

The FISU University Games, formerly the Universiade, are an international multi-sport event organized by the International University Sports Federation (FISU) for university athletes. The original name is a fusion of the words "University" and "Olympiad."
Previously known as the World University Games or World Student Games, in July 2020 FISU announced that the Universiade would officially be renamed the FISU World University Games.

The idea of a global international sporting competition among student-athletes predates the founding of the International University Sports Federation (FISU) in 1949. After English peace activist Hodgson Pratt proposed hosting student sports activities back in 1891, a similar event was created in Germany in 1909, and five editions were held from 1909 to 1913, all hosted in Germany.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Frenchman Jean Petitjean organized the International University Championships in Paris in 1923 and founded the Confederation Internationale des Etudiants (CIE). The renamed 1924 World Summer Student Championships followed a year later, and two more were held in 1927 and 1928. Another name change led to the 1930 International University Games. The CIE International University Games were held four more times in the 1930s, before their final edition in 1947.

The beginning of World War II interrupted all major international student sports activities, and its consequences led to the closure of the CIE and the creation of the first games organized by the UIE.

FISU was founded in 1949 and organized its first major student sporting event that same year, the International Summer University Sports Week. The Sports Week was held every two years until 1955. In 1957, Jean Petitjean reorganized the World University Games in Paris, bringing together students from 32 countries to compete in six sports. This meeting sparked the desire to organize a universal event for student-athletes.

In 1959, FISU and the IUS agreed not to organize their respective summer events. Instead, they agreed to participate in the "Universiade" organized in Turin by the Centro Universitario Sportivo Italiano (CUSI), the Italian university sports association.
1,407 student-athletes from 43 countries across all continents gathered in Turin for this event, which finally proved promising for reconciliation.

A flag with a "U" surrounded by stars began its journey around the world, while the traditional academic anthem, “Gaudeamus Igitur”, resounded at all official Universiade ceremonies in place of the national anthems. The 1959 Turin Summer Universiade was also a success for the local Organizing Committee and especially for its leader, Dr. Primo Nebiolo, the man who would change the future of the University Sports Movement and lead it on the path to globalization.

Since then, the Universiade, which has continued to be held biennially, has continued to attract ever more participants. Starting with 1,407 participants in Turin in 1959, the Universiade has seen a total of 6,757 participants from over 165 countries in Beijing in 2001 and 6,643 participants from 174 countries in Daegu in 2003. The highest number of participants was recorded at the 2013 Summer Universiade in Kazan, with 11,759 athletes representing 159 countries.

Walking made its first appearance in the athletics program at the Bucharest Universiade with the men's 20 km race. Eight athletes representing four nations participated in the event.
Women's race walking made its debut in 1985 at the Universiade in Kobe (Japan), with ten athletes from six countries competing in the 5,000m track walk.

The men's competition has always been held over 20 km, while the women competed in the 5,000m track walk in the 1985 and 1987 editions. In 1989, the race was held over 5 km on the road. Subsequently, from 1991 to 2001, the race was held over 10 km on the road. From the 2003 edition in Daegu, the race was definitively extended to 20 km. Since 2011, Shenzhen (CHN) has also introduced a team ranking based on the placement of the top three athletes in the country out of a possible five.

From the first editions, the number of participants has gradually increased until reaching its peak in the last edition in Germany, where both the men (38 athletes) and the women (28 competitors) had the highest number of athletes at the start. The record for the most nations entered in a single race for men is held by the 1987 and 2001 editions, with 17 nations participating; for women, in Rhine (Germany), there were 16 nations in the last edition. The race with the most disqualifications for improper walking was the 1989 Duisburg men's race, with 6 disqualifications; for women, it was the 1999 Palma de Mallorca race, with 5 disqualifications.

Two races were retroactively rewritten in the finish order due to doping offence.
These were the women's 20 km races in 2011 and 2013. At Shenzhen 2011, third-place finisher Nina Okhotnikova (Russia) was disqualified and at Kazan 2013, winner Anisya Kirdyapkina and Vera Sokolova, who had already been stopped for improper walking, were disqualified. The placings of the three Russian athletes in both races were annulled due to issues with their biological passports.

The best results in the 20 editions of the race walk are achieved by Italian Andrea Cosi in the men's 20 km race, with a time of 1:19:48, set in Rhine-Ruhr (GER) in 2025. Among the women, Ileana Salvador (ITA) holds the best performance in the 5 km race, a time of 20:44, set in Duisburg (GER) in 1989.

The best 10 km time is held by Chinese Gao Hongmiao, who walked in 43:20 in Beijing in 2001. The best 20 km race walk is held in the women's 20 km race. the best time is 1:28:18 set in two different editions by Anysia Kirdyapkina (Rus) in Gwanggju (Kor) in 2015 and in the last edition held in Rhine-Ruhr (Ger) by the Australian Mcmillen.

Among the men, the most notable medal winners are Robert Korzeniowsky (1991 in Sheffield, GB) and Buffalo, USA (1993), and Russian Andrey Krivov (2011 in Shenzhen, CHN) and Kazan, Russia (2013).
Other athletes who have won a gold and a silver medal include Italians Maurizio Damilano (ITA), first in Bucharest 1981 and second in Edmonton 1983, and Lorenzo Civallero, winner in Beijing 2001 and second in Palma de Mallorca 1999; Mexican Daniel García, winner in Fukuoka 1995 and second in Buffalo 1993; and Alejandro López, first in Palma de Mallorca 1999 and second in Catania 1997; Spanish athlete Juan Molina took first place in Izmir 2005 and second place in Beijing 200m.
Canadian Guillaume Leblanc won in Edmonton 1983 and came in third in Kobe 1995. Also noteworthy are the three bronze medals won by Arturo Dimezza (ITA) in 1991, 1997, and 1999.

In the women's event, the top three medalists, all in the 10km, are: Italian Annarita Sidoti, one gold medal in Fukuoka 1995 and two bronze medals in Sheffield 1991 and Catania 1997, and Russian Larissa Khmelnitskaya, one gold medal in Catania 1997 and two bronze medals in Buffalo 1993 and Fukuoka 1995. Italian Rossella Giordano also took second place with three medals, all silver. consecutively in 1995, 1997, and 1999.
In the 20 km, the only woman to win twice in a row was China's Jiang Qiuyan, first in Izmir 2005 and Bangkok 2007. Russia's Tatyana Sibileva won in Daegu 2003 and finished third in Izmir in 2005.

In the team rankings by medals won, Italy leads the men's team (5 gold, 5 silver, and 4 bronze), followed by Russia (5 gold, 2 silver, and 2 bronze), and Spain (2 gold, 5 silver, and 1 bronze). In the women's team, China leads the way (5 gold, 5 silver, and 4 bronze); Russia is second (5 gold, 3 silver, and 6 bronze); and Italy is third (2 gold, 4 silver, and 2 bronze).

