



## Actions Oriented Toward the Permanence of University Students: A Perspective from Three Institutions in Rio Grande do Sul\*

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### ABSTRACT

This research aimed to identify the actions focused on the permanence of university student in three Federal Universities of Rio Grande do Sul, seeking to highlight the effectiveness of support services and actions with better results/higher impact. The research, of a qualitative character, was developed from data collected from the institutional websites of the *Universidade Federal de Pelotas*, *Universidade Federal de Santa Maria* and *Universidade Federal do Pampa*, in semi-structured interviews (audio recorded and transcribed) with the 15 coordinators of the departments, that developed activities directed to the permanence of students in these institutions, and discussion group. The data were analyzed based on Content Analysis. It was evidenced that the researched sectors develop an essential work in the Institutions and that they directly interfere in the trajectory of the academics in the university, in the continuity and in the conclusion of the course.

### KEYWORDS

Learning. College education. Inclusion. Permanence.

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## Ações Direcionadas à Permanência do Estudante Universitário: Um Olhar a Partir de Três Instituições do Rio Grande do Sul<sup>1</sup>

### RESUMO

Esta pesquisa teve por objetivo identificar as ações voltadas à permanência do estudante universitário em três Universidades Federais do Rio Grande do Sul, buscando evidenciar a efetividade dos serviços de apoio e as ações com melhores resultados/maior impacto. A pesquisa, de cunho qualitativo, foi desenvolvida a partir de dados coletados nas páginas institucionais da Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria e Universidade Federal do Pampa, em entrevista semiestruturada (gravada em áudio e transcrita) com os 15 coordenadores dos setores que desenvolviam atividades voltadas à permanência dos estudantes nessas Instituições, e grupo de discussão. Os dados foram analisados a partir da Análise de Conteúdo. Evidenciou-se que os setores pesquisados desenvolvem um trabalho essencial nas Instituições e que interferem diretamente na trajetória dos acadêmicos na universidade, na permanência e na conclusão de curso.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Aprendizagem. Educação superior. Inclusão. Permanência.

## Acciones Dirigidas a la Permanencia del Estudiante Universitario: Una Mirada de Tres Instituciones en Rio Grande do Sul

### RESUMEN

Esta investigación tuvo como objetivo identificar acciones dirigidas a la permanencia de los estudiantes universitarios en tres universidades federales en Rio Grande do Sul, buscando resaltar la efectividad de los servicios de apoyo y acciones con mejores resultados / mayor impacto. La investigación, de carácter cualitativo, se desarrolló a partir de datos recopilados en páginas institucionales de la Universidad Federal de Pelotas, la Universidad Federal de Santa María y la Universidad Federal de Pampa, en una entrevista semiestruturada (grabada en audio y transcrita) con los 15 coordinadores de los sectores que desarrollaron actividades dirigidas a la permanencia de los estudiantes en estas instituciones, y un grupo de discusión. Los datos se analizaron mediante el análisis de contenido. Se evidenció que los sectores investigados desarrollan un trabajo esencial en las Instituciones y que interfieren directamente en la trayectoria académica de la universidad, en la permanencia y en la conclusión del curso.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Aprendizaje. Educación universitaria. Inclusión. Permanencia.

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## Introduction

Higher Education has been gaining space in discussions and in surveys developed in recent years. Despite the expansion of the number of actions aimed towards the access and enrollment in Higher Education, this educational scenario still presents many challenges to students.

For some time, the main concern in relation to Higher Education was focused on access, expansion of openings and courses, student entrance through quotas/reservation of openings, affirmative actions, university entrance through vestibular exams or the Unified Selection System (SISU). Less numerous, and still restricted, are the discussions about the actions planned, taking into consideration the permanence of the student in the institution, improvement in academic performance, and conclusion of the course.

In line with this scenario, the National Education Plan (PNE), 2014, foresees, in its Goal 12, the increase to 50% of the gross enrollment rate in Higher Education, ensuring the quality of supply and expansion to, at least, 40% of new enrollments in the public segment (BRASIL, 2014). Raising the enrollment rate, means expanding the number of students entering higher education and, for this, strategies are needed:

- [12.2) expand the offer of vacancies [...];
- 12.3) gradually raise the average completion rate of undergraduate courses in public universities to 90% [...];
- 12.5) expand the policies of inclusion and student assistance directed to students from public institutions [...], in higher education, in order to reduce ethnic-racial inequalities and expand the rates of access and permanence in higher education for students coming from public schools, afro-descendants, indigenous and students with disabilities, global development disorders and high abilities or overdose, in order to support their academic success [...];
- 12.9) expand the proportional participation of historically disadvantaged groups in higher education, including through the adoption of affirmative policies [...];
- 12.10) ensure accessibility conditions [...] (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 11).

