



Peer interaction as an element of integration to Higher Education – A case study of the alumni of Interdisciplinar Higher Education Program (ProFIS)

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Abstract

This research was oriented to the evaluation of ProFIS regarding the contributions of the program to the integration of its students at Unicamp, with emphasis peer interactions. Through qualitative interviews, it was possible to analyze not only how those interactions were shaped, but also what other factors influenced the integration of ProFIS alumni at Unicamp's undergraduate courses. Besides interaction with peers, interaction with professors and knowledge of the campus and its resources were key elements of integration at University, and ProFIS is a program that gives the students familiarization with these elements, promoting their integration.

Key words:

Integration, Peer interaction, Higher Education.

Introduction

The research aimed to evaluate the integration of students from ProFIS at Unicamp's undergraduate courses, once they graduated from the program, looking for: a) peer interaction¹; b) interactions with professors²; c) transition between high school and university²; d) prejudice for being students from lower income families.

The research was based on 10 interviews with students from ProFIS (4) and from the bonus affirmative action program of Unicamp named PAAIS (6). The intention of interviewing students from PAAIS was to compare the experience of students from similar backgrounds (public high schools) in order to understand the influence that ProFIS has on their integration.

PAAIS and ProFIS are both meant to promote the inclusion of students from public schools at Unicamp. Still, there is a significant difference between them:

ProFIS	PAAIS
1 up to 2 students from Campinas public high schools using ENEM	38,5% ³ come from the top public schools using vestibular
ProFIS + Undergraduate course	Undergraduate course
82% up until 5 minimum wages ⁴	56,7% up until 5 minimum wages ³

Results and Discussion

In terms of access, a great impact of ProFIS is undermining the self-exclusion phenomenon, where students from public schools never get to apply for exams. Many students from ProFIS said they had never aspired to study at Unicamp and that they never thought it was possible for them to get in without ProFIS. Once they were at university, ProFIS had a significant positive impact on a student's integration at Unicamp. The main contributions were:

- Giving the students an earlier chance to know more deeply all the resources available at Unicamp;
- More enrollment in extracurricular activities such as research projects. Students from ProFIS did so more often, and earlier on their studies;
- The formation of a community of students and alumni of ProFIS, which makes the transition to their undergraduate courses easier.

Despite these benefits, students from ProFIS still face prejudice and stigmatization:

- Although there were no reports of direct stigmatization against the students interviewed, they reported overhearing negative comments about students from ProFIS.
- This did not undermine their pride to be at Unicamp, and many students from ProFIS demonstrated consciousness of the importance of their presence there and a great sense of belonging that emphasized the importance of their presence as a means of resistance and change.

Conclusions

The research evidenced the importance of ProFIS for the inclusion of first generation and low-income students at Unicamp, and showed the important contributions of the program for their integration, regarding specially their knowledge of the campus, the resources available and the relationships established with their peers and professors from ProFIS. The students of PAAIS, on the contrary, did not demonstrate a sense of community, and were generally not perceived to be students benefitted from affirmative actions. This means they did blend in more easily at Unicamp, which minimized experiences of stigmatization, but they also reported more difficulty in using the campus resources, and adapting to the university's environment.

¹ ASTIN, Alexander. What matters in college: Four critical years revisited. 1993.

² PASCARELLA, Ernest T.; TERENZINI, Patrick T. How college affects students: A third decade of research (Vol. 2). 2005.

³ COMVEST. Perfil Socioeconômico dos Inscrições e Matriculados PAAIS, 2017

⁴ PACP Situação de matrícula na Unicamp e perfil Socioeconômico dos alunos do ProFIS - 2017