

Freie Universität  Berlin



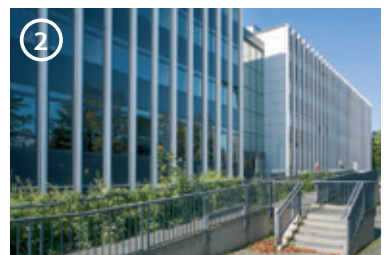
Campus Tour

A walk through history





1
Institute for Latin American Studies (LAI). Erected 1929-1930, designed by Max Taut & Franz Hoffmann as the Reichsknappschaftshaus. Since 1970 LAI of the FU Berlin.



2
Institute of Art History. Erected 1963-1968, designed by Wassili Luckhardt & Joachim Wandelt, initially for veterinary medicine. In 1998, art history moved in.



3
Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science (OSI). Established in 1959. Grew out of the German School of Politics, originally founded in 1920. Photo: The "Red Café" run by political science students.



4
Henry Ford Building of Freie Universität Berlin. Erected 1952-1954, designed by Franz Heinrich Sobotka & Gustav Müller. Includes the Max Kade Auditorium (Audimax) with 1202 seats. Foreground: "Perspectives," sculpture by Volker Bartsch.



5
Department of Law. Erected 1914-1915, designed by Ernst Eberhard von Ihne & Max Guth. Originally, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biology.



6
Hahn-Meitner Building. Erected 1911-1912, designed by Ernst Eberhard von Ihne & Max Guth. Originally, the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry. Since 1948, Freie Universität building. Today, home of the Institute of Chemistry and Biochemistry.



7
Präsidium (Office of the President). Erected 1926-1927, designed by Heinrich Straumer for the fire insurance association. 1945-90 Allied Kommandatura building. Since 1994, home to the University's Executive Board and University Management.



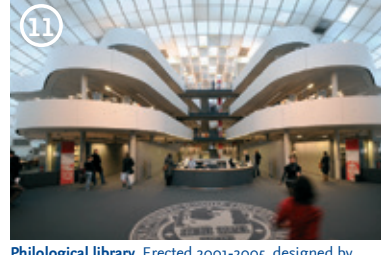
8
International House. Erected 1911-1912, designed by Heinrich Straumer as an entomological museum. Since 1953, used by Freie Universität. Since 2015, part of the International Affairs Division: home to liaison offices of international partner universities.



9
Institute of Philosophy. Erected 1981-1984, designed by Hinrich & Inken Baller.



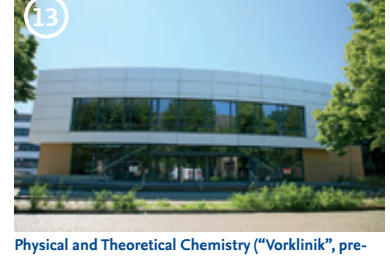
10
Rost- & Silberlaube (Rust & Silver Cabin). Erected 1967-1973 & 1975-1979, designed by Georges Candilis, Alexis Josic, & Shadrach Woods. Remodeled 1999-2007 by Foster + Partners.



11
Philological library. Erected 2001-2005, designed by Sir Norman Foster (Foster + Partners). Nicknamed "The Berlin Brain."



12
New building for the "small subjects" ("Holzlaube", wood cabin). Extension of the Rost- & Silberlaube, erected in 2015, designed by Florian Nagler. Home to 14 "small subjects" and a "campus library" that integrates 24 institute libraries.



13
Physical and Theoretical Chemistry ("Vorklinik", pre-clinic). Erected 1960-1963 as the Physiological Institute of Freie Universität. Transferred to Charité in the 1990s. 2015-2019 renovated and returned to Freie Universität.



14
"Pi Building". Erected in 1979 and extended using rapid construction methods. In 1980, the Institute of Mathematics moved in.



15
Botanic Garden (Tropical Greenhouse). 1903: Garden relocated from Berlin's center to its present location in Steglitz. 1996: Integrated into Freie Universität as an independent central institution.



16
"Startup Villa" (picture: view from behind). Erected in 1912, designed by the Royal Building Councilor Alfred Koerner as the Astronomical Computing Institute. 1973-1994 home to Executive Board of Freie Universität. Since 2015, headquarters of Freie Universität's start-up program, Profund Innovation.



17
Student Service Center (SSC). Erected 2011-2014, designed by braun.busse.architekten. The entrance gate to Freie Universität.



18
John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies (JFKI). Erected 1903-1904, designed by Otto Stahn as an elementary school. Since 1963, "America Institute" of Freie Universität, renamed in honor of Kennedy that same year.

A “New Oxford” in Dahlem

The history of the campus of Freie Universität Berlin begins many years before the university was founded. In 1911, the “Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften” was founded and established on the site of today’s campus. Kaiser Wilhelm II wanted to create a second Oxford.

The cornerstone of this ambitious project was the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Chemistry, where Otto Hahn, the director of the institute, worked for many years with his closest colleague Lise Meitner, the first female professor of physics in Germany. In 1938, Otto Hahn (with Fritz Straßmann) discovered nuclear fission in this building, for which he received the Nobel Prize six years later. Lise Meitner, who was already in exile in Sweden at the time because of her Jewish ancestry, presented the first interpretation of this discovery based in theoretical physics together with Otto Frisch. However, she was left out when the Nobel Prize was awarded. Since 1950, the building, now known as the “Hahn-Meitner-Bau,” has belonged to Freie Universität and houses the Institute of Biochemistry (fig. 6).

