

At a Glance

A Brief Portrait of Freie Universität Berlin





Designed by Norman Foster, the Philological Library with its unmistakable dome is enclosed within a building complex that also houses the humanities and social sciences.

PHOTO: DIRK LAUBNER

WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Freie Universität Berlin is a young, international university with a unique history. Situated in the southwestern suburbs of Berlin, it is an integral part of one of the largest and most important research hubs in Europe. Freie Universität is among the few universities to have received the distinction of “University of Excellence” in all three rounds of Germany’s Excellence Initiative. Its liaison offices in Cairo, New Delhi, São Paulo, and Tbilisi connect the university with the global community and provide a platform for international cooperation. The Times Higher Education (THE) Ranking lists Freie Universität Berlin among Germany’s top four universities and places it eighty-eighth worldwide. It was also recognized by the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking five times in a row as the number one German university overall regarding the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. The university received especially high marks for Goal 5: Gender Equality.

BUILT ON FREEDOM

Freie Universität Berlin was founded on December 4, 1948, as a joint effort by students and professors with the support of the American Allies and various Berlin-based politicians. Their efforts came in response to the persecution faced by students who took a critical stance toward Berlin's main university at that time, which was located in the Soviet sector of the divided city. They wanted to establish a university where its members were able to study, teach, and research free from political interference. Thanks to generous donations from the United States, Freie Universität was able to construct several new main buildings, including the Benjamin Franklin university hospital complex and the Henry Ford Building, which houses the university's largest lecture halls. Given its history Freie Universität Berlin is particularly committed to the principles of truth, justice, and freedom, which are featured in the university seal.



President John F. Kennedy held an iconic speech at Freie Universität lauding its core values in 1963.

PHOTO: JOACHIM G. JUNG

The Henry Ford Building, designed to be the main lecture building on campus, was built in the 1950s.

PHOTO: BERND WANNENMACHER



INTERNATIONAL – FROM THE VERY BEGINNING



People from over 100 different countries come to Freie Universität to study, work, teach, and research.

PHOTO: MICHAEL FAHRIG

Ever since Freie Universität Berlin was first established with the support of the international community in 1948, research and teaching here have been defined and driven by international cooperation. During the Cold War, Freie Universität established connections to organizations and individuals in West Germany, Europe, and the entire world in order to survive and thrive as an intellectual and academic institution even from its isolated position in West Berlin. What began as a necessity then evolved into a successful strategy. Freie Universität currently maintains around 200 partnerships with scientific institutions around the world. Forty-two percent of doctoral candidates here come from abroad. As the location most often selected by scholars visiting Germany through the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Freie Universität Berlin is one of the most internationally renowned and popular German research universities.

A YOUNG UNIVERSITY STEEPED IN TRADITION

Freie Universität Berlin is located in the idyllic residential district of Dahlem in the southwest of Germany's capital city. This neighborhood is home to many research institutions, including four Max Planck Institutes, the Zuse Institute Berlin, and the German Federal Institute for Materials Research and Testing. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, following Prussia's plans to establish a "German Oxford," Dahlem developed into a center for research of the highest caliber. The first buildings housed government research agencies and new institutes of what was then known as the University of Berlin. The Kaiser Wilhelm Society – forerunner of the present-day Max Planck Society – was founded in 1911 and established several institutes



Otto Hahn, Lise Meitner, and Fritz Straßmann all conducted research in this building. This is where nuclear fission was first discovered thanks to their rigorous scientific work. Today the Hahn-Meitner Building is home to the Institute of Biochemistry at Freie Universität.

PHOTO: BERND WANNENMACHER

in Dahlem. A dynamic group of scientists carried out pioneering research here that resulted in several Nobel Prizes, including Albert Einstein, Max Planck, and Werner Heisenberg. Since its founding, Freie Universität has used various buildings around Dahlem for teaching, research, and administration. It has also paved the way for new architecturally innovative university buildings.