The strategies highlighted are organized mainly in two points: expansion of openings (increase in the number of students in Higher Education institutions) and actions aimed at permanence and course completion - increase in the rates of course completion, expansion of inclusion and assistance policies, increase in the participation of historically disadvantaged groups and the guarantee of accessibility conditions.

It is noteworthy, in this perspective of expansion and democratization of access, that the strategies need to be effective as a whole, because access alone does not guarantee equity conditions in learning, nor does it make the institution less exclusionary.

Considering this context, it was initially proposed to establish as research spaces the six federal universities in the state of Rio Grande do Sul: Universidade Federal de Ciências da Saúde de Porto Alegre (UFCSPA) – Porto Alegre; a Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPEL) – Pelotas; Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM) – Santa Maria;

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande (FURG) – Carreiros, Rio Grande; Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) – Porto Alegre e Universidade Federal do Pampa (UNIPAMPA) – Bagé. After contacting the six institutions by telephone and e-mail, institutional authorization was obtained for the research to be carried out in half of the universities mentioned, which were: UFPEL, UFSM and UNIPAMPA.

## Method

This qualitative research was developed based on data collected from the institutional websites of universities; semi-structured interviews (audio recorded and transcribed) with the 15 coordinators of sectors that developed activities focused on the permanence of students, held in the cities and institutions where they worked; and a discussion group at the researcher's home institution, bringing together some participants in person and others via Skype. The data collected were analyzed based on the Content Analysis proposed by Bardin (2011). The research followed the ethical precepts of the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Santa Maria, being approved by this Committee.

According to Bardin (2011), Content Analysis is organized around three points: "the pre-analysis"; "the exploration of the material"; "the treatment of results, inference and interpretation". It is not a linear one-way analysis, but comprises several techniques. Category analysis is the oldest and most widely used technique, breaking down the text into units/categories according to analogical regroupings (BARDIN, 2011). In this research, this technique was used, where the grouping of the participants' answers by categories and subcategories was performed for further interpretation and discussion of the data.

For data systematization and analysis, due to the large number of sectors involved in the research and the fact that they develop similar actions, it was decided to group them by similarity. Thus, each grouping had as a criterion the meeting of sectors that performed the same type of action: focused on Learning, academic development and psychology (SAP); directed to Accessibility (SAI), related to Affirmative Action (SAF) and linked to Student Assistance (SAE).

**Table 1.** Grouping of Sectors

<b>Learning, Academic Development and Psychology (SAP)</b>	Coordination of Educational Actions (UFSM); Learning Support Center (UFSM); Núcleo Psicopedagógico de Apoio ao Discente (UFPEL); Coordinator of Planning, Development, and Evaluation (UNIPAMPA); Educational Development Center (UNIPAMPA).
<b>Accessibility and Inclusion (SAI)</b>	Accessibility Center (UFSM); Center for Accessibility and Inclusion (UFPEL); Inclusion and Accessibility Center (UNIPAMPA).
<b>Affirmative Action (SAF)</b>	Affirmative Action Center (UFSM); Affirmative Action Coordination (UNIPAMPA).
<b>Student Assistance (SAE)</b>	Coordination of Support to Community Organizations (UFSM); Student Attention Center - Satie, BSE and SAME (UFSM); Student Integration Coordination (UFPEL); Núcleo de Serviço Social (UFPEL); Division of Student Assistance (UNIPAMPA).

Source: The authors.

After this organization, each grouping received an acronym and each sector received, in addition to the acronym corresponding to its grouping, a number. To maintain the confidentiality of the information and research participants, the numbers were randomly distributed within each grouping (SAP 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; SAI 1, 2 and 3; SAF 1 and 2, SAE 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5).

In this scenario, it was proposed to identify the actions aimed at the permanence of university students in three Federal Universities of Rio Grande do Sul: *Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria e Universidade Federal do Pampa*, seeking to highlight the effectiveness of support services and actions with better results/higher impact.

### **Results and Discussions: Permanence Actions in Gaucho Institutions**

The student arrives at the university each time younger, more insecure, and with many difficulties in keeping up with the complex contents of this new learning space. Many need support, usually from professionals in the areas of psychology, psycho-pedagogy, and special education. This support is essential for the student to overcome his difficulties, to stay in the course, and to finish it. After all, at the moment when "[...] learning is not achieved and the consequent repetition and evasion spread, from the point of view of the educational institution, some devices can be arranged [...]" (PAVÃO; VARGAS, 2015, p. 77). Among them, sectors that work directly with student support or assistance.

