

Dieser Artikel ist ein Preprint. Die publizierte Version kann sich leicht von der vorliegenden Version unterscheiden. Die Finalversion finden Sie unter Gindl M., Pellert A. (2007). Gender Equity and Higher Education Reform in Austria. In: Danovitz Sagaria Mary Ann (Ed.): Women, Universities, and Change. Gender Equality in the European Union and the United States. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (pp. 61-72).

Gender Equity and Higher Education Reform in Austria

Ada Pellert

Danube University Krems – University of Continuing Education, Austria

and

Michaela Gindl

Department for Higher Education Research, Faculty for Interdisciplinary Studies of the

University of Klagenfurt, Austria

### Gender Equity and Higher Education Reform in Austria

Since the 1970s, the Austrian universities<sup>1</sup> have slowly but steadily become “feminised.” The 1970s were characterised by an immense expansion of the Austrian universities in terms of both the facilities and personnel. Greater options for participation increased the plurality of scientific approaches and modernisation of the “research landscape,” and democratisation of participation for assistants and students moved to the centre of higher education policy. In this context, providing more access for women was not an explicit political goal of reform. Nevertheless, the widening participation of women in the tertiary sector led to a substantial increase of female participation at the universities as well. The rate of women increased, for example, among the first year students from 30% in the academic year 1970/71 to 53% in the academic year 2002/03.

A review of the 10-year history of promotion of women in science and research in the state-run higher education system of Austria shows that women have increased their participation in tertiary education and that the representation of women in science and research has improved. The legal and programmatic measures as well as scholarships offered by the Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture have led both to an improved gender-ratio, even in higher positions, and to awareness about the situation of women in science and research, but the expected outcomes have fallen short of those necessary to effect gender equity owing to

---

<sup>1</sup> The overall population of Austria in the year 2004 was 8,171.244. Number of universities: until 2004, Austria had 12 Scientific Universities and 7 Universities of Arts; after a new University Act became effective in 2004, the number of universities increased to 21.

unfavourable economic conditions, a bureaucratic system, and traditional organizational cultures. A more detailed analysis of progress toward gender equality, however, reveals that the results are mixed and continued change is necessary. Although women still dominate in certain less prestigious disciplines, such as the humanities, both the leaky pipeline and the glass ceiling persist in Austrian universities.

In order to derive holistic strategies to promote women in science and research in Austria, agents of higher education policy must consider the broader cultural context in which it is embedded:

- The Austrian higher education system is changing, adopting a new steering model comprised of (1) managerialism, deregulation, and competition; (2) institutional budgetary autonomy as well as personal and organisational autonomy; and (3) a new steering instrument of goal/output-agreements, reports, indicator-based budgets, and university boards.
  - The employment system at universities is stagnant. In the 1970s, when the system expanded, there was a lack of qualified women; now, many qualified women are “available,” but the jobs are not.
  - The Austrian culture is conservative. The general consensus is that women should have a good education, but they are not expected to advance beyond the first degree. Childcare policies create expectations for women to do considerable family work while still engaging in the labour market.
  - The integration of Austria into the European Union has helped to reduce gender inequality. EU-policies force Austria to compare its performance in terms of gender
-

equity with other European countries—and Austria does poorly (She Figures, 2003; Pechar & Pellert, 2004). In addition, the European integration of gender equity emphasises the “economic argument.” To achieve the Lisbon goals<sup>2</sup>, the EU needs more researchers, and a large pool of highly qualified female researchers is available for employment.

Austria’s conservative cultural and social traditions strongly influence gender discourses and attitudes towards female participation in the labour market and familial task sharing.<sup>3</sup> This has some important consequences: women are not explicitly and broadly supported or empowered to advance in terms of job. By European standards, Austria clearly has low participation and graduation rates in higher education for both men and women. For example, in the year 2001, only 12% of the population over 15 years hold a tertiary education degree (Wroblewski et al., 2005). In a comparison by the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development [OECD], Austria ranks fourth from last among 30 countries (OECD, 2003).

#### Background: Higher Education Policy and Reforms

Until the late 1960s, Austrian universities were essentially organised according to the Humboldtian model. Universities were state-owned and government-run agencies. Academics were civil servants appointed by the Minister of Education, Science, and Culture. The government made the most important decisions regarding admission and curricula. As long as universities remained small elite institutions, this heavy dependency on the state rarely had negative consequences for academics. Top civil servants and members of the academic oligarchy informally made many of the

---

<sup>2</sup> The Council of the European Union agreed in Barcelona (2002) on objectives in order to support the achievement of the “Lisbon Goals“ (2000). The Lisbon Goals aim at the reorganisation of the European Union until 2010 into the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic area of the world who is capable to reach continuing growth, full employment, and broader und coherence”).

