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The EU Erasmus Mundus Program: The Master's Degree in Food Innovation and Product Design (Partners: Dublin Institute of Technology, AgroParisTech, University of Naples and University of Lund)

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Erasmus Mundus is a European educational training program for non-European and European students who want to pursue studies at a Master's level. Students study modules provided by a number of higher educational institutes/universities in various European countries. The M.Sc in Food Innovation and Product Design is a new program which will commence at the end of August 2011. The successful applicants will study in AgroParisTech (France), Dublin Institute of Technology (Ireland) and can choose to study at either Lund University (Sweden) or University of Naples (Italy). Students will gain knowledge and skills to enable them to produce innovative food products.

KEYWORDS *Erasmus Mundus, education, food innovation*

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WHAT IS ERASMUS MUNDUS?

ERASMUS is the EU's flagship education and training program enabling 200,000 students to study and work abroad each year. In addition, it funds cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe. The program not only supports students but also professors and business staff who want to teach abroad and helps university staff receive training.

Many studies show that a period spent abroad not only enriches students' lives in the academic and professional fields but can also improve language learning, intercultural skills, self-reliance, and self-awareness (Carpenter *et al.*, 2001; Button *et al.*, 2005). Their experiences give students a better sense of what it means to be a European or even a global citizen. In addition, many employers highly value such a period abroad, which increases students' employability and job prospects. Staff exchanges have similar beneficial effects, both for the people participating and for the home and host institutions.

In 2004, the European Commission launched a new scheme that was aimed at attracting the brightest and best postgraduate students from around the world to Europe. Erasmus Mundus gives non-European students the chance to study for a master's or Ph.D on the continent of Europe. The initiative has been fairly small so far, with 115 master's and 13 doctoral programs offered through the beginning of July. Tuition fees for European students are between €2,000 and €8,000.

Almost all of the courses are taught in English. Until 2009, the courses were aimed at non-European students—Americans, Canadians, and anyone from developing countries—who were given scholarships to entice them to the continent. Scholarships are generous, giving students up to €23,000 for fees, a monthly grant for board, and lodging and money for travel if the student studies in a country outside Europe. According to Paul Dowling, of the Europe Unit at Universities UK, the Erasmus Mundus courses are very competitive. "It has become quite prestigious, a mark of quality" (Prest, 2010). It seems that everyone benefits. European institutions form links with other universities across Europe and across the world. At the same time, they attract top-notch students. The young people gain a distinguished postgraduate diploma as well as international experience (Prest, 2010).

HOW ERASMUS WORKS

Higher education institutions that want to participate in ERASMUS activities must have an ERASMUS University Charter. The Charter aims to guarantee the quality of the program by setting certain fundamental principles. The European Commission is responsible for the overall program implementation; its Directorate-General for Education and Culture coordinates the different activities.

So-called decentralized actions that promote individual mobility are run by national agencies in the 33 participating countries. Centralized actions, such as networks, multilateral projects, and the award of the ERASMUS University Charter, are managed by the EU's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency.

Recent Erasmus Mundus Success for DIT School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology—The Master's Degree in Culinary Innovation and Product Design

The European Commission announced the latest round of successful Erasmus Mundus applicants in August of this year. Among the M.Sc's listed was the master's in culinary innovation and product design. Four academic institutions constitute the successful collaborative consortium. They will offer joint study modules in addition to their existing curricula. The consortium comprises The School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology, College of Arts and Tourism (DIT, Ireland), AgroParisTech (France), UNINA University in Naples (Italy), and Lund University (Sweden). AgroParisTech is the program coordinator. DIT will deliver five modules totalling 30 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). ECTS provides a common basis to recognize higher education study periods abroad. It is the credit system for higher education used in the European Higher Education Area, involving all countries engaged in the Bologna Process (European Commission, 2010). The Bologna Process harmonizes academic standards and quality assurance in over 40 European countries (European Commission, 2011).

The School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology modules focus on entrepreneurial skills with an emphasis on innovation management and culinary approaches. AgroParisTech (Department of Food and Bioproduct Science and Engineering) will focus on food science and technology with an emphasis on the development and processing of food products and engineering skills, including molecular gastronomy. UNINA (Department of Food Science) will focus on food science and technology with an emphasis on the formulation of functional foods related to health as well as to X-omics approaches related to food quality. Lund University (Department of Product Design) will focus on food packaging development related to sustainability and logistics issues. It will be in charge of the food packaging design option, where extensive international research expertise is present in the field of user-driven food packaging design, packaging design for sustainable development, integrated product and packaging development, and packaging logistics.

Universities from third-world countries (Lebanon, Algeria, Tunisia, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, and Korea) will contribute actively to the curricula as associate members. The European institutes of Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA) (Paris, France), Teagasc (Ireland), and Istituto di Scienze dell' Alimentazione Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (ISA-CNR) (Avellino, Italy) will also contribute as associate members.

The 2-year master's program aims to provide a European dimension in the knowledge-intensive area of food (culinary) research and development and will be highly relevant for students from both the EU and third-world countries who wish to be employed in the field of the agri-food and drink sector. The overall objective of the program is to produce highly skilled graduates capable of coping with the huge challenges in the innovative food sector and adapting to future developments. The curriculum is especially designed to take into

consideration the needs of potential employers. The official language of the master's is English, with ample opportunities to learn the local language and food culture. Upon graduation, each student will receive a double or triple degree (AgroParisTech, DIT, UNINA); that is, national master's degree certificates with a diploma supplement. The program is open to highly motivated students who have a B.Sc or relevant degree in culinary science, food technology, biotechnology, process engineering, biochemistry, or related fields. All students are required to pass a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam to indicate their competence in the English language.

Impact on Higher Education

An overriding aim of the program is to help create a European higher education area and foster innovation throughout Europe. In addition to exchange actions (transnational mobility), ERASMUS helps higher education institutions to work together through intensive programs, networks, and multilateral projects. Thanks to all these actions, ERASMUS has become a driver in the modernization of higher education institutions and systems in Europe and, in particular, has inspired the establishment of the Bologna Process. ERASMUS became part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme in 2007 and covered new areas such as student placements in enterprises (transferred from the Leonardo da Vinci Programme), university staff training, and teaching for business staff. The program should further expand the educational opportunities it offers in the coming years, with a target of 3 million ERASMUS students by 2012.

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