At first a centre for the study of law, the university would remain the eighteenth century. Quite rightly, the University’s motto: Universa Universa Patavina Libertas.

Initially, the university was organised as a free corporation of students, who were divided into nationes according to their region or ethnic group of origin. These nationes themselves then formed two larger groups: the citromontani (the Italians) and the oltramontani (the non-Italians). It was the students who approved the university statutes, elected the rectors, chose the teachers and paid them with money collected from those attending their lessons. Then the teachers were directly chosen and paid by the public authority.

The fifteenth century marked the beginning of a period of great splendour and development, which would continue for the entire Venetian Republic, the government in Venice guaranteed freedom of thought; however the university continued to fulﬁl its role successfully at a regional level. Padua’s professors and students would participate actively in the struggle for Italian independence, most noticeably in the local uprising of February 1848. The university also found itself in the frontline during the First World War, when Padua became the centre of a military zone of operations. True to its above-mentioned motto, it would be the university itself that was a centre of operations within the Veneto during the struggle against Fascism and the occupying Nazi forces, with Chancellor Concetto Marchesi and Vice-Chancellor Egidio Meneghetti playing leading roles. In fact, due to the number of young people here who gave their lives in that struggle, Padua is the only university in Italy to have been awarded the Gold Medal of Military Valour.

Today, Padua is one of Italy’s most prestigious universities. Fully autonomous since 1995, it is now a regional presence, with teaching branches and departments located throughout the Veneto.
THE GREAT HALL
From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century this housed "The Great School of Jurists" and was where lessons were held. One of those who taught here was Galileo, and the hall is now dedicated to his memory. Used in the first years of the sixteenth century as a drawing studio, the space would only become the university’s Great Hall after restoration in 1854-06. Painted then, the ceilings frescoes are by Giulio Carpioni; in the central allegory depicts Wisdom and the Other Disciplines. The architect Gio Ponti would in 1942 do the work that gave the hall its present appearance. This is where the members of the University Senate sit during important occasions (the opening of the academic year, the presentation of honorary degrees, etc.); the inscription is the university’s ancient motto: Universa Universus Patavina Libertas.

THE SALA DEI QUARANTA
This takes its name from the forty (quaranta) portraits on the walls, each one depicting an illustrious foreigner who studied at Padua. With no claim to be actual likenesses, these works were painted in 1942 by Giangiacomo dal Forno and show such figures as: Antonio Augustin, the Spanish ambassador of Philip II and of various popes; Michel de L’Hospital, Chancellor of France and adviser to Catherine de Medic; Thomas Linacre, physician to Henry VIII of England and a teacher at Oxford University; William Harvey, the Englishman famous for his study of the circulation of the blood and a founder of the English school of medicine; Olof Rudbek the Elder, a professor of anatomy and medicine at the University of Upsala in Sweden, where he promoted the establishment of a botanical garden modelled on the old. The podium, a Dane who played a leading role in establishing medical studies in his native country; Nicholas de Cusa, a famous fifteenth-century German philospher and cardinal; Werner Rolfinck, a German who promoted the study of anatomy and chemistry in his native country; Peter Vepslavick Postnikov, a Russian sent to Padua by Peter the Great to study medicine; Stefan Báthory, a Hungarian who would become King of Poland in 1576; Giovanni Capodistria, a Greek appointed dictator/ president of the Greek government in 1828; Emanuele Sciascian, an Armenian physician at the imperial court of Constantine and the promoter of the first institution of medical studies in Turkey.

GALILEO’S ROSTRUM
The Sala dei Quaranta also contains the podium which, tradition has it, was set up by his students so that Galileo could teach in the "great hall of juris" (now the Great Hall); none of the other rooms was large enough to house the large crowds that thronged to his lessons. The podium was kept in the Great Hall until the middle of the nineteenth century. Galileo would teach at Padua University for eighteen years (1592-1610), later recalling this as amongst the happiest periods of his life. Much admired by his students and protected by the Venetian government, he would here take the first steps towards the development of modern scientific method.

ANATOMY THEATRE
This was built in 1594 for the famous professor of anatomy Gerolamo Fabrici d’Accapandente; it is said that the design was based on suggestions from Fra Paolo Sarpi. The earliest permanent anatomy theatre in the world – up to then, temporary structures were erected for those attending autopsies – this is also the oldest still extant. The theatre structure has the form of an inverted cone with an elliptical ground plan; it comprises six concentric ranks of seats that rise around the anatomy table. The balustrades and balustrades are in carved walnut. Originally, the windows were blank panels, with the lighting for anatomy lessons being provided by torches; they were only opened up as windows proper in 1844, the final year of modifications which had begun in 1842. The theatre was last used for teaching purposes in 1872 and was restored in 1991-92. In the small room alongside – once used in preparing the bodies for dissection – there is a small exhibition illustrating its history.

THE MEDICINE HALL
One of the oldest and most attractive teaching rooms in the building, this is now used for the public discussion of degree theses presented by students of medicine and other subjects. This room formerly housed lessons in anatomical theory, but it actually dates back to before the establishment of the university here: the perfectly-preserved coffered ceiling and the typical medieval fresco on the walls reveal that it was part of one of the three fourteenth-century patrician houses which once stood here. Belonging to the Da Carrara family, those buildings formed the core structure on the site which would be occupied by the aforementioned Ox Inn.

THE FIRST WOMAN GRADUATE IN THE WORLD
At the foot of one of the two wide staircases leading to the upper loggia in the Old Court is a statue of Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia. In 1678 she would become the world’s first woman graduate when she took her degree in philosophy at Padua.