According to news on the MEC Portal, in the year 2010 "[...] 11.4% of students dropped out of the course for which they were admitted. In 2014, this number reached 49%" (BRASIL, 2016). These figures thus reinforce the concern with the factors that have contributed to the growth of this statistic.

Both failure and dropout in Higher Education are due to different factors: difficulty to adapt, demotivation, learning difficulties, reconciliation of the course with work/profession, difficulty in inter and intra-personal relationships, outdated curricula, difficulty to follow the

dynamics/methodology of the classes, deficient basic education, lack of specialized monitoring. But how to mitigate these factors and contribute to learning and to the reduction of failure and dropout? How can we contribute to the permanence of the student in the academic space? It is believed that

[...] a good part of the measures to fight evasion in Brazilian public higher education depends, to a great extent, on actions focused on each institution, within the scope of its autonomy. This does not exempt, of course, the federal government to promote programs and incentives for these HEIs to adopt these actions - quite the contrary - but only suggest that initiatives of a solely national character are not sufficient if disarticulated from the local realities of each institution and even of each campus and course (GILIOLI, 2016, p. 26).

It is in the context of each Higher Education Institution (HEI) that actions must be proposed, considering the public served and the demand of each institution, starting from the understanding that students, even adults and attending higher education courses, also face difficulties and need monitoring.

If the student does not learn, it is usually attributed to a lack of cognitive skills, but it must be said that the educational institution also has its role in these processes. It is the university's responsibility to give the necessary tools for learning to occur. Understanding that the difficulties to learn is the peculiar way in which each subject deals with social reality is, perhaps, the best way to help these subjects to overcome these difficulties (PAVÃO; VARGAS, 2015, p. 71)

Accepting that the institution has responsibilities in the student's learning process is the first step for the development of actions and programs that contribute to the permanence in the university. This reality suggests that "[...] more forceful actions are still needed to avoid or minimize the difficulties encountered from the pedagogical, didactic and personal point of view that involves the academic performance of students at the university" (PAVÃO; VARGAS, 2015, p. 70).

This context reinforces the argument that, given the difficulties presented by a large number of university students, permanence actions are increasingly necessary in order to reduce the numbers of failure and dropout, as well as for students to complete their course. In this sense, it becomes essential to constantly rethink the work and training offered. Bassani and Martins (2011, p. 115) emphasize that

[...] the necessary training, especially at the undergraduate level, is one that effectively prepares the student in a multidisciplinary way, to meet the constant changes in society and the rapid pace of technological innovations. We should not [...] present as a training proposal at the undergraduate level, narrow, imprisoned and imprisoning curricula, restricted to a predominantly disciplinary curricular matrix, which makes it impossible to use the knowledge produced to meet the needs identified in society.

Thus, universities are required to stop following old and rigid standards and start considering the contemporary social context; to reformulate themselves, modify curricula, innovate and develop permanence actions that contemplate a diversified public that will be launched, afterwards, to the demands that the world of work imposes to the graduated

professional. The need to restructure - whether after a crisis, a change in government or a technological innovation - will always exist, since society is constantly updating and transforming itself.

Based on this scenario and focusing on the permanence of students in the different HEIs, this research was carried out and a set of developed actions was obtained.

### *Welcome, Pedagogical Support and Mental Health*

The sectors focused on learning, academic development and psychology (SAP) have as their main objective and work focus, especially, the permanence of students, learning, development, mental health, support and course completion.

Among the speeches, the following stand out: "Permanence of the students in the best way and that they manage to finish the course on time" (SAP1). This objective shows the concern of the sector with the trajectory of the students in the institution until they graduate. It is not only to remain, but to be able, with the support offered by the sector, to finish the course.

SAP2 further details the sector's intention:

It aims to prevent difficulties and work on recurring themes in the lives of university students, aiming to contribute to the student's academic development and adaptation and more efficient use of their intellectual, psychic, relational and/or social resources. (SAP2)

The concern with adaptation is justified insofar as

[...] implies several changes, some requiring accommodation of new habits, others demanding the incorporation of new behaviors and knowledge. As an example, new study methods are required to meet curricular demands, new knowledge must be acquired, and more maturity in relationships with peers and teachers is expected (SOARES; PRETTE, 2015, p. 139).