<sup>3</sup>As in many other European countries, marriage rates decline and the rates of cohabitations increase. Currently, 43 of 100 legal marriages will culminate in divorce in Austria. Sixteen percent of the Austrian families are single educators; most of them single mothers. See <http://www.statistik.at>

important decisions. Academic freedom was regarded primarily as an individual right given only to academics at the top of the hierarchy: full professors. Within the traditional chair system (Ordinarienuniversität), each chair holder was personally responsible for his academic domain with other academics in that domain being, in some way, personally dependent on the professor.

The expansion of universities in the 1970s irreversibly ended this traditional concept of the Humboldtian university. The first reform cycle intended to open up the ivory tower of the former age. The “opening” was intended to widen participation for students from social backgrounds whose access higher education formerly had been blocked. It also added new fields of study, especially in the social sciences and humanities, that had been denied academic “respectability.” Furthermore, new forms of decision-making were established that more evenly distributed academic authority among the various groups within the university, extending to professors without chair, assistants, and students.

The process of opening and democratisation culminated in the University Organisation Act of 1975 (Universitätsorganisationsgesetz 1975, UOG). In legal terms, this act marked the end of the old regime of the chair holders (Ordinarienuniversität) and the beginning of a much more complex and formalized system of academic decision making, which included the middle ranks of academics (Mittelbau, including assistants and assistant professors, or außerordentliche Professoren/Professorinnen) and students. Because power was now shared by different academic *estates*, this new type of academic organisation was labelled *group university* (Gruppenuniversität) (Neave & Rhoades, 1987). It was supposed that, within those groups, the interests and beliefs of all members were quite homogeneous. The new act attempted to create a just and balanced kind of equality by means of formal legal procedures. In order to consider every aspect, these legal

procedures became extremely complicated and made the university one of the most complex institutions of Austrian society (Welan, 1995).

The debate concerning this organisational reform was extremely controversial. The government was the driving force behind UOG 1975 with support coming from Mittelbau and students and the majority of professors actively opposing the reform. However, the implementation of the UOG 1975 neither caused the collapse of Austrian universities, as some conservative critics predicted, nor did it lead to a more rational and transparent decision making process. At the institutional level, faculty rectors and deans remained weak. These *monocratic organs*, such as rectors and deans, had little authority except to execute the decisions of the respective collegial body made up of senate, faculty, and institute committees. A strong monocratic organ existed only at the level of the basic unit (Institut) with the chair holder (i.e., professor).

During the 1980s, student numbers continued to grow far beyond the levels that had been forecast only a few years earlier. However, due to fiscal constraints, public expenditures for universities could not keep pace with the growth of student numbers. Only minimal additional income came from private sources because Austrian universities were not allowed to charge fees, and third party funding was low. These circumstances necessitated that university administrations improve their efficiency. Because they had been state-run for many centuries, Austrian universities did not have an entrepreneurial tradition; however, beginning in the 1980s, the strong paternalistic tradition in Austrian politics was undermined, and by the late 1980s, the demand for greater autonomy of universities became one of the primary issues of higher education policy, thereby inviting entrepreneurial reform strategies.

University autonomy has been interpreted very differently by various actors, especially in the distinctions they make between the concepts of individual autonomy and institutional autonomy. In the Humboldtian tradition, autonomy was synonymous with academic freedom of the individual academic, i.e., the full professor. Many professors saw this kind of autonomy endangered both by state intervention and by the academic co-determination of the students and Mittelbau. From the professorial perspective, *autonomy* was a buzzword for restoration of the “old regime” of the Ordinarienuniversität.

Embracing the notion of autonomy as *institutional autonomy*, on the other hand, meant that universities were now self-governed enterprises with respect to academic, financial, and administrative affairs. Many academics and students claimed that Austrian universities were perfectly able to take on this responsibility. However, politicians and state bureaucrats as well as a minority of academics seriously doubted that the existing decision-making structures were adequate for the new tasks. They argued that increased institutional autonomy should go hand in hand with the development of a professional management (Bast, 1991; Höllinger, 1992).

