



# SPAIN

**Brief Background:** Higher education is an honored tradition in Spanish society. The first university, Universidad de Salamanca, was established in the 13th century. As such, many of Spain's institutions have developed strong programs that have earned them a solid international reputation. In fact, 26 Spanish universities are currently featured in the top 200 of various international university ranking lists like the Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai (ARWU), the *QS World University Rankings*, and *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*. Of those, 18 appear in the top 100 for a single subject, and another 10 in the top 50. There are currently 84 universities in Spain, of which 50 are public and 34 are private.

From 2009 to 2010, Spain immersed itself in a transformation of its higher education system. Its goal was to harmonize its academic qualification framework to fit into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in order to increase student mobility in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In 2014-2015 alone, more than 85,000 international students enrolled in Spanish higher education institutions. American students accounted for nearly 8 percent of the international student population.

**Good to Know:** In Spain, an undergraduate degree is referred to as *grado*, and can fall into one of two categories: official, those that are government-regulated and recognized by the EHEA; and unofficial (*propio*), which are

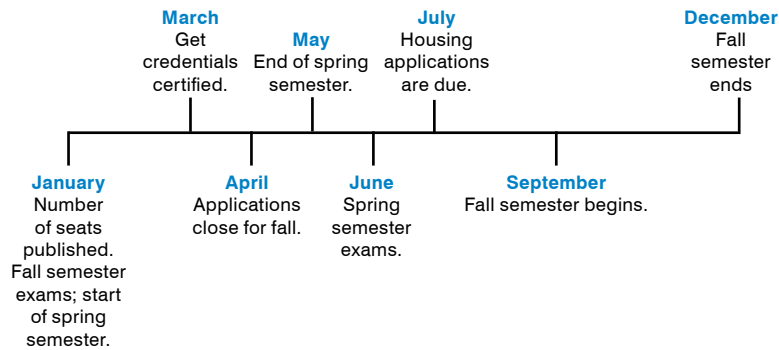
independently established by an institution and generally not recognized by other institutions or education systems. A student pursues an official degree (*grado oficial*) as they would an undergraduate degree in the US. An unofficial degree (*grado propio*) is typically meant for students that have already completed an official degree and are looking to improve their technical knowledge in a specific field or subject. Length of study for an undergraduate degree varies by subject. While the majority can be completed in three to four years, more technical degrees, like engineering, medicine, and architecture, can take up to five years.

The Study in Spain website is a government-sponsored resource for English-language speakers. It features information on the cultural and academic value of studying in Spain and has a university search engine that filters by province and university type. It also provides information about administrative procedures; however, the entries often include links to the official resource in Spanish. To access the Study in Spain website, visit <http://www.studyinspain.info/en/index.html>.

Most undergraduate degrees are taught in Spanish or one of Spain's recognized regional languages, such as Basque or Catalan. However, there has been an increase in the number of programs taught completely in English or in a bilingual immersion format. In bilingual immersion programs,

students begin their undergraduate careers in English-taught classes and are slowly transitioned into a full Spanish learning environment. The Spanish Service for the Internationalization of Education (*Servicio Español para la Internacionalización de la Educación* or SEPIE) compiles a list of English-taught or bilingual programs: <http://sepie.es/internacionalizacion/becasytitulaciones.html>.

**Academic Calendar:** The school year in Spain generally starts in the fall and ends in late spring. The majority of Spanish universities operate on a two-semester system: the first from September/October to late December, and the second from January/February to May. Semester exams are usually scheduled the month after the semester ends (January and June, respectively). Other universities follow a trimester schedule.



**Search:** The official source of information for international students is SEPIE. The internationalization section on its website provides resources for prospective and current international students: <http://sepie.es>.

To search universities by program, region, or employability of graduates, use the What to Study and Where tool (*Qué Estudiar y Dónde en la Universidad* or QEDU) on the website of the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports: <https://www.educacion.gob.es/notasdecorte/compBdDo>.

**Apply:** Spain does not have a centralized application system for university admission. Each university sets its own requirements and deadlines for applications and in some instances these can even vary by program within the university. Some universities or programs may require applicants to attend an interview, submit additional materials, or even take a subject or general knowledge exam. It is important that students familiarize themselves with the requirements for each university and program of interest.



Each year, universities assess the number of seats in each program that will be open for new applicants. For public universities, this number is determined by the regional governments and is based on projected labor market needs. Of this number, a specific percentage—determined by the universities—is reserved for international students. The number of seats open for general and international admission are typically published in January or February. Students are advised to apply soon after these numbers are published, as space is limited. However, students should also keep in mind the pre-application requirements established by the government explained below. Private institutions set their own enrollment goals and could provide more flexibility.

Students that apply for seats reserved for international applicants are not required to take the Spanish University Access Test (*Prueba de Acceso a la Universidad* or PAU), also known as *Selectividad*. If an international student applies to an international seat and is not accepted, he or she can reapply for a seat in the general admission pool. However, they will then be required to submit PAU scores.