There are so many changes that many students need help from the sectors to understand how to situate themselves in this new space and meet the demands that come with it. Sometimes the expectations in relation to the university, the classes, and the activities are frustrated; friendships don't happen as easily as expected, and the student feels helpless and alone. These factors contribute to the fact that many students do not adapt and drop out of their courses, which reinforces the importance of welcoming the sectors. According to Soares and Prette (2015), support and welcome are important because they allow the student to feel more secure to develop in this new space and face the difficulties inherent to this process. Therefore, in addition to family support, it is understood that the university's welcome also contributes to the student's adaptation.

The difficulties regarding content, organization, and studies - which increase every semester and may be related to deficient Basic Education, specific learning difficulties, disabilities, emotional problems, among others - also contribute to students dropping out of courses.

Similarly, concerned with the development of students, SAP3 states that the focus of the sector is: "[...] promotion and prevention of mental health and health in general and offer conditions for students to develop in their learning" (SAP3).

In Chart 2 it is possible to observe which are the actions developed by the sectors.

**Table 2.** Actions and Projects developed: SAP

SAP 1	SAP 2	SAP 3	SAP 4	SAP 5
Customer service; events; tutoring and groups.	Individual consultations; Mini courses; Orientations; Internships; Commission.	Individual consultations; workshops; psychotherapeutic groups; Internships.	Orientations; Discussions of Guidelines and Policies; Training; Monitoring of the egress.	Social and pedagogical support; Orientation regarding Assistance Programs; Tutoring; Lectures.

Source: The authors.

These actions are organized, above all, from attendance, events, guidance, commissions, policies and prevention.

It stands out, as the main work front of these sectors, the assistance to students, whether pedagogical, psychological, psycho-pedagogical, in the area of special education or social: "[...] involves psychological, psycho-pedagogical, special education assistance" (SAP1.); "So we do this assistance, this welcoming" (SAP5).

One of the differentials for the students' follow-up work are the professionals that perform it. In this research, it was observed that some sectors have psychologists, educators, social workers, and technicians in educational affairs, while others have interns, fellows in training or graduating in the area of interest of the service, or professionals "on loan" from the Municipal Network. Besides, psycho-pedagogues and special educators, for not being contemplated in the Career Plan for Technical-Administrative Education Positions, are professionals pointed out as necessary, but less accessible to the institutions. The course in Psycho-pedagogy is a graduate course and the undergraduate course in Special Education is still offered in few Brazilian institutions. This reality also influences the shortage of professionals in these areas in Higher Education sectors and institutions.

Besides the individualized follow-up, the collective actions are also strong and increasingly necessary in order to meet the demand that cannot be met only with individual assistance - sometimes due to lack of professionals, sometimes due to physical space limitations. SAP3 mentions the experience developed by them: "And we have invested in the group thing, so, we have. Last year I did two groups, which I called experimentation clinic.

Each group had 15 students [...]" (SAP3). With the realization of group actions, it is being possible to serve a larger number of students who would be on the waiting list for a longer time or, even, who would not be served. Besides the groups, the sectors offer monitoring, which has helped students in specific subjects/areas in which they have more difficulties.

Going beyond the student focus, it has been noticed that the participating sectors are also concerned about the institution's employees and the external community, understanding that many themes should be expanded and reach a public outside the sector or, even, outside the university. To this end, they develop workshops, mini-courses, courses and training: "[...] we have mini-courses, courses in general, on the issue of academic life, adaptation of material, conversation rounds" (SAP1).

The difficulties faced by students (regarding adaptation, relationships, organization, studies, learning) have also been discussed from these training moments, which have helped in understanding and facing their problems. In addition, themes such as accessibility and inclusion, contemplated by the sectors, are important not only for the students, but also for the formation and training of teachers, administrative staff, and the community in general. After all, other professionals in the institution have recurrent doubts about what to do in the case of students with different kinds of difficulties, reinforcing the importance of this orientation work. It is noteworthy: "[...] guidance to teachers and administrative technicians in education regarding, mainly, learning issues" (SAP2). As the initial training of most teachers did not include, for example, important aspects related to the inclusion of students with disabilities or learning difficulties, the guidance becomes essential in an attempt to fill this gap and make it possible to meet the demands of students.

In the same line of orientation, prevention has become increasingly necessary in universities, as a tool for health promotion and prevention of worrying issues such as suicide. After all, the "transition to university puts students' problems in the spotlight, contributing to the development of strong ties with the highest levels of anxiety and stress" (FERRAZ; PEREIRA, 2002, p. 150). The authors reinforce that some of these problems faced by students in the university context are: loneliness, shyness, difficulties to relate, learning problems, anxiety, stress, financial difficulties.

