University of Hong Kong

Coat of arms

Motto Sapientia et Virtus (Latin)

Motto in English Wisdom and Virtue

Type Public

Established 1 October 1887; 136 years ago (as Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese)

30 March 1911; 112 years ago (as University of Hong Kong)

Chancellor John Lee Ka-chiu

Vice-president Gong Peng[1]

Ian Holliday[1]

Max Shen[1]

Vice-Chancellor Xiang Zhang

Provost Y.C. Richard Wong[1]

Pro-chancellor David Li

Academic staff 8266[2]

Administrative staff 4295[2]

Students 29,791[3]

Undergraduates 17,106 (57.4%)[3]

Postgraduates 9,813 (32.9%)[3]

Location Pokfulam, Hong Kong

Campus Urban

17.7 hectares (0.177 km2) (Main campus)

70.1 hectares (0.701 km2) (Total)[4]

Newspaper Undergrad HKUSU (Chinese)

Colours Dark green

Affiliations ASAIHL, Universitas 21, ACU, JUPAS, AACSB, EQUIS, APRU, UGC, Heads of Universities Committee, Joint Quality Review Committee, Washington University in St. Louis McDonnell International Scholars Academy, BHUA,[6] GHMUA

Mascot Lion

Website hku.hk

The University of Hong Kong (HKU) is a public research university in Pok Fu Lam, Hong Kong. Founded in 1887 as the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese, it is the oldest tertiary institution in Hong Kong.[7] Today, HKU has ten academic faculties and English is the main medium of instruction and assessment.

The University of Hong Kong was also the first team in the world to successfully isolate the coronavirus SARS-CoV, the causative agent of SARS.

The origins of the University of Hong Kong can be traced back to the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese founded in 1887 by Ho Kai later known as Sir Kai Ho Kai, which was later incorporated as the university's faculty of medicine. It was renamed the Hong Kong College of Medicine in 1907.[9] The college became HKU's medical school in 1911.

However, it was the colony's governor, Frederick D. Lugard (1858-1945) who would be the real moving force in the creation of a university in Hong Kong... His ambitions in Hong Kong was to make the colony a more effective British asset and the creation of a university might help to fulfill this aim. Lugard's efforts reflected metropolitan development as he sought to make more recent universities (such as Birmingham and Leeds) the model for a secular institution.

— from Western Higher Education in Asia and the Middle East (2016) [10]

The University of Hong Kong was founded in 1911. Governor Sir Frederick Lugard had proposed to establish a university in Hong Kong to compete with the other Great Powers opening universities in China, most notably Prussia, which had just opened the Tongji German Medical School in Shanghai.[11] Sir Hormusjee Naorojee Mody, an Indian Parsi businessman in Hong Kong, learned of Lugard's plan and pledged to donate HK$150,000 towards the construction and HK$30,000 towards other costs.[12] The Hong Kong Government and the business sector in southern China, which were both equally eager to learn "secrets of the West's success" (referring to technological advances made since the Industrial Revolution), also gave their support. The Government contributed a site at West Point. Swire Group contributed £40,000 to endow a chair in Engineering, in addition to thousands of dollars in equipment (its aim was partly to bolster its corporate image following the death of a passenger on board one of its ships, SS Fatshan, and the subsequent unrest stirred by the Self-Government Society).[13] Along with donations from other donors including the British government and companies such as HSBC, Lugard finally had enough to fund the building of the university.

Charles Eliot was appointed HKU's first Vice-Chancellor.[12] As Governor of Hong Kong, Lugard laid the foundation stone of the Main Building on 16 March 1910.[7] The university was incorporated in Hong Kong as a self-governing body of scholars on 30 March 1911 and had its official opening ceremony on 11 March 1912. It was founded as an all-male institution; women students were admitted for the first time ten years later.[7]

As Lugard felt that the Chinese society at the time was not suited to ideals such as communism, the university originally emulated the University of Manchester in emphasising the sciences over the humanities.[citation needed] It opened with three founding faculties, Arts, Engineering and Medicine.[7][14] The Faculty of Medicine was founded as the Hong Kong College of Medicine for Chinese by the London Missionary Society in 1887.[15] Of the College's early alumni, the most renowned was Sun Yat-sen,[7] who led the Chinese Revolution of 1911 which changed China from an empire to a republic. In December 1916, the university held its first convocation, with 23 graduates and five honorary graduates.

Move towards Chinese cultural education, and WW2

Main Building in 1946, with visible damage from the Second World War

After the Canton-Hong Kong strikes of 1925 and 1926, the government moved towards greater integration of Eastern culture, increasing the number of Chinese courses.[16] In 1927, a degree in Chinese was created. Donations from wealthy businessmen Tang Chi Ngong and Fung Ping Shan – after whom two campus buildings are named – triggered an emphasis on Chinese cultural education. In 1937, the Queen Mary Hospital opened. It has served as the university's teaching hospital ever since. In 1941, the Japanese invasion of Hong Kong caused damage to university buildings, and the university closed until 1945, during this period, the Medical College of the University of Hong Kong moved to Chengdu to run a school.

