



Vienna
Private University

Webster Vienna Private University

Strategic Plan 2016 – 2022 Executive Summary

Approved by the
University Council of Webster Vienna Private University on September 26, 2016
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der Webster University (St. Louis, USA) on October 07, 2016

1. Executive Summary

Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU) is undergoing the most comprehensive transformative innovation process in its 35-year history; one that will require continued diligence for years to come. Guided by the academic imperative to fulfill the standards of the Qualification Framework for the European Higher Education Area spelled out in the Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) Board's administrative decision of October 7, 2015, the university revised its governance structure and updated its academic procedures, paving the way forward for the current planning period. These steps constitute the first in a series of planned actions.

In the chapters that follow, we lay out our objectives, the necessary development steps, measures, and action plan required for repositioning the institution over the long-term. In each case, we identify realistic milestones in order to ensure proper quality control. For purposes of editorial style and enhanced readability throughout the text, the legally applicable name Webster Vienna Private University is interchangeably referred to with its acronym WVPU or simply 'the university'. Likewise, Webster University, based in the US and consisting of extended sites and daughter institutions around the world, is often referred to as the 'parent university'. At no point does the use of any of these terms imply that Webster Vienna Private University is not an Austrian registered private university.

The following strategic plan delivers three key messages. First, it addresses all 16 points critically raised by the expert reviewers as summarized in the AQ Austria Board's administrative decision, demonstrates a comprehensive understanding and acceptance of those critiques, and addresses them in full, with a sober analysis and clear action plan based on achievable milestones. Second, it takes into account the university's unique status as the only American-based university in Vienna and its important role within Webster University's international network, the heritage of which WVPU is eminently proud, while simultaneously integrating into the European Higher Education Area. Third, it demonstrates that the core business of the university, namely the education of its students, is financially sound and continues to receive the unwavering patronage of its parent university. Together these three messages form the foundation for WVPU to execute the reforms necessary to excel in the Austrian higher education environment.

WVPU holds a distinctive position in the Austrian and broader European tertiary education sector. Its founding roots in a US-based university create a special and permanent relationship that shapes the interactions between the university and its parent. As the only private university dually accredited in the United States and Austria, it faces a unique set of challenges and opportunities. Its American features include undergraduate programs that incorporate a subject-diverse education that focuses on building global citizens through general education in the arts and sciences, while its graduate programs produce specialized and functional expertise and prepare students for advanced post-graduate studies. Its global network of campuses allows US degrees and credits to be earned at multiple locations providing a system of student and faculty mobility that greatly enhances the cosmopolitan nature of its academic programs and creates unique opportunities to integrate the research activities of faculty within the network and the broader scientific communities where they reside. It methodically focuses on programs from business administration and finance, to communications, psychology and international relations where US higher education plays a leading role and maintains faculty to student ratios that allow it to maximize individual student support, growth, and placement creating opportunities for its graduates.

The high quality and accessibility of the Austrian and broader European university landscape, specifically the European Research Area and the Bologna process, poses profound challenges to the university's success. Not only must the university compete for students in a highly competitive educational market that includes public universities, universities of applied sciences (FHs) and private universities, it must also develop a strategic orientation and profile that positions it to succeed in a financially sustainable manner and deliver value-added to the research and teaching community in Austria. Achieving this will require clearly defined and documented milestones and procedures that must be monitored, adjusted, and corrected whenever necessary through a persistent process of internal and external evaluation to meet market needs and international standards. University actions and decisions must actively involve all of its stakeholders and be reflected in the recruitment and evaluation of its staff and students. The university's strategy, therefore, focuses on maximizing the best qualities of its American heritage and its Austrian locale by focusing on educational quality and opportunities, professional responsibility, and instituting a new governance structure and management culture.

WVPU provides its students with a unique global-oriented and personalized education that prepares them for success in an increasingly complex and changing world. Students better prepared and integrated into state-of-the-art, thematically relevant research are better equipped to face real-world challenges regardless of their field of work. Its five unique selling points ([1] dual accreditation in the US and Austria, [2] small class sizes and a culture of mentorship, [3] a special mix of researchers and practitioners that provide students with the necessary skills for post-education success, [4] a global network that provides mobility and leverages a large pool of researchers, and [5] publicly engaged faculty that open doors for the university's graduates) are complemented by its nascent development of research foci and its reputedly strong placement rate for its graduates. To maximize the benefit of these comparative advantages for its students, the university must enhance its scholarly rigor, become leaner, more efficient, and financially sustainable. Achieving this will require a goal-based approach.

