM:

University education is structured in three phases: **Undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees** (similar to the American system).

- **Grados:** The undergraduate or Bachelor degree designed to comply with criteria established by the Bologna Process. The disciplines are divided into basic areas of knowledge: Sciences, Health Sciences, Art/Humanities and Social/Judicial Sciences and Engineering/Architecture. Double majors/degrees are also contemplated. Teaching methodology is based on skills obtained as opposed to knowledge learned. Classes are more experiential with continual assessment throughout the semester. The learning process is inverted from the traditional methodology to learn-teach approach. Students are expected to actively participate in class discussions, projects and outings. Often this means adapting to complicated schedules or small group labs.

COURSE CATEGORIES (for students pursuing a *Grado* in a Spanish university)
(Materias = asignaturas = cursos)

- **Formación básica:** Equivalent to American breadth classes, these cover general topics and can easily be transferred to other degrees within the same area of knowledge.
- **Materias obligatorias:** Mandatory courses for students within a particular *grado* (similar to major requirements).
- **Materias optativas:** Optional courses offered by a department to students in a particular *grado*. Students must complete a certain amount of these credits in their *grado* (similar to major electives).
- **Asignaturas transversales, libre elección, prácticas, clases erasmus, etc.:** Each university or department may assign some courses as free electives. However, most have been eliminated from the curriculum. In many cases, students receive a certain amount of credit for outside experiences such as foreign language acquisition, internships, volunteer work, etc.
- **Courses taught in English:** Many degrees offer either obligatory or optional courses in English in order to promote internationalization

OBSERVATIONS FOR DIRECT ENROLLMENT STUDENTS:

- Courses previously offered in the past, may no longer exist as the new system replaces the old. Thus students should carefully look at the university study plans on their Websites to ensure that the courses they want, are in fact, offered that specific academic year.
- As a study abroad student, you may take classes from any and all of the above categories regardless of the academic system (with the exception of courses taught in English unless your specific program permits this).
- Many universities will not permit foreign students to take first year courses.