Fear, frustrations and difficulties have contributed to the increase in cases of anxiety, stress and depression in the university environment and reinforce the importance of actions to be developed by the sectors both in meeting these demands and in their prevention. SAP5 talks about these actions:

[...] we have a great demand in this area of mental health, or in the case of lack of health itself. I don't know if it has increased a lot or if it already existed and was kind of latent. We have tried to talk a lot about this now, [...] many lectures on mental health that we have developed..., because we began to notice that our students are very sick, with various syndromes... and panic, and so on. (SAP5)

By noting a growing sickness of students, the sectors have realized that prevention is necessary and needs to be expanded. Gonçalves *et al.* (2015, p. 103) state:

Definitions of health and disease vary among individuals, cultural groups, and social classes. The social conceptions about the health-disease process show the contradictions and the organization of society itself, which makes the patients' behaviors based both on their individual state and on the expectations of the social group with which they live.

The pressure that the university space exerts on those who enter it is not always overcome. There is a great demand for production and efficiency that reinforce a scenario that demands good performance, competitiveness and excellence from students, becoming barriers for many who face learning difficulties, have a disability, fail disciplines, are at the university or in the course only because this is the family's wish. Factors such as these often destabilize students and contribute to making them sick, reinforcing the relevance and the need for the sectors to work towards prevention and health promotion.

Another support mentioned by the professionals in the sectors were the committees. Through them, they were able to interact with the academic community, discuss the sector's actions and questions about the public served. However, after Decree 9,759, of April 11, 2019, which "Extinguishes and establishes guidelines, rules, and limitations for collegiate bodies of the federal public administration", it was necessary to review the existence of the committees, following the determinations of the Decree.

Although it is not the sectors' focus, the discussions and creation of institutional Guidelines, Policies and Resolutions also count on their support. Some sectors have already collaborated with the creation of the Accessibility Policy and with other institutional Resolutions that regulate access, affirmative action, pedagogical support, among others that are directly related to permanence in the institution. SAP4 states: "[...] we are working now, at this moment, in the discussion of the new Guidelines for Teacher Education".

After the presentation of the actions, the participants highlighted those they perceived as most significant/most impactful and important for permanence and course completion.

For the sectors identified as SAP, the highlight is individual assistance, especially psychological: "The sector's flagship, the one that appears the most, is psychological assistance" (SAP2).

As previously mentioned, this type of attendance has been highlighted in recent years, and the concern of institutions about the mental health of students has grown. Even though the focus of the sectors is on student learning, the psychological follow-up stands out. However, this demand is met because it is considered to have a direct influence on the learning processes and on the permanence of students in the institutions. Many students have even mentioned that they were thinking of quitting the course but did not do so because of the support offered by the sector. It has been noticed that

[...] the psychological support services in Higher Education are a reality, although their political and social framework still needs to be defined. In fact, the practice of psychological support in Higher Education is heterogeneous, depending on the institution, the training of the technicians and the personal and interpersonal dynamics established between the services and the academic community (PEREIRA *et al.*, 2010, p. 5).

In the same direction, there are other follow-ups (with psych pedagogues or special educators), which stand out among the actions of the sectors for their direct impact on student education, reduction of failures and dropping out of curricular components.

The SAP1 representative pointed out that the biggest/main work of the sector nowadays is the follow-up of students who have exceeded the deadline for completing the course. Previously, the Institution used to "jubilate" these students, canceling their bond and enrollment. However, after a Resolution, the Institution formalized the follow up of these students and the granting of an additional period of time so that, with the follow up of professionals from the sector, the student can overcome their difficulties and finish the course. In the interview, the representative of the sector described this action:

[...] the academic has the course deadline plus 50%, and when he exceeds it, a process is opened. [...] and it comes to us [...]. We do an interview and prepare a plan of pedagogical accompaniment so that the academic can finish the course. He has a period of up to two years for the bachelor's and graduate courses and up to one year for the technologists. Then we evaluate the demand he has: how many subjects, the workload he still has to fulfill... and we make a schedule within this period [...]. (SAP1)

This path has highlighted the importance of the monitoring performed to minimize failures and dropouts, since the sector found that "With the Resolution, we already have students graduating" (SAP1).

### **Accessibility and Inclusion**

The sectors of accessibility and inclusion focus especially on the permanence of students, their learning and accessibility. It is highlighted some of its objectives: "It is to offer the follow-up to the students, teachers, servers in general, regarding the offer of attendance to the demands of accessibility" (SAI1).