This plan identifies seven overarching goals for the planning period, some of which are already complete and the rest of which are well underway. These include (1) fulfilling all conditions necessary for re-accreditation in Austria, (2) implementing the Humboldtian educational model, (3) continuously strengthening the academic quality and reputation of our core degree programs, (4) establishing a research focused unique selling point, (5) improving the university's market position, (6) maintaining a global horizon, and (7) executing a financially sustainable business plan. Addressing the most important matters of governance, accountability, academic freedom, and programmatic rigor, this goal-based transformation has already begun and, as part of its new governance structure, improved review and assessment procedures have become standard features of the university's management and operations.

In order to enhance the institution's academic standing and provide guidance for necessary action we identify several internal objectives that must be achieved prior to 2022. These include increasing academic reputation via research output, strengthening the financial viability of each program and department, ensuring that students are provided with the proper training in research design, theory, and methods while not overburdening the faculty in the process of implementing the universal thesis requirement, fostering mentorship by increasing research and training scholarships in academic departments, enhancing procedures behind course-planning, and carefully evaluating the merits of providing additional degree offerings. Progress is already being made on many fronts. Following a

series of reforms implemented over the last year, all of WVPU's degree programs are now fully compliant with the Qualification Framework of the European Higher Education Area. Some programs and concentration areas were retired and admissions criteria adjusted to benefit students and programs. However, the overall stability of student numbers indicates that the university's programs are well situated in the Austrian and CEE academic marketplace. The university will focus on consolidating and augmenting existing programs in the coming years before considering the introduction of any new ones. With the addition of new research faculty, the harmonization of academic rigor across all degree programs is well underway. Nevertheless, more needs to be done in the areas of mentorship and deeper student engagement in faculty research.

Understood in the broader context of its history in Vienna, WVPU has undergone paradigm shift in intellectual and pedagogical culture. The parent university is committed to the full implementation of the Boyer model of scholarship, which incorporates teaching, research, and services as vital components of an effective university. This enables WVPU to embrace the Humboldtian model of higher education that consequently fosters lasting linkages between teaching and research. The university is cultivating and investing in research and developed a comprehensive research concept that identifies six related goals. These include (1) increasing scholarly output, (2) expanding participation in professional networks and collaborative research projects, (3) acquiring more research funding, (4) comprehensively integrating faculty research in theses, (5) raising the number of cross-departmental theses, and (6) intensifying cross-departmental research collaboration for which its small size provides a useful laboratory. The university's overarching institutional research focus is the Social and Behavioral Sciences. Although its research funding goals are modest and like the rest of the plan, highly conservative, the university will work toward the incremental acquisition of external funding leading to € 500,000 per annum by 2022. Greater flexibility in teaching schedules and research sabbaticals will be introduced to make time for the preparation of research proposals. Meanwhile, a system of performance agreements with departments and faculty together with additional external key performance indicators to monitor and evaluate progress will aid in the planning and assessing of research activities and output; and the university will continue to increase its own financing for research activity and travel, invest in infrastructure, and help disseminate faculty research to increase their and the institution's visibility raising the scholarly reputation of the institution as a whole.

WVPU is better poised than any time in its history to meet the requirements of accreditors on two continents and the obligations vested in its global educational mission. It transformed its governance structure to come into compliance with Austrian private university law and installed new structures fulfilling the requirements of that law to secure its autonomy and institutional integrity. It changed its processes of executive decision making from a single individual to a collective and democratic board of qualified officers that answer to a supervisory board that oversees the interests of the owners of the Association. Faculty, staff, and students are now fully integrated into the university's governance structure. The university's new leadership is well positioned in Austria and the United States, trusted by the parent university, and endowed with the authority to continue reforming the institution.

Nevertheless, there is a pressing need for better oversight and coordination of the university's administration. The overall administration needs streamlining and consolidation, clearer chains of command, functionally dedicated personnel, and more frequent and in depth cooperation and coordination. Academic department heads oversee curricula, faculty research activities, and are responsible for the integrity and reputation of the academic programs and controlling budgets.

