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Diversity management award for WU's uLiKe performance assessment system



Over the past few years, demands and standards have been rising for universities, not only with regard to research, teaching, and third-mission activities, but also with respect to their role as employers. One of the key questions in this regard is which criteria universities apply to select the best applicants for faculty positions. In many cases, the focus is exclusively on research output: the more publications, the better. This approach adopts a very limited perspective, however, and fails to reflect the diverse responsibilities of a contemporary university. For this reason, WU has been implementing a more comprehensive assessment system for some time now to take into account additional dimensions and biographical contexts. WU's uLiKe framework, which combines and further develops the different approaches in a systematic manner, has won WU the 2016 Diversitas award.

With almost 1,700 academic staff members, WU is one of Austria's largest academic employers. This role comes with great responsibility. This responsibility includes developing recruitment procedures for senior faculty positions such as professorships, which require comprehensive and thorough performance assessment methods. Many universities place the most emphasis on the number and quality of applicants' academic publications. It is important, however, to break away from "traditional" views of what career paths should look like – full-time work, uninterrupted employment, and linear career development – and focus on quality, impact, and consistency of the applicants' work instead, taking into account his or her biographical context. "WU's uLiKe performance assessment approach is designed to evaluate a person's academic performance in relation to factors such as periods of part-time or full-time work and the person's academic age, that is the time that has passed since the completion of his or her doctorate. When assessing an applicant's academic performance, we cannot focus on research alone but must also take into account teaching, knowledge transfer activities, and contributions to university development," WU Rector Hanappi-Egger points out.

Equal opportunities for people with unorthodox biographies

In some areas, WU uses a multidimensional personnel performance assessment system that takes into consideration various biographical factors. These biographical factors include for instance time spent caring for children or other family members, leaves of absence, part-time work, or other interruptions of academic careers. "By broadening the scope of our performance assessment approach, we intend to strengthen equal opportunities for researchers with diverse career paths and biographies," explains Rector Hanappi-Egger. WU provides comprehensive information for search committees and guidelines for assessors in senior faculty recruitment proceedings. In addition, the search committees and assessors are also provided with a special assessment sheet to help them apply specific selection criteria and to increase transparency. The uLiKe system, for which WU has now won the Diversitas award, combines all of these elements. "We are absolutely thrilled to have won the Diversitas award and we'll take it as an opportunity to look for additional areas where these approaches might prove useful. We expect that at the end of this process, we'll be able to adopt a new, contemporary concept of performance as a guiding principle at WU. We also hope that our uLiKe concept will prompt other universities to rethink the way they assess performance."

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