The early years of the “Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft” saw the construction of another building that would be important for the beginnings of Freie Universität: the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Biology (fig. 5). At the time, it was a center for the cultivation of 3.7 hectares of land used for animal and plant breeding. In 1948, it became the first building of the newly founded university, including the enrollment office. Today, the Department of Law is located there.

The Foundation of a “Freie Universität”

After the end of World War II, in July 1945, the Allied Kommandatura moved into the building at Kaiserswerther Strasse 16-18 (fig. 7). It was built in 1926 as the headquarters of the Association of Public Fire Insurance Companies and until the early 1990s was the headquarters of the Allied city commanders of Berlin – with the exception of the Soviet representative, who moved out in 1948 as a result of the Cold War. Since 1994, it has been the seat of the Executive Board of Freie Universität Berlin.

Due to the division of Berlin into four sectors, the old Berlin University, now known as Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, found itself located in the Soviet sector after the war. Students openly criticized restrictions to freedom of expression and Communist control of the university, which led to arrests and revoked study permits.

Other students and sympathizers protested against this course of action and called for a politically “free university” to be established in Dahlem, part of the American sector at the time, with the support of the American authorities and West Berlin’s German mayor Ernst Reuter.

After enrollment began in the summer of 1948, an official founding ceremony was held on December 4 in the Titania Palace in Steglitz-Zehlendorf. This date has since been considered the official founding day of Freie Universität Berlin and is celebrated every year as “Ernst Reuter Day”.

Eventful Early Years

Freie Universität evolved rapidly: in the first semester after its founding, the university already had 2130 students; by 1949, the number had risen to nearly 5000. The university also quickly became an internationally renowned university, where a number of formerly exiled German researchers soon returned to teach. Through its International Office, it established numerous contacts with foreign universities, especially in the US. There were exchange programs, guest lectures, and joint research projects. Political science, sociology, and American studies, for example, gained particular renown in the early years.

The year 1963 was a milestone in the history of the university: US President John F. Kennedy visited Berlin on June 26. That morning, Kennedy gave a speech in front of the Schöneberg City Hall, where he famously said “Ich bin ein Berliner”. That afternoon, he was welcomed by an enthusiastic audience of 20,000 people in front of the Henry Ford Building (fig. 4) at Freie Universität. After his assassination in November 1963, the Amerika-Institut was renamed the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies (fig. 18).

Major Historical Events Shape the University

As the center of the West German student movement, Freie Universität once again became the focus of attention in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1968. One of the leaders of the so-called Extra-Parliamentary Opposition was Rudi Dutschke, who was studying at the Otto Suhr Institute of Political Science (fig. 3) at the time. As a result of this movement, numerous reforms took place at the university, including changes to the strict hierarchical structure that characterized universities back then. In the wake of educational reforms, Freie Universität started to become a “mass university” around the early 1970s, which required large new buildings to be constructed.

The “Rostlaube” (rust cabin) of 1973 was followed in 1979 by the “Silberlaube” (silver cabin); both are still among the most famous of the university’s buildings to this day (fig. 10).

After 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall led to a complete restructuring of Berlin’s higher education landscape. The number of spots for students at Freie Universität was drastically reduced; entire study programs were discontinued in favor of Humboldt-Universität, and the two universities’ medical schools merged into one. All of these changes resulted in reducing Freie Universität’s student body to half its previous size.

University of Excellence

After more than 15 years of cuts, reductions, and downsizing, the university built up its reputation, and since the mid-2000s it has established itself as a leading institution for research and teaching. In 2007, it became the first university in Berlin to win the so-called “Excellence Status” in a nationwide competition with its “International Network University” concept. This status was confirmed in 2019, when the university was once again successful in the Excellence Strategy of the Federal and State Governments in conjunction with the Technische Universität, Humboldt-Universität and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin as the Berlin University Alliance.

Two new buildings testify to its regained prowess: the futuristic Philological Library (fig. 11), which was designed by Norman Foster and opened in 2005 as part of the “Rostlaube.” It has since become one of the university’s landmarks. Then, in 2015, the structuralist layout of the rust and silver “cabins” was extended by a new building for the “small disciplines.” The new building, nicknamed the “Holzlaube” (wooden cabin) for its wooden shuttering, follows the architectural principles of the other two cabins with long central axes, lounge areas, and inner courtyards (fig. 12). Connected to it is the Campus Library, in which 24 individual libraries have been combined to form the university’s largest library collection. All in all, this building complex is one of the most interdisciplinary locations in all of Berlin.

History

1911	“Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften” established in Dahlem
1938	Discovery of nuclear fission in what is today the Hahn-Meitner Building (Biochemistry)
1945	End of World War II; Allies move into the Allied Kommandatura (now the Präsidium building)
1948	Call for the founding of Freie Universität Berlin on July 28, founding ceremony on December 4
1963	US President John F. Kennedy visits Berlin
1968	Height of the student movement, Freie Universität as a center of Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO)
from 1970	Development into a mass university
1989	Fall of the Berlin Wall
from 1990	Restructuring of the Berlin university system, downsizing of Freie Universität
2007	Success in the first federal Excellence Initiative for the “International Network University” concept
2012	Renewal of Excellence Status
2019	Successful application in the federal Excellence Strategy together with TU Berlin, HU Berlin and Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin as the “Berlin University Alliance”

Do you have questions or would you like to learn more about our campus?

Don't hesitate to contact us:

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