

The bull of Pius II

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The initiative to found a university in Basel came from the city. In 1459, the council sent a petition to Pope Pius II, the former Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini who had known Basel as a young secretary at the Council, asking him to authorise the foundation of a university with all the faculties. The pope granted the request in a bull dated 12 November 1459, which established a *studium generale* in Basel and granted it the privileges of the University of Bologna.¹ The university was solemnly opened in the Minster on 4 April 1460, in the presence of the bishop, the council, the clergy and the first professors and students. Its first rector was Georg von Andlau, provost of the cathedral chapter.

The University of Basel was the first university on the territory of present-day Switzerland and remained the only one for centuries; the academies of Lausanne (1537) and Geneva (1559) were schools for the training of Protestant ministers and became universities only in the nineteenth century. Zurich founded its university in 1833, Bern in 1834. For almost four centuries, Basel was the only Swiss city with a complete university, training a large part of the Swiss elites, in particular the lawyers and physicians.²

The university was organised in the four traditional faculties: arts, which provided a general education in grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music and prepared students for the higher faculties; theology; law, divided into canon law and civil law; and medicine. The faculty of arts had the largest number of students; the higher faculties were smaller but more prestigious. Students came from Basel and its region, from the Swiss cantons, from southern Germany, Alsace and, increasingly, from all over Europe.

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1 Notes

1. Bull of Pius II of 12 November 1459 establishing the University of Basel; see Bonjour, *Die Universität Basel von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart 1460–1960*, 1960; HLS, article "Universität Basel". To be verified. ↩
2. On the foundation dates of the Swiss universities and academies (Basel 1460; Lausanne academy 1537; Geneva academy 1559; Zurich university 1833; Bern university 1834), see HLS, articles on the respective universities. To be verified. ↩

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