The attention of these sectors to the accessibility is evident in their nomenclatures and speeches, being broken down in the actions of the three cores. According to the Brazilian Law of Inclusion (2015), accessibility is the

[...] possibility and condition of reach for use, with safety and autonomy, of spaces, furniture, urban equipment, buildings, transportation, information and communication, including their systems and technologies, as well as other services and facilities open to the public, for public or private use, both in urban and rural areas, by people with disabilities or reduced mobility.

Besides architectural and urban accessibility, the sectors are concerned with pedagogical and communicational accessibility, organizing their actions based on the understanding that it is necessary to provide conditions for the learning and permanence of students with special educational needs with equity (Chart 3).

**Table 3.** Actions and Projects developed: SAI

SAI 1	SAI 2	SAI 3
Individual accompaniment; Training; Orientation; Adaptation and loan of material; Assistance with transportation and meals; Accompaniment of deaf academics; Monitorships; Commissions.	Training; Attendance/interview; Attendance/Tutoring; Research space; Selective process; Commission; Orientations.	Instruction/information; Libras courses; Orientations; Training; Assistance; Commission; Loan of materials; Monitorships.

Source: The authors.

From the tabulation of the participants' answers, it was observed common units with the learning sectors and the addition of accessibility. The following stood out: services, events, guidance, commission, and accessibility.

By working with a more restricted group, the accessibility centers have a greater concern with the special education area and with their public. This way, the individual consultations, the monitoring/tutoring, as well as the training of employees and courses, are directed to this area and to the specificities of the subjects attended to. "We have the pedagogical follow-up with the special education professionals, who are post-graduation scholarship students [...] the formation of teachers or civil servants, according to the demand that comes to the sector, lectures, meetings" (SAI1)

After the effectiveness of the Accessibility Centers and the Special Education Policy from the Perspective of Inclusive Education (2008), accessibility and inclusion were strengthened and gained more space in the universities' discussions, evidencing the need for qualification of employees, training of the community in general and even the inclusion of curricular components, such as the discipline of Libras (Brazilian Sign Language) in undergraduate courses. These discussions take place through courses, seminars and in the actual commissions presided by the sectors (Accessibility Commission, Audio description Commission).

As important as the qualification and the training of the professionals is the work developed by the sectors in the sense of guiding the course coordinators, teachers and the community as to the daily demand involving accessibility and the work with people with disabilities: necessary adaptations in the physical space, pedagogical adaptations, possibility of substitution of curricular component, mediation between students and teachers. SAI1 states: "[...] guidance to teachers and pedagogical coordination, course coordination, which is also a very large demand from the Center and which takes us a lot of time.

Besides orienting, the sectors also adapt and lend essential materials for the permanence and learning of students at the university. Among the loaned materials, the following were mentioned: electronic magnifiers, notebooks, wheelchairs (SAI1).

As actions that stand out, besides the follow-up to students through individual assistance, monitoring and tutoring, the participants listed the guidance to professors, coordination and secretariats as fundamental actions for the permanence of students:

[...] the monitoring of students and the guidance of coordinators and teachers, which also leads to training, but I think they are perhaps the main ones in the sense of permanence and completion of this student, because, often, if this student did not have this guidance with the coordination, with the teachers and adaptations for him, in the individual monitoring here too, he may not be able to complete the course. (SAI1).

It is known that the training of teachers regarding the needs of students with disabilities is still deficient.

Particularly the issue of initial or continuing training of teachers of education and higher education on an inclusive basis can be considered as a major obstacle to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Although the University plays a key role in this context, there is still a big gap in programs or projects that involve actions related to the qualification of its faculty in more inclusive proposals (MOREIRA; BOLSANELLO; SEGER, 2011, p. 140).

This gap is reflected in their work in the classroom that, without the guidance of the accessibility centers (as to the adaptation of assessments, materials and methodologies), is far from the minimum necessary for student learning, reinforcing an exclusionary inclusion.

This reality reinforces the importance of the work developed by the centers, at the same time it denounces the professionals' lack of preparation and how much it is still necessary to deepen their training towards an inclusive education.

### **Affirmative Actions and Diversity**

The affirmative action sectors are the most recent in the Institutions (both dated 2016) and cover demands from a large public: indigenous, black, brown, quilombola, and students from public schools with a certain income. Their focus is on actions that promote inclusion, contribute to the permanence and minimization of historically established inequalities.

The actions (Chart 4) developed by these sectors also include individual assistance to students, guidance to teachers and academic community and training to discuss important issues such as racism: "I told you about the conversation wheels, then there would also be the Interculturality Project and education of ethnic and racial relations, [...] where we are discussing this issue with the courses, [...] so... the training of teachers" (SAF1).