Prior to applying to university, international students must submit their credentials to be certified for equivalency. Students from the US must submit their documents to the Spanish embassy or consulate in their country of residence to be reviewed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sports prior to submitting their application. This process is known as *homologación* and can take three to six months. The Spanish Education Advising Office

in the United States recommends that students begin this process as early as possible to assure they'll have all their documentation in time for enrollment. In the meantime, students can apply for a permit for conditional admission (*volante de inscripción condicional*) that would show they have initiated the credential equivalency certificate process, allowing them to be considered for admission to the university of their choice. While this is a responsibility of the student, some universities provide assistance. Students should contact the admission office of their prospective school or program to verify which resources are available to them. For the most accurate and updated information about the credential equivalency certificate process and its requirements, students can contact the Spanish Education Advising Office at [consejeria.usa@madrid.ecd.es](mailto:consejeria.usa@madrid.ecd.es) or visit <http://www.mecd.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/catalogo/educacion/gestion-titulos/estudios-no-universitarios/titulos-extranjeros/homologacion-convalidacion-no-universitarios.html>.

**Deadlines:** Students typically begin their academic studies in the fall semester. Deadlines vary by university, but applications are generally due the first week of June.

**Admission Requirements:** International students are not required to take the Spanish university admission test, unless they apply for general admission (see Apply section). Admission is based on students' prior academic performance and high school GPA. However, some universities could also require international students to take one or more subject proficiency tests (*Pruebas de Competencias Específicas* or PCE). These tests are managed by UNEDasiss, a service from the distance learning institution UNED, and are administered in Spain and several other locations across the globe. It is important that students reach out to the university of their choice to determine which tests they will need to take, if any. For more information about UNEDasiss, visit [http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?\\_pageid=93,55011208&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?_pageid=93,55011208&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL).

International students may also be required to take a language proficiency exam for Spanish or English depending on the program they are applying to and their country of origin. There are several testing platforms for language proficiency. The most widely recognized evaluations for Spanish are those given by the *Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española* (SIELE) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). For English, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are accepted. It is important for students to research whether their institution or program of choice requires them to take a language proficiency exam, which tests are accepted, and the minimum scores required for admission.

**Upon Acceptance:** The university will send a letter of acceptance, which is needed in order to apply for a student visa before coming to Spain.

**Tuition and Fees:** The cost of tuition at Spanish universities varies by the type of degree a student enrolls in (official or unofficial) and by the nature of the university (public or private). The cost of public universities is regulated by the General Assembly for University Policy (*Conferencia General de Política Universitaria*) and the regional governments where they reside. While the universities are not allowed to raise tuition for Spanish and EU students, legislation does allow them to increase the fees for international students. It is important to research each institution individually to assess the true cost of tuition for an international student. However, public university tuition for international students can still be considerably cheaper than the cost of attending a private university. In 2014–2015, the cost of tuition at a public Spanish university varied between 750 and 3,700 euros. Meanwhile, the cost of tuition at private universities ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 euros.

The Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport has a page dedicated to scholarships, aid, awards, and subsidies: <http://www.mecd.gob.es/servicios-al-ciudadano-mecd/catalogo/educacion.html>.



**Housing:** The average cost of living for students in Spain is estimated between 900 and 1,000 euros per month, depending on the city or town of residence and the individual needs of each student. There are various housing options for students enrolled in Spanish universities:

- *Colegio Mayor*: Similar to American residence halls, these dormitories may be privately-funded or affiliated with a particular university or student organization. However, space is often limited and students must submit a separate application, typically due by mid-July.
- Apartment rentals or shared apartments: Some universities provide a service for students and community members to promote alternative housing options.

- **Host families:** Students living with host families can immerse themselves in the Spanish language and culture. Students should contact their universities to confirm the availability of this option.
- **Intergenerational living:** Some universities have adopted programs that pair a student with an older person in their community who offers accommodation at a low rate in exchange for some help at home.

**Visa and Other Permits:** Students from countries outside of the European Union pursuing studies for longer than 90 days must apply for a student visa (*Autorización de Estancia por Estudios*) through the Spanish embassy or consulate in their country of origin or residence. This visa expires on a yearly basis, and must be renewed within the 60-day period prior to its expiration date. For the most reliable and up-to-date information, students should contact their local embassy or consulate or visit the Ministry of Employment and Social Security website: <http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/es/informacioninteres/informacionprocedimientos/Ciudadanosnocomunitarios/hoja003/index.html#procedimiento>.

Citizens of countries outside of the European Union, the European Economic Area, or citizens of countries that do not currently have a reciprocity agreement for social services with Spain must independently enroll in a private health insurance plan. This is a prerequisite for the student visa application. The selected health insurance plan must cover the cost of repatriation of remains and stay valid for the entirety of the student's time in Spain.

Upon arrival in Spain, students will have one month to register for the Foreigner Identity Card (*Tarjeta de Identidad de Extranjero* or TIE) at the local Foreigners Office or police station. This permit serves as an identification for the student. More information can be found through the Ministry of Interior website: <http://www.interior.gob.es/web/servicios-al-ciudadano/extranjeria/regimen-general/tarjeta-de-identidad-de-extranjero>.

**Advice from the Field:** The internationalization of Spanish universities is still developing. While there is a growing number of undergraduate degrees offered in English, it is difficult to find English-language resources outlining admission procedures. Moreover, the higher education system and relevant authorities are currently in the process of adopting changes to make the admission process more amenable for international students. During this transition period, counselors are advised to reach out directly to universities, embassies, or consulates via e-mail or telephone for the most accurate and reliable information regarding the application process and requirements.

When deciding where in Spain to apply, students should keep in mind the remarkable differences in temperature and precipitation found in different regions of the country. Cities in the central region undergo major changes throughout the year, while coastal regions can be less stark.

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