After two drafts of a new law were rejected by the interest groups of academics and students in December 1992, a draft for a new organisational act, a “*White Paper*” was published. It outlined a traditional chair structure consisting of a multitude of small institutes, many of them with only one professor, that remained basically unchanged. After a review process, the new act, UOG 1993, was passed by Parliament in October 1993. Like its predecessor, the UOG 1975, it was one of the most divisive and heatedly discussed legal acts in Austria. In the academic year 1994/95, the UOG 1993 was implemented in five universities; in 1995/96, another five implemented the new act, and in 1996/97 the remaining two universities followed.

One of the primary goals of the UOG 1993 was to improve the efficiency of the universities by giving them greater institutional autonomy in order to replace very complex structures that could no longer be governed well centrally. The greater institutional autonomy was expected to foster organizational creativity and innovation in response to market competition. However, adverse conditions limited reform. Financing was driven by neither performance nor enrolment, financial autonomy remained low, and offering financial incentives was generally not feasible in a time of budget cuts. The civil service laws coupled with Austrian bureaucracy's paternalistic traditions and fear of losing control allowed only a modest increase in personal autonomy. The minister and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture used their formal authority to try to bring about the reform but faced much resistance. Despite the limited effectiveness of early reform attempts, women's participation in Austrian universities increased, necessitating more concentrated efforts to incorporate gender equity measures into the reform process.

#### Managerialism: The Current Situation in Higher Education

As a result of further reform measures, namely the University Act 2002 (Universitätsgesetz 2002)<sup>4</sup>, Austrian universities are undergoing far-reaching reform in the areas of managerialism, new governance, and autonomy. Effective 2004, each university receives a general budget and acts as the employer of university staff, with the employment conditions now governed by private law. The internal decision-making structures have also been significantly modified (Pellert, 2003). This shift from a state-run to an autonomous university brings with it fundamental shifts in organizational and policy paradigms and as an additional consequence equality policy. With this redesign in governance, universities have become actors in various areas in which the Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture had previously assumed a

---

<sup>4</sup> University Act 2002, <http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/start.asp?bereich=7&OID=4327&l1=1101&l2=1108&l3=4256>

controlling role. Consequently, instruments for gender equality have been brought “closer” to the institution resulting new steering modes, such as indicators, performance contracts, and/or evaluations to assess women’s opportunities in all areas of teaching and research. New models of affirmative action include legal regulations for equity, the establishment of institutes for affirmative action inside universities, incentive programs (prizes and financial rewards), and expectations for accountability. At the same time, the UOG 2002 calls for new mechanisms for monitoring and oversight that have yet to be implemented and into which the gender dimension is to be integrated.

Austrian universities are only at the beginning of the so-called managerial revolution: new management posts have been created and existing ones, such as rectorships, have been strengthened. The new managerialism represents an important opportunity to incorporate gender equality. Austrian universities must develop new attitudes and processes of organizational functioning, such as forming communities, teams, and projects. Such a shift in norms and structures is crucial for universities to function as organizations rather than as multiple individualized decision-making entities. Only with such a shift in orientation and structure will there likely be an acknowledgement that organizations are gendered and that organizational processes and structures create both gender inequalities and equalities. It remains to be seen how the autonomous universities’ responsibilities for promoting and advancing women will be translated into practice.

#### Core Problems for Women in Science and Research in Austria<sup>5</sup>

##### *Status of Women*

---

<sup>5</sup> The following section is based on the research carried out during the project *Evaluation of Measures for the Promotion of Women in Science and Research in Austria* (Wroblewski et al., 2005), which will be released in 2005.

With the expansion of the educational system, young women increasingly pass the general qualification<sup>6</sup> for entering the higher education. The concentration of women in business, economics, and secondary education in schools influences women's choices of study in universities. Female students predominate for first degrees in the humanities, social and economic sciences, and in veterinarian/human medicine but are underrepresented in the technological areas. For example, the rate of women among first-year students in the academic year 2001/02 (Wroblewski et al, 2005) were as follows:

Veterinary Medicine	86.0%
Humanities	77.0%
Medicine	67.0%
Natural Sciences	63.5%
Law	60.5%
Social and Economic Sciences	52.7%
Technology	30.9%

Women number fewer than a third among the technology students while occupying anywhere from half to over 85% of the student positions in other programs.