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE – TIME AND AGAIN

The years 1968, 1990, and 2007 mark milestones in the history of Freie Universität Berlin. The campus was an important focal point of the student protest movement in the 1960s, which sought to achieve greater openness and equality, and spread democratic values. German reunification in 1990 sparked a series of restructuring and improvement measures at Freie Universität Berlin. By placing an emphasis on specific cross-disciplinary research areas, the university managed to boost its research performance considerably. With the highest number of approved funding applications in the German Excellence Initiative, Freie Universität Berlin became one of Germany's "Universities of Excellence" in 2007. In 2012 it succeeded in defending this title in the second round of the Excellence competition. It received the title again through the Excellence Strategy in 2019 as a member of the Berlin University Alliance together with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Technische Universität Berlin, and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin.



A range of specialist subjects in history and cultural studies can be found in the "Holzlaube" Building.

PHOTO: BERND WANNENMACHER



Freie Universität's Botanic Garden is one of the largest of its kind in the world, attracting 300,000 visitors every year.

PHOTO: CHRISTIANE PATIĆ

FACTS AND FIGURES

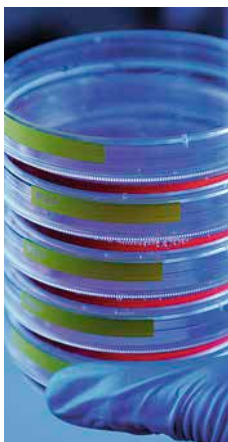
Founded: 1948 | **Students:** approx. 34,500 | **Doctoral researchers:** approx. 3,300 | **Professors:** approx. 500 | **Employees:** approx. 4,350 | **Degree programs:** 180 | **Doctoral programs:** 46 | **Collaborative Research Centers** (funded by the German Research Foundation): 9 hosted by Freie Universität, plus 23 others with strong ties to the university | **Departments and central institutes:** 11 departments, 1 joint medical faculty with Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin: Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, 4 central institutes

RESEARCH SPECIALITIES LIKE NOWHERE ELSE

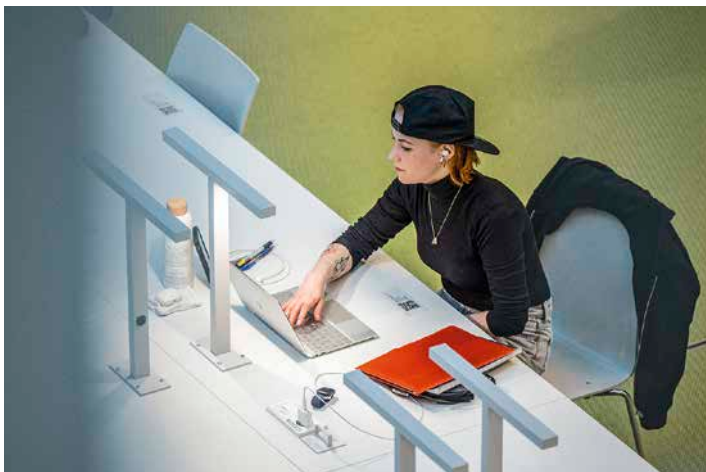
Freie Universität Berlin boasts a breadth of research areas in the humanities that is unparalleled in Germany. The spectrum covers a number of specialized subjects such as Ancient Near Eastern studies, Arabic studies, and Jewish studies. Researchers working in area studies are also well represented here and focus on regions around the world from North America, Latin America, Eastern Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East, to individual European countries. The Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science is one of the leading institutes of its kind in Germany. Additional areas of research at Freie Universität Berlin include physics, mathematics, and computer science, as well as the life sciences and Earth sciences. The range of subjects also covers veterinary medicine – Freie Universität is one of only five sites in Germany offering veterinary education and training. Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin is the joint medical school of Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Freie Universität Berlin is one of the best research universities in Germany.

PHOTOS: ESA/DLR, DAVID AUSSEHOFER, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVE



EDUCATING “CITIZENS OF THE WORLD”



Freie Universität's libraries contain nine million resources, including printed books, e-books, periodicals, and databases. They also provide 3,500 study stations for individuals and groups.

PHOTO: BERND WANNENMACHER

Around 34,500 students are enrolled in the university's 180 different degree programs. The centrally located Student Services Center provides students with advising for all matters related to studying at Freie Universität Berlin. There are also several mentoring programs in place to support students at all stages of their studies. Exchange programs for students have always played an important role at Freie Universität. From its founding and up to today, international partnerships have been at the heart of research and teaching here. Currently, the university benefits from over 200 partnerships with other universities worldwide in addition to another 400 partnerships within the Erasmus+ mobility network with universities across Europe and beyond. The university also maintains connections with roughly seventy-five individual departments and institutes around the globe. The Dahlem Research School organizes structured doctoral programs for ambitious scholars interested in pursuing advanced research.