However, course planning remains technologically rudimentary and must be reformed. In revising its administrative activities, the Executive Board will consistently apply the overarching management principle of subsidiarity, locating services and responsibilities as close to the source as possible. New planning and reporting rules will strengthen oversight and deepen coordination with marketing, PR as well as alumni relations. The administration of student services will be revamped and consolidated into a Student Resource Center. Most importantly, academic program needs will determine the focus of marketing and recruitment strategies in the future and, therefore, university management has mandated a series of recruitment/admissions-related actions from program specific recruitment to substantially increasing international coordination with sister recruiting offices and departments.

WVPU's success hinges on the performance of its personnel, without whom the university could not deliver high quality education to its students or meet rigorous international standards of research. Its working culture is imbued with American and Austrian values toward academic freedom and opportunity that effectively promotes and rewards results-oriented performance leading to job-satisfaction. The university increased the number of employed faculty over the last five years by 63% and doubled the number of its scientific staff. It also added non-academic personnel. As a result, the institution has grown to become a medium sized business with close to 70 employees. Although the current ratio of non-academic staff to scientific staff and particularly employed faculty is not optimal, it does allow the university to guarantee that employed faculty and other scientific staff teach more than 50% of its courses. WVPU will continue to work toward the goal of having at least 50% of the university's employed scientific staff working in employed faculty positions by 2021. To achieve this, the university must assess and redefine job descriptions in accordance with the clearly and functionally defined job categories spelled out in WVPU's Constitution and establish an appropriate and transparent pay scale system that both secures gender equality and provides an attractive environment for its employees; an exercise that will require utmost professionalism and diligence. At present, 58% of WVPU's employees are female and women constitute 37% of employed faculty, percentages that are above average for the sector. Nevertheless, WVPU's strategy moving forward will prioritize increasing the share of female research faculty even further.

Webster Vienna Private University's core business of educating students is sound. It generates its income almost exclusively from tuition paid by students per credit hour and it will take several years to balance the cost increases associated with investments in infrastructure and quality with increased tuition and research income. Our six-year (2016 – 2022) financial plan projects a conservatively estimated overall growth in tuition and research revenue over the six-year period of 32% while direct costs rise by 27% due to the strategy to strengthen scientific personnel together with commensurate increases in operating costs. WVPU thereby expects to balance its operational budget (including the losses of the student dormitory operations) by 2020. The financial plan reflects modest growth in student numbers, and projected increases in credit hour based revenues as well as income from research activities developed over the next years. The university's overall objective is to improve its yearly accounts step-by-step maintaining a small deficit until 2020 putting it on path to achieve financial self-sustainability several years later. As part of its patronage commitment and global strategic plan, Webster University in St. Louis is committed to and agrees with this plan. Thus, WVPU is guaranteed a secure source of funding for at least the next six years and well into the future, a point irrefutably demonstrated by its investments in local campus real estate.

Still, for its core business to thrive, WVPU must offer the right programs in the best possible way. Connected to its core business is its immediate presence and engagement in Vienna and in Austria. It is imperative that WVPU makes an impact on the Austrian educational landscape. It needs to continuously improve and increase its research output, to build networks, and to cooperate with local and regional partners creating opportunities for the university and its students. WVPU's six-year strategic plan incorporates these ideas in broad context without irrational exuberance, but rather with conservative and prudent recognition of the challenges and limitations that lie ahead. Maintaining its dual accreditation in the United States and Austria remains a vital component of its mission. Upholding that standard means full compliance with two distinct systems, a challenge for any institution, but a prerequisite for a global one.

Finally, the university's ongoing reforms begin with its leadership. The first change made in the last year was the installment of new management and governance structures. This strategic plan is the outcome of close coordination with all of the university's relevant stakeholders and that new leadership. It takes into account new and carefully designed approaches in marketing and recruitment, stricter management of resources, a rebalancing of personnel costs and a reorganization of the administrative structures, and enhanced liberty and accountability of the degree-granting programs. The plan is conservative, prudent, and aware of the increasing error associated with future projections. It sets the annual growth of its core valuation unit (credit hours studied by students) at 3% per annum and establishes new levels of analysis to revisit those projections on a frequent basis. Most importantly of all, it recognizes that the underlying premise of why students choose WVPU must be the high quality educational and professional opportunities that await them. So long as this remains valid, the university remains true to its mission and poised to succeed.