#### *Leaky Pipeline and Glass Ceiling as Part of the University Culture*

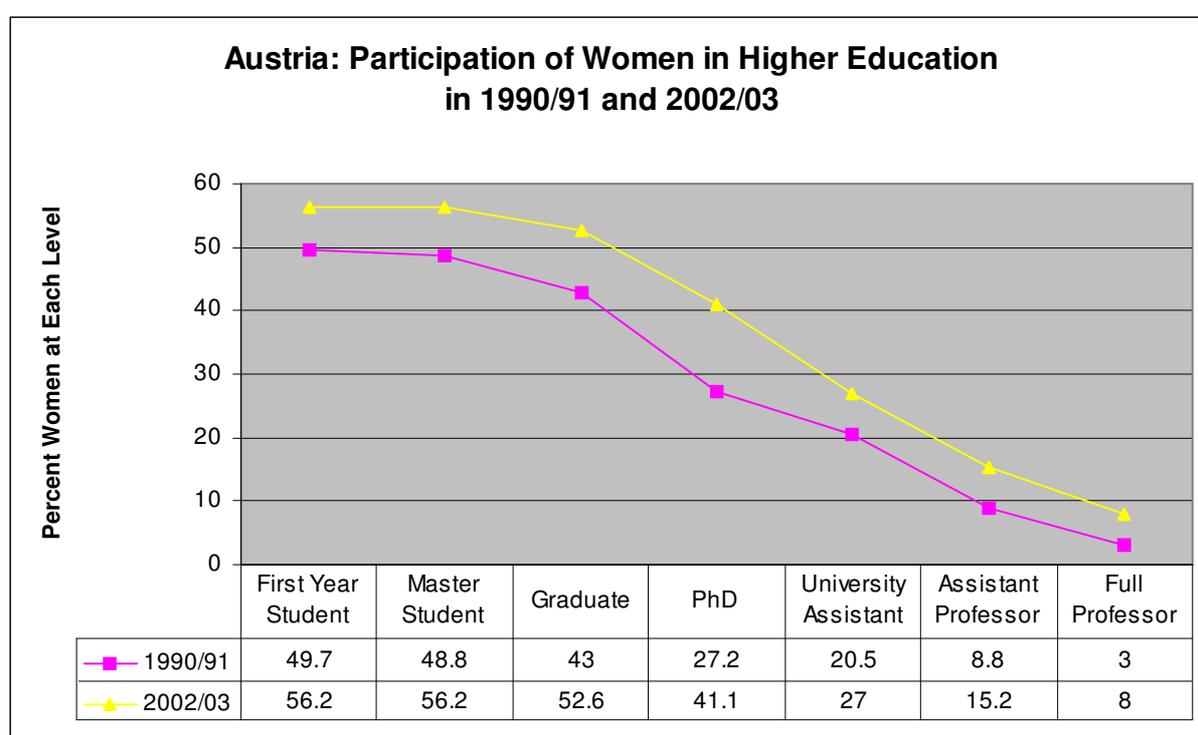
Aside from showing the disparity of women's participation in technology versus other programs, the aforementioned enrolment figures show that women have indeed caught up in terms of access to the university system. In the academic year 1990/01, 49.7% of the first-year students were female, and the rate of women graduates was 43%. In comparison to the number of females with first degrees, the rate of women doctorates was only 27.2%. Until the academic

---

<sup>6</sup> Usually, a general qualification for university entrance (Matura) is reached after passing the final exam of a comprehensive secondary school

year 2002/03, the rate of women steadily increased: 56.2% of the first-year students were female and the rate of women graduates was 52.2%. In addition, the number of female doctorates rose significantly to 41.1% (see Figure 1). Nevertheless, women less frequently begin and/or finish a doctoral thesis and have a higher dropout rate than that of their male colleagues (Statistik Austria, 2004).

Figure 1.



Although the majority of beginning students are women, few women are full professors. The probability of a women becoming university professors is incomparably lower than it is for a male academic. The rate of women habilitating<sup>7</sup> was only 19.2% in the year 2001. Ten years earlier in the 1990/91 academic year, females represented 3.0% of the full professors at scientific

(Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schule or Gymnasium) or a school providing vocational education (Berufsbildende Höhere Schule).

<sup>7</sup> Habilitation is a qualification step consisting of an advanced scientific publication (elaborating on perennial research) and a final hearing in order to be formally allowed to apply for a professorship. Although now formally abolished, habilitation is still the main prerequisite of becoming a professor.

universities, yet by the 2002/03 academic year, that number had increased to only 8% (see Figure 1). The combined rate of female professors at the scientific universities and universities of arts<sup>8</sup> reached 11.6% in 2003 (Statistik Austria, 2004). In the natural sciences, technology, and social sciences, the rate of professors has remained lowest. Moreover, in an international comparison, Austria has the lowest rate of female professors in natural sciences, in engineering, and in the social sciences. In the humanities, only Belgium has a lower rate of female professors; in Medicine Austria is in the midfield (She Figures, 2003).

