

**Course GA-03 INTRODUCTION TO THE GEOGRAPHY OF SPAIN,  
ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND PROTECTED NATURAL SPACES**

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**45 CONTACT HOURS / 3 SEMESTER CREDITS**

**THIS CLASS MEETS: MON/WED 11AM – 1PM**

**OBJECTIVES**

The main objective of this Course is to provide students with a scientifically-based knowledge of the structure of the geography of Spain by means of a basic review of its physical characteristics, thereby enabling them to acquire an overall knowledge of this territory.

**METHODOLOGY**

Use will be made of the specific analysis of each of the physical elements that go into the territory's configuration, the ways in which they are found to interact, together with the factors which explain their nature. Class sessions, of both a practical and a theoretical character, will involve the use of audiovisual resources so as to be able to illustrate the geographical reality of Spain. Likewise, use will be made of graphs and diagrammatic figures, news features, as well as texts associated with the syllabus content being dealt with.

**SYLLABUS**

**Unit 1. SPAIN'S GEOGRAPHICAL SINGULARITY.** The territory of Spain: principal territorial units and their location. Spain's geographical singularity and the contrasts that go into its making. Causes: Spain's peninsular and insular character; Spain's location as crossroads; the main features and contrasts of Spain's interior.

**Unit 2. RELIEF.** General characteristics of the peninsular and balearic relief. The geological evolution of the Iberian Peninsula. The overall relief units of the Peninsula, and of the Balearic Islands and the Canaries. The peninsular and island shorelines.

Environment: Soil erosion and degradation: desertification.

**Unit 3. CLIMATE.** Climatic factors affecting the Iberian Peninsula and the Canary Islands. Climate diversity. General characteristics of the elements of climate. Climatic domains. Extreme phenomena.

Environment: droughts and flooding. The impact of climate change.

**Unit 4. THE WATER TABLE.** Factors and elements affecting the fluvial system of Spain's rivers. The hydrographic network. Natural springs and main riverbeds in Peninsular Spain. Regulating river courses: reservoired water.

Environment: The importance of water as a resource: exploitation and issues involved in management.

**Unit 5: VEGETATION.** Determining factors in Spain's vegetation and its distribution. Major areas, or bio-geographical units, and the main species of vegetation. Spain's forest mass.

Environment: forest fires.

**Unit 6: PROTECTED NATURAL SPACES.** Spain's biodiversity. Natural spaces and the environment: issues and public policy.

Protected spaces: major statistics related to protection.

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- PEINADO LORCA, M., RIVAS MARTÍNEZ, S., eds. *La vegetación de España*. Alcalá de Henares: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Alcalá, 1987.
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## **DICTIONARIES**

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- Whittow, J. B. *The Penguin Dictionary of Physical Geography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986.

## **COMPLEMENTARY ACTIVITIES**

As the Course develops, scientific documentary films will be shown related to the syllabus units being dealt with, while a visit to Sevilla's Alamillo Park will be organized as a way of acquiring first-hand knowledge of Mediterranean vegetation.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Assessment and grading of the extent of assimilation of syllabus content, above all with regard to the explanations concerning the interrelated nature of Spain's geographical structure, will be carried out in the following ways:

- 1.- Two written exams, one mid-way through the semester and another at its close, consisting of:
  - The filling-in, and annotated commentary of an outline map, pinpointing a certain number of the physical features dealt with during the Course.
  - An awareness of key concepts.
  - A commentary to be written on a news feature, a diagrammatic figure, or a text, with regard to an environmental issue concerning Spain.
- 2.- An individual or group assignment, the results of which are to be presented in class, exploring the physical and environmental features of one of the Autonomous Regions of Spain.
- 3.- Activities in terms of specific subject-matter, including: vocabulary, the commentary of a news feature, the working out of questionnaires in order to pinpoint and clarify concepts.

Final grades will be calculated as the average of the scores obtained in each of these three areas of action.

*Positive value will be attached to:*

- precision in the pinpointing of the location of geographical facts, phenomena, and features of relief;
- the capacity to comment in depth;
- the correct use of terminology;
- the capacity to analyse and describe the phenomena concerned and the degree of interpretative maturity;
- within the development of a subject area, the ordering and structuring of specific content and the coherence of the explanations provided;
- precision and clarity in the development of explanations of concepts;
- the extent and depth of the knowledge under consideration, together with the capacity for synthesis and the use of an interrelated approach.