In addition to these actions, one of the differentials of these sectors has been the involvement with the process of entry of this public in the institution, participating in the preparation of edicts, dissemination of selection processes and conference/verification interviews to enter by specific vacancy reserve. SAF1 states:

Our University was one of the first to start spreading the word about access, in 2011, because we realized that we had opened the openings for the Indigenous selection process and we did not have many candidates, because this information did not arrive. And from then on, we started... Together with the indigenous leaders, we organized the visitation routes to these villages and we started to make this disclosure. Based on this dissemination, the University started to receive the candidates.

The affirmative action sectors are the most recent in the Institutions (both dated 2016) and cover demands from a large public: indigenous, black, brown, quilombola, and students from public schools with a certain income. Their focus is on actions that promote inclusion, contribute to the permanence and minimization of historically established inequalities.

The actions (Chart 4) developed by these sectors also include individual assistance to students, guidance to teachers and academic community and training to discuss important issues such as racism: "I told you about the conversation wheels, then there would also be the Interculturality Project and education of ethnic and racial relations, [...] where we are discussing this issue with the courses, [...] so... the training of teachers" (SAF1).

In addition to these actions, one of the differentials of these sectors has been the involvement with the process of entry of this public in the institution, participating in the preparation of edicts, dissemination of selection processes and conference/verification interviews to enter by specific vacancy reserve. SAF1 states:

**Table 4.** Actions and projects developed: SAF

SAF 1	SAF 2
Monitorships; Training; Conversation rounds; Dissemination of access; Committees; Orientations.	Admission notices; Forums; Committees.

Source: The authors.

Just like the other sectors, those focused on affirmative action also have commissions that contribute to re(think) the issues that involve their actions and proposals. Its differential is in its composition, which counts on institutional and external representatives focused on social movements and indigenous leaderships.

The sectors focused on affirmative action reinforced the importance of service and guidance to the academic community, and pointed out that training and discussions involving interculturality are essential. SAF1 states:

[...] it is a Nucleus that has many actions to take. It cannot remain oblivious to the context, to what is happening around it. It has to be very attentive and trying, then, to develop this work that will consolidate this social inclusion here inside our institution, and this involves training, involves debate, involves discussion, involves intercultural dialogue.

These actions become even more significant when we witness, in the middle of the 21st century, racist, homophobic, and prejudiced manifestations.

### **Student Assistance and the PNAES**

Student assistance and its programs/assistances are the focus of the last group of sectors surveyed. This assistance reaches a very large public in the institutions and is considered one of the main factors for the permanence of students in the university and for the completion of their course, mainly due to the range of actions involved (Chart 5).

**Table 5.** Actions and Projects developed: SAE

<b>SAE 1</b>	<b>SAE 2</b>	<b>SAE 3</b>	<b>SAE 4</b>	<b>SAE 5</b>
Food; Housing Health care; Day care; Digital inclusion; Leisure; Sports; Culture; Transportation; Support.	Service; BSE - Housing, food, and transportation; Aid for teaching materials; Collective interventions - workshops.	Food; Transportation; Housing (student's house); Housing allowance (defrayal); Dental Instrumental; Pre-school assistance; Displacement assistance; Free pass - agreement.	Service/interview to access the Programs: Food; Transportation; Housing (student's house); Housing assistance (costing); Dental Instrumental; Pre-school assistance; Displacement assistance.	Permanence plan; Student evaluations and organization of the processes; Program of food, housing, transportation and daycare assistance; Socioeconomic reevaluation; Lectures; Orientations.

Source: The authors.

The sectors are based on the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES), which aims to expand the conditions for students to remain in public higher education (BRASIL, 2010):

- I - democratize the conditions for young people to remain in federal public higher education;
- II - minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities in the permanence and conclusion of higher education;
- III - reduce retention and evasion rates; and
- IV - contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education (BRASIL, 2010).

Because they have this direction and follow the proposal of the PNAES, the actions of these sectors are the closest to each other. In the discourse of those responsible, one can highlight aspects that contemplate attendance, events, policies and areas of student assistance (transportation, housing, food, daycare ...). One can highlight: "The actions [...] are based on the PNAES. The actions are all based on the ten points of PNAES: food, housing, health care, day care, digital inclusion, leisure, sports, culture, transportation, pedagogical support" (SAE1).