The rigid scientific career scheme of Austrian universities contributes to inferior career opportunities for women. The hierarchical system rarely acknowledges members of the scientific community and considers individuals “young scientists” until their habilitation at about 40, the average age of habilitation. Although formally abolished, habilitation continues to be a prerequisite for a university career. Considered from a legal perspective, habilitation is no longer a obligatory requirement for becoming a full professor. Informally, it is still a qualification which is necessarily required. And under the new University Act 2002, scientists have less time to achieve this qualification<sup>9</sup>. This may create an added barrier for women by expecting them to meet both important private obligations, such as giving birth and rearing children, and professional ones at the same time. Moreover, often women are not promoted and supported in the same way in accomplishing and finishing their habilitation theses as their male colleagues are. The pivotal phenomenon of *homosocial reproduction* (Kanter, 1977), or *male homosociability* (Witz & Savage, 1992), which suggests that men can and commonly do seek

---

<sup>8</sup> The Austrian University system differentiates between scientific Universities (Social Sciences, Humanities, Law, Medicine, Engineering, Natural Sciences, etc.) and the Universities of Arts (Universities for applied and visual arts and for music).

<sup>9</sup> Under the University Act 2002, all employments – except the employment as full professor – are temporary. Now, a “young scientist” who envisions a career as full professor has 4 years time to finish her/his PhD as an “University Assistant”. After this, she/he can apply again for another 6 years as “Assistant Professor”, the time dedicated to achieve the qualifications to become “professorable”. Therefore scientists have only 10 years – instead of unlimited as it was often the case before – time to acquire the prerequisites to become a full professor; and informally habilitation is still a part of this prerequisites.

satisfaction for most of their needs from other men, is a highly relevant conceptual framework for understanding the persistence of the gender order in academia not only in Austria but elsewhere in the EU and United States. Austria's conservative cultural and social traditions strongly influence gender discourses and attitudes towards female participation in the labour market and familial task sharing. Such traditions, if allowed to continue, have some important consequences: women are neither explicitly and broadly supported nor empowered to advance in their careers.

The culture of university and academic life perpetuate a glass ceiling. As students, women are accepted as recipients of university services, but the producers of these services, university scholars, continue to be principally men. Female students, regardless of their discipline, find few female role models among the professoriate. In contrast, administrative staff members are overwhelmingly female except at the highest ranks of the hierarchy. Despite the increasing number of female academic professionals, an optimal situation for gender equity will take several decades if one trusts in a natural transformation from a male dominated organization to a gender-balanced organization.

#### Measures for the Advancement of Women

Owing to the reform movement embodied in the University Organization Acts beginning in 1975 and culminating in 2002, gender mainstreaming has begun to take hold in various forms: federal legislation; university policy and oversight; programs, scholarships and awards; national reports; gender mainstreaming tools; and collaboration with business and industry. Judging by the number of women attending university, Austria has successfully increased women's access to higher education. With an open policy, women from diverse social backgrounds are increasingly able to study at universities. Gender mainstreaming policies also promote the employment of

women not only in administration where numbers are currently improved but in academia as well, especially at the higher echelons.

### *Legislative Measures*

During the 1990s, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture and the universities initiated several measures to promote equal opportunity. Legal procedures were implemented in 1990 to reach a balanced ratio between the number of male and female employees in both the Ministry and universities. This goal was supported by a ban on gender discrimination, implementation of affirmative measures, a qualification-oriented quota system for admission to the federal service, and the appointment of persons and institutions responsible for equal treatment matters.

Since the mid-1990s, there has been an increased effort to coordinate policy strategies. The *White Paper for the Promotion of Women in Science (Weißbuch zur Förderung von Frauen in der Wissenschaft)*, for example, is a key programmatic document. Developed in 1999 by the Ministry of Science in cooperation with female experts from the university and non-university sectors, the *White Paper* contains measures and recommendations, some which already have been partially implemented, to increase the support and promotion of women as well as to improve the general conditions of science, research, and art. These legal and programmatic approaches have been augmented by financial and other forms of support for individuals. In order to be able to reduce hidden and indirect discriminations, the *White Paper* considers preferential treatment, or positive discrimination, of disadvantaged women as indispensable.

