



History of the University of Vienna

On 12 March 1365 Duke Rudolph IV (the "Founder") founded the University of Vienna, "Alma Mater Rudolphina Vindobonensis" as it has been called by literary sources, along the lines of the Sorbonne in Paris. The members of this "universitas magistrorum et scholarium" (the fellowship of teachers and learners) were exempt from taxes and military service, they had their own dress code and jurisdiction, the latter carried out by the rector himself.



Reformation – Stagnation and dominance of the Jesuits



In the course of the Reformation, starting in 1520, the University of Vienna, a "papal institution", suffered a great loss of prestige. Due to the First Turkish Siege of Vienna in 1529, recurring epidemics, the city's economic decline, and the increasing competition between universities, the number of students sank, too.

King Ferdinand I tried to counteract this development with new reforms and started to turn the University of Vienna into a Catholic stronghold. For this purpose he installed the Jesuits there in 1551, and gave them two theological chairs. Consequently, tensions and conflicts between the Jesuit school and the university itself arose, making Emperor Ferdinand II pass the 1623

"Sanctio Pragmatica". Thus, the Jesuits became the teachers at the theological and philosophical faculties, and the student numbers rallied. The Jesuit order was to keep its dominating position for the coming 150 years.

Enlightened Absolutism: The university as an educational establishment of the state

In the middle of the 18th century, Empress Maria Theresia ensured that the Jesuits lost a great deal of their former influence on university life as they had greatly neglected the "secular" faculties. As both the Church and the university's own administrative bodies were eliminated, the university became an educational establishment of the state, focussing on the training of civil servants and physicians, but not on the education of scholars.

The empress's personal physician, Gerard van Swieten, was to implement the new reforms. Obviously, he focussed on the medical and natural sciences. He was the one to transfer the training of the students of medicine to the patients' bedside, and he also established two new Chairs – Chemistry and Botany. In 1754, the Botanical Gardens of the University of Vienna (Rennweg) were opened to the public.



Joseph II continued with the reforms of Maria Theresia, abolishing both academic jurisdiction and official attire. His laws of tolerance enabled protestants to enrol at the university for the first time in 1778, while in 1782 Jews were admitted to the studies of Medicine and Law. Joseph II was also the one to introduce German as the compulsory language of teaching in 1783.

1867: "Freedom of research and research-based education"

The year of the revolution 1848 also greatly influenced the University of Vienna. Students demanded the freedom of teaching and learning, and the end of any suppression of academic life. To this day, the most important success of their endeavours has been the – still valid – article 17 of Austrian Fundamental Law: "Freedom of research and research-based Education."

Minister of education Leo Graf Thun-Hohenstein reformed the system of tertiary education radically and invited a great number of professors to Vienna.

The new Main Building on the Ring



In 1884, Emperor Franz Joseph I inaugurated the new [Main Building of the University of Vienna](#) on Ringstraße, which had been erected by Heinrich von Ferstel. This splendid historicist building was designed to resemble the renowned Italian Renaissance universities. However, it could never lay claim to be the central university building even in the early days, and there was never enough room for all departments and institutes. The up-and-coming Viennese Medical School required more space, and by 1915 numerous buildings had been erected in the vicinity of the Main Building to house the "homeless" institutes.

More Information: [The Main Building - a historic centre](#)

Women at the University of Vienna

It was 532 years after its foundation until the University of Vienna permitted female students to enter its hallowed halls as students in 1897, even if "only" at the Faculty of Philosophy for a start. Elise Richter – she had registered for Romance languages and literature in 1897 – was the first woman to habilitate at the University of Vienna in 1907.

The turmoil of war and the post-war era ("Wiederaufbau")

The boom of the University of Vienna nosedived during the First World War: the Main Building was now used as a military hospital, with the Main Ceremonial Chamber ("Große Festsaal") functioning as a dining hall and lounge, and the Kleine Festsaal (Smaller Ceremonial Chamber) and numerous lecture rooms as operating theatres.

During the worldwide economic crisis of the 1920ies, German nationalist tendencies also started to make themselves felt on academic soil, often growing into full-blown Anti-Semitism. In 1938, after the "Anschluss", Austria's affiliation to the German Reich, any dissenting voices are quickly silenced, the result being a kind of academic mass exodus: 45 per cent of all professors and senior lecturers were dismissed on political or "racial" grounds.

By the end of this war, the Main Building had been hit by 26 bombs. The glass roof of the library reading hall was shattered. The Red Army took over the building, but on 16 April 1945 student Kurt Schubert (1923–2007, Emeritus Jewish Studies) succeeded in having the University cleared, and by the end of May 1945 the summer term lectures had started again, despite reconstruction work.



Education boom and expansion

Free university admission in the 1970ies triggered an educational boom and resulted in a vast expansion of the University of Vienna. Increasing numbers of students necessitated the construction of new buildings and the redevelopment of old ones: Neues Institutsgebäude (New Institute Building, NIG, 1962), University Sports Centre Auf der Schmelz (1973), University Centre (UZA) I, Althanstraße (1982), Juridicum (Law School 1982), Business-Administration Centre, Brünner Straße (1991), Vienna Biocenter, Dr.-Bohr-Gasse (1992), UZA II, Althanstraße (1995), University Campus on the premises of the former General Hospital (1998), and the Hörsaalzentrum (centre of lecture halls) on Campus (2003).

21st century: Re-organisation – Status quo

With the University Act of 2002, all Austrian universities became autonomous, and therefore more self-dependent and performance-orientated. For the University of Vienna, this meant total re-organisation: as per 1 January 2004 the Medical Faculty became a separate university. Currently, the University of Vienna comprises 15 faculties and four centres. 91,000 students can choose from more than 180 courses, and 9,400 employees, 6,700 of which academic, work at more than 60 locations of the University of Vienna.

Further information on the history of the University of Vienna on the Homepage of the [University Archives](#).



The Main Building University of Vienna, Universitätsring 1, 1010 Wien



Großer Festsaal, Main Building University of Vienna



Kleiner Festsaal, Main Building University of Vienna