1945 to 2001

After the end of the Second World War, the university reopened and investment in law and the social sciences increased as post-war reconstruction efforts began in earnest. The Faculty of Social Sciences was established in 1967 and the Department of Law in 1969. The student population in 1961 was 2,000, quadrupled from 1941, and in 1980 the number of students exceeded 5,500.[17]

In 1958, the librarian of University of Hong Hong, Mrs. Dorothea Scott, organized a meeting of over 40 library practitioners at the Fung Ping Shan Library on 3 April to determine and establish a library association for Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Library Association.[18]

In 1982, the Faculty of Dentistry, based at the Prince Philip Dental Hospital, was established. To this day, it remains Hong Kong's only faculty training dental professionals. In 1984, both the School of Architecture and School of Education became fully-fledged faculties and in the same year the Faculty of Law was created. The Faculty of Business and Economics was established in 2001 as the university's tenth and youngest faculty.

After 1989, the Hong Kong government began to emphasise local tertiary education in order to retain local students who would otherwise have studied abroad in the United Kingdom. Student places and course variety were greatly increased in preparation for the handover of Hong Kong. By 2001, the number of students had grown to 14,300 and the number of degree courses to over a hundred.

2001 to present

In 2002, Growing with Hong Kong: HKU and its Graduates – The First 90 Years was published by the Hong Kong University Press as a study of the impact of HKU's graduates on Hong Kong.

In January 2006, despite protest from a portion of students and alumni, the Faculty of Medicine was renamed as the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine "as a recognition of the generosity" of Li Ka-shing and his foundation, which pledged HK$1 billion in support of the university's "general development as well as research and academic activities in medicine".[citation needed]

On 16 August 2011, Li Keqiang, Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China, began a three-day visit to promote development between Hong Kong and mainland China.[19][20] The university was locked down. The mishandling by the police force caused the Hong Kong 818 incident.[21] In a statement to the HKU community, the university vice-chancellor Professor Lap-Chee Tsui admitted that the security arrangements could have been better planned and organised, and apologised to students and alumni for not having been able to prevent the incident. He assured them that "the University campus belongs to students and teachers, and that it will always remain a place for freedom of expression".[22] On 30 August 2011, the university council resolved to set up a panel to review issues arising from the vice premier's visit, to improve arrangements and to set up policies for future university events that are consistent with its commitment to freedom of expression.

From 2010 to 2012, the university celebrated its 100th anniversary and the opening of the Centennial Campus at the western end of the university site in Pokfulam.[23] The University of Hong Kong–Shenzhen Hospital, one of the two teaching hospitals of the university, also opened in 2011.[24][25]

On 10 April 2015, HKU declared itself as the first university in the world to join HeForShe, a UN Women initiative urging men to achieve more female rights.[26] The university promised that it would triple the number of female dean-level members by 2020, so that more than 1 out of 5 deans would be women.[27]

On 15 December 2017, the university's governing council appointed University of California, Berkeley nanoscience professor Xiang Zhang to the posts of President and Vice-Chancellor with effect from January 2018. Zhang was the first vice-chancellor of the university born in mainland China and educated to undergraduate degree level there.[28][29]

2015 political interference

Main article: University of Hong Kong pro-vice-chancellor selection controversy

The HKU Council made headlines in 2015 for alleged political interference behind the selection process for a new pro-vice chancellor. A selection committee unanimously recommended the council appoint Johannes Chan to the post, which involved the responsibility for staffing and resources, and which had been left vacant for five years.[30] Chan, the former dean of the Faculty of Law, was a distinguished scholar in constitutional law and human rights and "a vocal critic on Hong Kong’s political reform issues".[31][32] Owing to his liberal political stance, Chan was roundly criticised by Communist Party-controlled media including Wen Wei Po, Ta Kung Pao, and Global Times, which together published at least 350 articles attacking him.

Customarily the HKU Council accepts the recommendations of search committees for senior posts, with no prior recommendation having been rejected by the council.[31][36][37] The council was criticised when it delayed the decision to appoint Chan, stating that it should wait until a new provost was in place. Finally, in September 2015, the council rejected Chan's appointment (12 votes to eight) through an anonymous vote in a closed meeting, providing no reason for the decision.[30] Political interference was widely suspected and the opacity of the council criticised.[36]

The decision is seen widely viewed as a pro-government act of retaliation against "pro-democracy leaders and participants" and a blow to academic freedom.[31][36] Six members of the council are directly appointed by the Chief Executive of Hong Kong, who acts as chancellor of all publicly funded tertiary institutions in the territory.[38] Five members are delegates to the National People's Congress in Beijing and, as such, are obliged to toe the Communist Party line or risk expulsion.[39] In overall Council makeup, university students and staff are outnumbered by members from outside the university.[39]

The decision was decried by student groups including the Hong Kong University Students' Union and Hong Kong Federation of Students, faculty members, leading international law scholars, and legislators.[30][39][40][41] They noted that the decision would serve as a warning to other academics not to engage in pro-democratic politics and would severely tarnish Hong Kong's reputation for academic freedom and education excellence.[37][41] The law faculty also refuted the allegations against Chan. Billy Fung, student union president, revealed details of the discussion to the public and was subsequently expelled from the council.