To provide both protection from discrimination as well as regulations intended to advance women, the Federal Government Equal Opportunities Act has established a 40% target quota of women in all employment groups within Federal agencies since 1993. This goal is to be achieved

through preferential employment, promotion, training, and the education of women. When Austria began implementation of the University Act 2002 to create autonomous universities in January 2004, the 40% target quota of women stipulated earlier in Federal Government Equal Opportunities Act was integrated into University Act 2002<sup>10</sup> with three especially relevant measures: (1) the equal treatment of women and men is considered a guiding principle of university policy, (2) each university must enact an affirmative action plan, and (3) each university must have an organisational unit to coordinate equal treatment and promotion of women and gender studies.

#### *University Policies and Legal Regulations*

Charged with counteracting gender-based discrimination at the university level, The Working Committee on Equal Treatment (Arbeitskreis für Gleichbehandlungsfragen) is at the core of the legal regulations of Austrian Universities. Retaining its same basic structure since 1990, The Working Committee is entitled to participate in all employment-related procedures. For example, if sexual discrimination is presumed, the Working Committee has the right to raise an objection, in which case the respective employment procedure is interrupted as long as the responsible authorities deciding on the employment comply with the objection raised by the committee. If the employment authority does not answer to the committee's objection, the Working Committee could, according to the Federal Act on the Organisation of the Universities 1993, file a complaint with the Federal Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture. According to the University Act 2002, an internal arbitration commission has the final say. In addition to the capabilities of the Working Committee, the University Act 2002 contains new mechanisms that

---

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/8019/8019\\_ug02\\_engl.pdf](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/medienpool/8019/8019_ug02_engl.pdf)

have yet to be implemented, such as outputs, evaluation, and indicators, for which the gender dimension still remains to be integrated.

*Programs, Scholarships, and Awards to Promote Women*

Several programs, scholarships, and awards are in place to support women in research. Specifically targeting women academics, The Charlotte Bühler Fellowships for Habilitation<sup>11</sup> and the Hertha Firnberg Programme<sup>12</sup> were both established in 1992 to provide financial support for a period of 12 to 36 months for women who are beginning their scientific careers, who have just taken a childcare break, or who are completing the habilitation stage. Assistance is also given by The Austrian Program for Advanced Research and Technology (APART),<sup>13</sup> which supports young, highly-qualified scientists, women as well as men, who have demonstrated scientific competence (by having completed a doctorate and worked on research projects) and who seek further qualifications in a renowned research centre in Austria or abroad for the duration of three years. In addition, for scientific efforts fostering gender democracy, the Gabriele Possaner Award<sup>14</sup> has been awarded (by nomination) every two years since 1997. So far, four awards have been awarded.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture and the European Social Fund are also providing funds to support women in science and research. These funds are dedicated to improving academic women's professional qualifications through measures both within and outside of the university. Childcare facilities at universities (UNIKID)<sup>15</sup> is one example. Several childcare offices offer inexpensive, flexible, walk-in childcare facilities near to or on campus

---

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/buehler.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/firnberg.html>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/info/1\\_stipendien/apart/11\\_apart-stipendien.html](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/info/1_stipendien/apart/11_apart-stipendien.html) and [http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/n\\_info/1\\_stipendien/apart\\_extra/apart\\_extra.html](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/stipref/n_info/1_stipendien/apart_extra/apart_extra.html)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/forschung/frauen/foerderung/poss\\_fp\\_ausschr\\_2003.xml](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/forschung/frauen/foerderung/poss_fp_ausschr_2003.xml)

<sup>15</sup> The Offices are supported by the UNIKID, a web-based information and exchange system for members of the university community who have children. For details, visit <http://www.unikid.at>

with hours tailored to the special time requirements of teaching and research jobs. Moreover, Coordination Centres for Women's Studies and Gender Research in Universities<sup>16</sup> are operating at six universities in order to improve the infrastructure for university agendas relating to women, including services for women's studies and gender research.

Specific universities further assist women negotiating academic careers. The Mentoring<sup>17</sup> pilot project for women writing dissertations and post-doctoral theses began at the University of Vienna in 2000–2003 to facilitate the access of young female scientists to formal and informal networks and to support them in their transition to university worklife. Ten men and women mentors advised a total of 41 mentees at important stages of scientific qualification. Similarly, a Program for Correcting the Underrepresentation of Women involved both students and scientific staff at three universities in Graz. It targeted improvements for women in the areas of education (training), personal development, organizational development, and compatibility of work and family. In 2004, this program was integrated into university operations with a subsequent project, Potential II.

