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RESEARCH

EDUCATION

Did you graduate Sub auspiciis Praesidentis?

Acknowledging the academic elite

Sub auspiciis Praesidentis recognises the most distinguished Austrian university graduates. The tradition began in the seventeenth century when the Austrian Emperor invited the finest graduates to the imperial palace and offered them gifts for their achievement. The Austrian government restored the tradition in 1952. Impeccable academic achievement during high school, undergraduate university study and doctoral study is necessary to achieve the accolade. Recipients of the accolade pursue extraordinarily successful careers primarily in academia.

The tradition of Sub auspiciis Praesidentis began in the seventeenth century. In 1623 the finest graduates from the University of Vienna's Faculty of Arts attended „Sub auspiciis Imperatoris“(under the auspices of the Austrian Emperor) graduation ceremonies. Graduates received a personal gift from the Austrian Emperor. A bachelor's degree graduate received a gold necklace. A master's degree graduate received a medallion and a doctoral graduate received a ring. A diamond ring containing the initials of the emperor was first offered as a gift in 1779. The tradition became customary in the nineteenth century. The ceremony acknowledged the contribution of Austrian university graduates to national scholarship.

The tradition celebrated the magnificence and importance of the Austrian empire. The ceremonies occurred in the theatre hall of the Akademisches Kolleg (Academic College) in Bäckerstraße during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The ceremony consisted of the professor conferring the degree standing on the podium. The two graduates standing in front of the podium. The Emperor sat in the centre of the audience. The university rector and chancellor sat on the left behind a bebel containing the rector's sceptre. The ceremonies continued until the dissolution of the Austrian empire after the First World War in 1918.

The Austrian government restored the tradition in 1952. The award became known as: „Sub auspiciis Praesidentis rei Publicae“ (under the eyes of the President of the Republic). 1200 Austrian doctoral graduates received the academic honour between 1952 and 2014. It constitutes a ratio of 20 from 2500 doctoral graduates annually. Another ratio proclaims 20 graduates receive Sub auspiciis Praesidentis doctoral degrees from 300,000 Austrian

university graduates annually. The Bundespräsident (Austrian President) attends the graduation ceremonies of the country's finest doctoral graduates to award a gold ring engraved with *Sub auspiciis Praesidentis* and the Austrian coat of arms.

Impeccable academic achievement is necessary to qualify for the award. A doctoral graduate must demonstrate exemplary moral character and graduate with the highest possible grades. The process begins with the graduate obtaining a Matura. The graduate must pass with distinction in all compulsory and elective subjects in every year of high school and the final Matura examination. A result of 1.5 or lower is required in every subject to pass with distinction. The grades correspond to the following numerical sequence: 1 = sehr gut (excellent); 2 = gut (good); 3 = befriedigend (satisfactory); 4 = genügend (sufficient) and 5 = nicht genügend (fail). The grades awarded for the Matura examination correspond to the following statements: mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg bestanden (Pass with distinction. An average grade result of 1.5 or better. No grades worse than 2); mit gutem Erfolg bestanden (Pass with merit. An average grade result of 2.0 or better. No grades worse than 3); bestanden (Pass. No results worse than grade 4) and nicht bestanden (Fail. At least one subject result with a grade 5).

Graduates must demonstrate excellent academic achievement throughout university study. Undergraduate study at Austrian universities consists of several parts. Each part concludes with a diploma examination. The graduate must achieve the best possible grade in each diploma examination. It implies a grade 1. The degree must be completed within the typical studying time. All grades for the bachelor's and master's degree must be the best possible of grade 1. The Austrian doctoral degree consists of a Doktorarbeit (thesis) and Rigorosum (oral examination). The graduate must pass both components with grade 1.

Several distinguished and prominent Austrians graduated with the honour. Professor Harald Niederreiter, a distinguished mathematician graduated *Sub auspiciis Praesidentis* from the University of Vienna in 1969. He held professorships at Southern Illinois University; University of Illinois; University of California Los Angeles. His research contributed to number theory; algebra; complexity theory; numerical analysis and cryptology. Niederreiter's contributions to the theory of low-discrepant sets of points contributed significantly to quasi-Monte Carlo methods. Gerhard Larcher, an esteemed mathematician and professor at Johannes Kepler University Linz graduated *Sub auspiciis Praesidentis* from the University of Salzburg in 1985. His research contributed to Monte Carlo and quasi-Monte Carlo methods.

A few graduates achieve the award in two subjects. Mathias Moosbrugger achieved the accomplishment in 2014. Dr Moosbrugger graduated from the University of Innsbruck in 2009 with a doctoral degree in history and a doctoral degree in theology in 2014. He became the first graduate from the University of Innsbruck to achieve two *Sub auspiciis Praesidentis* doctoral degrees and the seventh Austrian since the award was restored in 1952. He is a lecturer in systematic theology at the University of Innsbruck.

A private university graduate achieved the accolade. Carolin Gemeier graduated Sub auspiciis Praesidentis from Paracelsus Private Medical University Salzburg in November 2014. Dr Gemeier studied medicine at Vienna Medical University and completed graduate study in molecular medicine in Salzburg. Recipients from elite Austrian public universities dominate the accolade. Private universities are recent additions to the Austrian university sector. Paracelsus Private Medical University Salzburg was established in 2002.

Graduating Sub auspiciis Praesidentis is an extraordinary achievement. The Austrian Emperor began the tradition in the seventeenth century and it was restored by the Austrian government in 1952. Candidates must achieve the highest possible grades during every year of high school and throughout university culminating with a doctoral degree. A very small elite group of students are able to maintain the rigorous requirements. Students from elite Austrian public universities dominate the accolade. The vast majority of recipients pursue very successful careers in academia and private sector research.