

A spectacular new campus reflects the venerable Viennese university's commitment to the future says **Eva Male**

# WU's new campus building the future



**THE LIBRARY & LEARNING CENTER**  
THE HEART OF THE NEW UNIVERSITY CAMPUS  
IS THE LIBRARY & LEARNING CENTER (LC),  
DESIGNED BY ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS




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What should the university of the future look like? What tasks is a modern business and economics university expected to fulfil? And what functions does an urban campus need to perform today?

These were the questions WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business) had to tackle when it became clear that it would move to a new campus built from scratch rather than renovate its buildings at the old location.

The project to build a new WU campus was launched in 2007, the groundbreaking ceremony took place in 2009 and the new campus was inaugurated in early October 2013 – in the same week that WU celebrated its 115th anniversary. The new campus was completed on schedule and within budget.

Now the first academic year at the new location is nearly complete and the new Campus WU has stood up to the test well.

The visions and ideas that guided the planning and design phases have come to full fruition. The new campus not only offers vastly improved teaching and learning spaces and facilities for students and faculty, it has also become a popular meeting place for non-academic visitors, attracting large numbers of tourists and local residents. There are children playing, people having fun on the campus basketball court or simply enjoying the sun – everyone is very welcome on Campus WU.

After all, WU's new campus was always meant to be more than just a place for academic research and teaching and learning practical skills; it was also designed to create a new space for social, cultural and political life. It is the concrete realisation of WU's vision of a modern university.

The fundamental principles of the architecture reflect the values and ideas such as diversity, innovation and internationalism we cherish at WU.

And as a public institution WU has lived up to its responsibility to build its new campus in an economical, ecological and socially sustainable manner. We have not only constructed new buildings but in the process have built on our ideas of what the university of the future should look like.

What does this mean in real terms?

The heart of the new university campus is the Library & Learning Center (LC), designed by Zaha Hadid Architects. This imposing building is a testament to the central importance of research and teaching at WU. All other buildings and facilities on campus have been conceptualised, designed and built around this core element.



The Library & Learning Center is surrounded by five complexes, including the Teaching Center (TC), which houses most of WU's auditoriums. The Teaching Center is intended mainly for bachelor degree students. Masters degree programmes are taught primarily in individual department buildings. The Executive Academy building is the home of continuing education and life-long learning programmes.

In this way, the various buildings and their functions reflect the three tiers of teaching and learning represented by the Bologna Process that was implemented at WU in 2007.

WU's department-based organisational structure was also a contributing factor. In the past, the various institutes that make up the departments were scattered across different locations. Now they have been brought together in four department buildings, which make life much easier for both students and faculty.

These are not the only improvements the new campus has to offer. All rooms have natural light and the auditoriums feature state-of-the-art teaching equipment, including digital whiteboards. There are 3,000 student workplaces, three times as many as in the old buildings.

These workplaces are located not only in dedicated self-study areas but also in project rooms that can be booked by both teaching staff and students. They cater to different needs by providing quiet spots for focused academic work as well as opportunities for work on group projects in communication-friendly study areas.

It was a conscious design decision that the areas and rooms intended for use by students should be the most attractive spaces on the new campus.

The top priority in planning the new campus was to create an environment for WU students and staff that is conducive to productive work and

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communication. The buildings and the surrounding grounds offer plenty of opportunities for communication and meeting people.

Approximately 55,000 m<sup>2</sup> of publicly accessible open space surround the six building complexes, perfect for strolling and exploring. The campus is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. Fences or barriers would contradict our vision of an open campus.

WU is open to impulses and influences from the non-academic "outside world" and at the same time it also wants to have a positive impact on the city of Vienna, the Austrian economy and society at large.

Six architects of international renown, representing the international, open-minded spirit that is such an important hallmark of a modern university, designed the buildings on Campus WU.

The multi-faceted character of the campus architecture symbolises the diversity of disciplines, perspectives and research methods at WU. Uniformity and a one-size-fits-all approach are detrimental to any university. In order to thrive, a university must be a place that encourages and cultivates a broad diversity of approaches and perspectives.

Despite their different appearances the buildings are all based on the same overall technical concept, standardised in terms of construction, energy supply, ventilation and sanitary facilities.



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The entire campus has been designed in accordance with “green building” principles. Seventy per cent of the required energy is obtained using geothermal groundwater. Durable, long-lasting materials were used in construction in order to minimise life-cycle costs.

Further “green” features include energy efficient exteriors and technical equipment and a high percentage of renewable energy sources in energy generation and material use. Preference is given to local energy sources and materials. All buildings are equipped with heat recovery systems with an efficiency rate of 75% and occupancy-sensitive and daylight-sensitive lighting systems. WU has also implemented new green IT strategies, including data centre heat recovery systems across the campus.

With these features, the new Campus WU places great emphasis on one of the key principles informing current social and political debates: sustainability. WU is firmly committed to sustainability in teaching, research and university management – both out of necessity and from conviction. One of the most important steps taken as part of this commitment was the establishment of a Competence Center for Sustainability at WU a few months ago.

Another key feature of Campus WU is barrier-free accessibility. All auditoriums are specially equipped for people with disabilities, all areas are designed to be wheelchair accessible and the campus features a tactile guidance system for the visually impaired.

We have not only made sure to comply with all the relevant legal guidelines in designing the new campus but we have also drawn on experience gained from best-practice examples. WU aims to play a pioneering role – in all respects.



As well as bringing about an impressive improvement in the quality of WU’s buildings, facilities and equipment, the move to Campus WU has also prompted the university to rethink its own position and activities– a process of reorientation that is of vital importance for any modern business and economics university.

In a world struggling with growing economic and social problems, we simply cannot go on using the same old economic decision-making processes that serve short-term, parochial or national interests while – seen from a global perspective – keeping a majority of the people on earth in a state of poverty and deprivation.

A university such as WU that takes pride in educating leaders for business and society must accept its part of the responsibility for global economic and social developments.

In this context, WU currently offers its students the highly popular courses Future-Oriented Business I & II. As well as an interdisciplinary, English-language masters degree programme in Socio-Ecological Economics and Policy. This provides students with the skills and knowledge to harness different theories and disciplinary perspectives for analysing and addressing important questions for the future.

In addition to conventional business and management skills, WU also looks at issues of great importance for current global developments such as research on ageing, demographics and social responsibility.

To conclude, WU is refocusing its activities in accordance with the following fundamental principles:

- to make a sustainable contribution to a new and improved economy
- to encourage a diversity of perspectives on business, economics, and society
- to foster an international and open-minded attitude towards academic, intellectual exchange and real-life business practice
- to stimulate innovative thinking to create new ways of dealing with business and economic phenomena of the 21st century.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva Male is press relations officer at WU. She was previously a journalist with Die Presse, an Austrian daily newspaper, working in Vienna and for several years as correspondent in Washington and Berlin.