#### *National Reports, Monitoring, and Rating*

Several national reporting measures are in place to monitor the integration of gender equity into university policy. The Minister of Education, Science, and Culture's *Women's Report 2002*<sup>18</sup> to the Federal Chancellor provides information regarding the implementation of equal opportunities and indicators regarding the advancement of women. Likewise, The Equal Opportunities Working Party annually reports on its activities to the university council and the rectorate. In addition, since 2003, the Women's Political Advisory Board has advised the

---

<sup>16</sup> e.g., <http://www.gendup.sbg.ac.at>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.univie.ac.at/frauenfoerderung>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/forschung/frauen/fber.xml>

Minister of Education, Science, and Culture on necessary improvements and recommendations to carry out regulations concerning gender-based discrimination and the advancement of women. Topics addressed by the Board include the integration of measures for the advancement of women into the governing instruments of the University Act of 2002, evaluation and quality assurance, advice on higher-education policy, sensitisation measures, publicity and public relations, and development of measures promoting the advancement of women and equal status to strengthen the legal framework in the implementation process for the law.<sup>19</sup>

### *Gender Mainstreaming Tools and Policies*

In line with the European Union gender mainstreaming approach, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture has begun incorporating gender mainstreaming into its approaches to promoting women and equality policies.

Targeting programs and funding, a pilot research project at the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture is designed to promote the participation of women, strengthen research by, on, and for women, and create awareness for gender specific topics in research and teaching. The research project analyses funding procedures and the integration of gender-criteria in current research programs and selection procedures. In some research programs, this initiative has led to an increase of up to 50% women among project leaders, and women have been promoted in extra-university research especially. Additionally, guidelines for science-and-research-events aim to enhance the visibility of female researchers and gender-specific research results. For example, guidelines suggest both increasing the number of women as keynote speakers, moderators, and chairs and intensifying gender-specific topics in seminars, workshops, etc. Such projects at the level of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture set a example of

---

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/universitaeten/kontakte/Frauenpolitischer\\_Beirat9901.xml](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at/universitaeten/kontakte/Frauenpolitischer_Beirat9901.xml)

promoting gender equity that is vital to promoting changes in women's participation in the universities.

*Initiatives to Promote Women in Industrial Research and Business*

Many programs and measures target the cooperation and the knowledge transfer between science/research and industry, and the programs and measures initiated or funded by state agencies are to be gender mainstreamed. Because women are strongly underrepresented in the occupational segments of intensive research and technology, especially in management positions, such initiatives as FEMtech, or Women in Research and Technology, have been designed specifically to promote women by improving access to the professional field and career opportunities. FEMtech is a program designed to promote women in research and technology by funding the development and the implementation of measures to improve equal opportunities between men and women. FEMtech is carried out within the framework of the fFORTE initiative.<sup>20</sup>

For those who seek to develop their skills in research and development, the Impulse Project: Researchers for the Economy targets national and international university graduates from all technical disciplines as well as employees of Austrian enterprises employing up to 500 persons. The goals of the Impulse Project are (1) to improve the transfer of knowledge from Austrian universities and enterprises, (2) to increase the number of Austrian enterprises focusing on research and development, (3) to promote young researchers by helping them to acquire key economic competency skills, (4) to increase the proportion of women in research and

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.femtech.at/index.php?id=133>

development, and (5) to create additional research positions in Austria for researchers who are working abroad.<sup>21</sup>

To promote entrepreneurship, the University Graduate Start-up Enterprises (UNIUN) program allows university graduates to acquire the necessary skills for entrepreneurship by offering qualification modules and coaching. The goal is to raise awareness among university graduates of entrepreneurship as a career alternative. At participating universities, 50% of the places are reserved for women, and some seminars are offered only to women to help them tackle women-specific challenges in entrepreneurship.<sup>22</sup>

### *Challenges*

Even though the above programs, initiatives, scholarships, and awards assist women in their academic careers in tangible ways, their impact is limited to the number of women they are able to serve. For changes in gender equity to be sweeping, laws and policies governing gender mainstreaming must be embraced equally by both the state and university policymakers. Austria is making gains in this effort. However, it lags behind its counterparts in the European Union, so more work is still required to realize the benefits of gender mainstreaming in higher education.