SAE4, whose institution has a proposal of university units in distant places, also reinforces the displacement assistance:

[...] meal allowance program; transportation allowance; housing allowance; preschool allowance, for those students who have children up to 6 years incomplete; dental instrumental aid, which is intended for students in the dentistry course [...]; commuting aid, which is intended for students who live in cities near here, within a radius of up to 150km, that student [...] who needs to commute daily to come study [...], this is what we call commuting.

Due to the amplitude of the actions, the sectors focused on student assistance work interconnected with most of the sectors surveyed.

These sectors are the ones that most understand the articulated actions and presented a greater difficulty in highlighting a main one. Despite this, student housing (student house) and food (university restaurant) were unanimously considered fundamental.

It is very difficult. I think, for example, that the issue of student housing is very important inside the university, because if the student only had a scholarship, for example, if we were going through this crisis, they would have already left, and the housing itself is important because it doesn't matter what crisis the university is in, it is here. But the University Restaurant is also fundamental for the students. In fact, it is difficult to highlight one action, but I would list these two as priorities for the permanence of the student, they would be these two main focuses: housing and food (SAE1).

This understanding that housing and food contribute directly to the permanence of the student at the university is reiterated by the participants when asked about the data that prove the contribution of the sector. One of the speeches in which it is mentioned stands out:

But then, in practice, when we follow up, on a daily basis, in meetings, there are always several examples. We already have colleagues who passed, who were approved in a competitive examination and were beneficiaries of the student assistance program, and who report that if there was no possibility of using the student assistance resources, there would be no way they could have stayed there and completed the undergraduate course and then been approved in the competitive examination (SAE2).

The discussions presented by the participants regarding the actions developed show the difficulty in delimiting which ones have the greatest impact due to the importance that each action has in particular and in relation to the others. How to choose between guidance to teachers and their own training? Or, equally, how to determine if specialized professional assistance or accessibility will contribute more to the permanence of students? And among the aid/benefits offered by student assistance, how can one choose between housing and food? Therefore, it is understood that, despite the attempt to highlight one main action, it is understood that they are complementary and determinant as a whole.

## Final Considerations

The data presented allowed us to broaden the understanding that we had about the federal universities of Rio Grande do Sul and the sectors related to support/service, accessibility, and student assistance, especially in the researched institutions - Federal University of Pelotas, Federal University of Santa Maria, and Federal University of Pampa.

The institutions present distinct spaces and structures. However, despite the differences, the participants' speeches showed homogeneity with regard to the permanence actions developed and the difficulties faced.

The sectors focused on learning, academic development and psychology (SAP) have at the core of their work, essentially, actions that contribute to the permanence of students, learning, mental health, support, and course completion. These actions are developed through individual or group consultations, events, guidance to course coordinators and professors, committee meetings, policy proposals, and prevention. The latter is also worked on through events and guidance. Among the actions pointed out, the individual consultations are highlighted and assume the biggest demand of the sector, mainly due to the growth in the number of cases of students with psychic disorders, a reality that has worried the sectors and institutions in general.

The Accessibility and Inclusion Sector (SAI) has permanence, learning and accessibility as the focus of its work, developing its actions based on individual consultations, events, guidance to course coordination and professors, committee meetings and accessibility. It differs from the actions of the previous sectors for having its work directed, above all, to people with disabilities, distancing itself from actions directed to mental health and emphasizing accessibility. The highlight in its actions is in the guidance to teachers and coordinators about the necessary adaptations for each student with disabilities. These orientations become essential when we think that most teachers have difficulty in proposing the necessary adaptations for the learning of the student who is a target of Special Education.

The Affirmative Action Sectors (SAF) are concerned with providing actions that contribute to inclusion and equal opportunities for indigenous, black, brown, and income-earning public school students. These factors are contemplated in individual assistance to students, guidance to teachers and academic community, trainings and committee meetings. Among the actions mentioned, the training and discussion about interculturality and differences have been highlighted, especially due to racist manifestations still present in the institutions.

The Student Assistance Sectors (SAE) have their actions based on the National Student Assistance Program. These sectors also develop events, services, and policies, but their focus is on the aid/programs offered (transportation, housing, food, day care...), with emphasis on housing and food, understood as essential for the permanence of the students.

Although some actions are more important and in greater demand than others, it was concluded that they are complementary and should be considered as a whole.

Finally, it is understood that the sectors researched are important for the permanence of students in the different institutions, for acting as a welcoming space that contributes to the inclusion of the student in the institution and for offering monitoring that aims to minimize the difficulties related to learning and health. It was concluded that actions markedly characterized by permanence, developed in institutional sectors structured for this purpose, effectively meet the precepts of inclusion, contributing to the permanence and increasing the number of graduates in Higher Education.

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