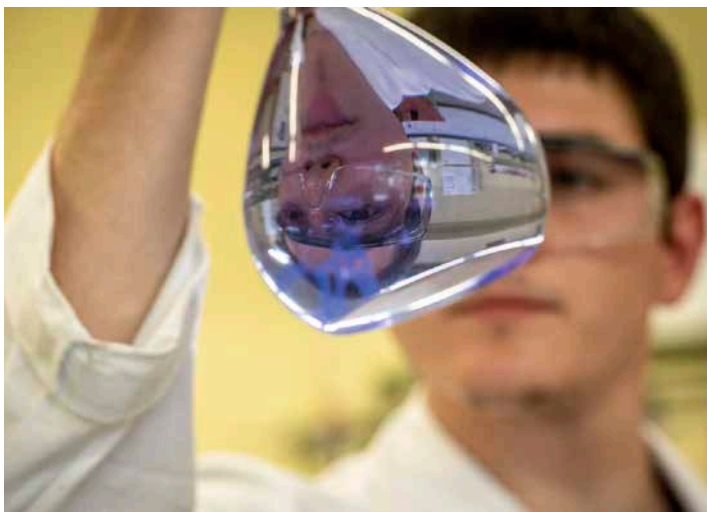
CAREERS, TRAINING, OPPORTUNITIES

Freie Universität Berlin is a major employer in the region with around 460 professors and 2,300 academic research staff members. In addition, approximately 2,400 employees work in management, administration, libraries, IT, veterinary medicine, building services, and landscaping. Freie Universität also provides vocational training for eleven different professions, for example, as an electrician, equine groom, or sports and fitness administrator. The university also has a trainee program for graduates of bachelor's degree programs.

Freie Universität has been the recipient of various employer awards, including awards for the introduction of environmental protection measures and for the exemplary facilitation of equal opportunities at work. The Dual Career and Family Service offers support to employees and students in balancing the responsibilities of family and university life. Freie Universität employees also have access to various offers and services aimed at promoting occupational health.

At Freie Universität Berlin you can receive vocational training in eleven different professions, including as a lab technician or animal caregiver.

PHOTO: BERND WANNENMACHER



OPENING DOORS – TO BERLIN AND THE WORLD



Freie Universität Berlin offers a special program for children during the Long Night of the Sciences.

PHOTO: MICHAEL FAHRIG

Researchers at Freie Universität Berlin regularly open their institutes, laboratories, and libraries to the public, for example, during the Long Night of the Sciences or other open house events. The Center for Cooperation with Schools organizes various activities for schoolchildren in the community, such as its summer university with a range of courses, many in university labs. The university also offers special programs for auditors interested in pursuing life-long learning regardless of their age or educational background. Freie Universität Berlin confers honorary doctorates on outstanding individuals from Germany and abroad. Some include the physicist Lise Meitner, the winners of Nobel Prizes in Literature, Orhan Pamuk and Imre Kertész, as well as the author Salman Rushdie, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry Benjamin List, and author and Holocaust survivor Margot Friedländer. The university has several visiting professorships that bring German and international writers to campus to teach for a semester. Their inaugural lectures are usually open to the public.

Departments

- Biology, Chemistry, Pharmacy
- Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, the medical school jointly operated by Freie Universität and Humboldt-Universität
- Education and Psychology
- Earth Sciences
- History and Cultural Studies
- Mathematics and Computer Science
- Philosophy and Humanities
- Physics
- Political and Social Sciences
- Law
- Veterinary Medicine
- Business and Economics

Central Institutes

- Dahlem School of Education
- John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies
- Institute for Latin American Studies
- Institute for East European Studies

Legal Notice

Freie Universität Berlin
Kaiserswerther Straße 16 – 18
14195 Berlin

www.fu-berlin.de/en

Published by the Office of Communication and Marketing at
Freie Universität Berlin, September 2025