### Summary

In Austria, there is hardly another sector where the gender ratio has changed as fundamentally as it has at the universities. Beginning in the 1970s, the expansion of the participation in the tertiary sector system led to a substantial increase of female participation at the universities although more access for women was not an explicit political goal at that time. Although for some years now more women than men have been starting university study

---

<sup>21</sup> [www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/impuls.html](http://www.fwf.ac.at/de/projects/impuls.html)

programs, a closer look reveals that subtle exclusion mechanisms have had lasting effects.

Leading positions remain male-dominated, and the number of female employees becomes lower the higher up one moves on the career ladder.

The recent reform measures have helped to change perceptions on part of the institution. With compliance as a major goal of the new laws, universities are called to view gender equality not only as a legal mandate but as an institutional and innovative strategy. In this sense, universities have to “own” affirmative action and not see it as an intrusion.

### Conclusion

The conservative cultural and social context of Austria and the deeply individualized traditions of the Humboldtian university have caused Austria to start further behind some other EU nation states in incorporating gender mainstreaming. At the same time, the timing and substantial changes of the University Act 2002 have meant that gender equality is but one of multiple strategic changes facing higher education. The legal provisions of the University Act 2002 will shape the strategies of equality change if a significant proportion of university members realize that the improved integration of women is an integral part of a university reform. Thus, gender mainstreaming must be fully merged into policies and practices so that top university leaders continue to be accountable for the outcomes at their universities and that they are expected to personally encourage and hold others accountable for reform within their organizations. Their leadership also effects cultural change that actively values and supports recruitment of women in to scientific careers and mentoring of women by women. Moreover, because women are latecomers in the university system, they bring their own experiences and perceptions of university work with them. These experiences and perceptions may be of great

---

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.uniun.at/>

value to universities as they innovate changes in gender equity, especially when the old perceptions, attitudes, and experiences are not suited to cope with new challenges. These possibilities can best become realities when more universities recognize that success in increasing the representation of women at all levels is an important condition for meeting Austria's needs.

#### References

- Bast, G. (1990). *Ordinarienuniversität, Gruppenuniversität – und weiter?* In: BMWF: Universitäts-Management. Wien: Federal Ministry for Science and Research (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Forschung).
- Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Verkehr. (1999). *White paper for the promotion of women in science (Weißbuch zur Förderung von Frauen in der Wissenschaft)*, Wien: Federal Ministry for Education and Traffic (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft und Verkehr) (Eigenverlag).
- European Commission. (2003). *She figures: Women and science*.  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/science-society/pdf/she\\_figures\\_2003.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/science-society/pdf/she_figures_2003.pdf)
- Höllinger, S. (1992). *Universität ohne Heiligenschein. Aus dem 19. ins 21. Jahrhundert*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag.

- Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and women of the corporation*. Cambridge: Basic Books.
- Neave G., & Rhoades, G. (1987), The academic estate in Western Europe. In B.C. Clark (Ed.), *The academic profession: National, disciplinary and institutional settings* (211-270). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (2003). *Education at a glance: OECD Indicators 2003*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Pechar, H., & Pellert, A. (2004). *Austrian universities under pressure from Bologna*. European Journal of Education, 39(3), 317-330. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Pellert A. (2002). *New challenges to the university as an expert organisation and the consequences for the representation of women*. In C. Wiedmer (Ed.), *Sound changes: An international survey of women's career strategies in higher education* (pp. 201-209). Zürich: UniFrauenstelle Zürich.
- Pellert A. (2003). *Das UG 02 und seine Auswirkungen auf Personalentwicklung und Frauenförderung*. BUKO (Hochschulpolitische Informationen der Bundeskonferenz des wissenschaftlichen und künstlerischen Personals) 03/I-4, Vienna, 28-31.
- Statistik Austria. (2004). *Hochschulstatistik (Higher Education Statistics)*. Vienna: Verlag Österreich GmbH.
- Welan, M. (1995). *The new university organisation or the third organisational reform since 1945*. In: A. Pellert, & W. Manfred (Eds.), *The formed anarchy: The challenge of the university organisation* (pp.113-124). Vienna: WUV-Universitätsverlag.
- Witz, A., & Savage M. (eds.). (1992). *Gender and bureaucracy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wroblewski et al. (2005). *Evaluation of measures for the promotion of women in science and research in Austria*. Project report (to be released in 2005). Vienna: Federal Ministry for

Education, Science and Culture (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur).