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University outreach at Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

A Extensão Universitária no Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

Abstract

University outreach is an educational, scientific and cultural process that brings the university closer to society. This work, presented in the "Perspectives" modality, seeks to report the inclusion of university outreach in the undergraduate degree programs of the Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro (INJC) (Josué de Castro Nutrition Institute), at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). It emphasizes the analysis of outreach activities for students' education. The main areas covered by the actions are strongly related to the Institute's Gastronomy and Nutrition courses. In June 2021, INJC presented 39 ongoing activities registered in UFRJ's academic management system, namely 30 projects, 6 events and 3 courses, covering the thematic areas of Health, Culture, Education, Environment and Work, Technology and Communication. These activities offer 288 vacancies for undergraduate students at UFRJ, not only from INJC but also from other colleges, especially in the human and social sciences. They are targeted at different ages, populational groups and territories. Despite the diversity of the objects of work, food is a theme present in all the 3 types of activities carried out. There is a firm tendency to strengthen university outreach activities, either through the mandatory credit completion by students or through the university's commitment to respond to social demands. This way, it receives at the same level of importance as novice research, when considering academic and institutional quality recognition.

Keywords: University Outreach. University. Teaching. Higher Education. Community. Society.

Resumo

A extensão universitária é um processo educativo, científico e cultural que aproxima a universidade da sociedade. Este trabalho, apresentado na modalidade "Perspectivas", busca relatar a inserção da extensão universitária nos cursos de graduação do Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro (INJC), da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), ressaltando a análise das ações extensionistas para a formação de estudantes. As principais áreas contempladas nas ações guardam forte relação com os cursos de Gastronomia e de Nutrição do Instituto. Em junho de 2021, o INJC contava com 39 ações ativas registradas no sistema de gestão acadêmica da UFRJ, distribuídas em 30 projetos, seis eventos e três cursos, contemplando, assim, as áreas temáticas de Saúde, Cultura, Educação, Meio Ambiente e Trabalho, Tecnologia e Comunicação. Essas ações disponibilizam 288 vagas para alunos de graduação da UFRJ, acolhendo estudantes do INJC e de outros centros universitários, em especial das Ciências Humanas e Sociais, tendo como público-alvo diferentes faixas etárias, grupos populacionais e territórios. Apesar da diversidade dos objetos de trabalho, a

alimentação apresenta-se como tema transversal nas três modalidades de ações realizadas. Nota-se uma firme tendência de fortalecimento das atividades universitárias de extensão, seja pela obrigatoriedade da creditação de carga horária para o corpo docente ou pelo compromisso da universidade em responder às demandas sociais, equiparando-as efetivamente à pesquisa no que tange à valorização acadêmica e institucional.

Palavras-chave: Extensão. Universidade. Ensino. Educação Superior. Comunidade. Sociedade.

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CONTEXT

The history of Brazilian universities is linked to the permanent struggle in the political-educational field of all those who seek an academic space where theories and practices that transform society and the State can be discussed and implemented. Education must be conceived in a critical and plural fashion, and it cannot be merely restricted to the transmission of knowledge in the classroom. Therefore, university outreach programs play a relevant role in a learning process that is based on reflection, debate, dialog and interaction with reality, with a view to understanding and transforming it. They prevent student's education from being restricted to technical and formal aspects; rather, they enable the inclusion of social and political aspects, thus promoting critical awareness.¹

University outreach in Brazilian higher education is the activity that integrates the curriculum and the organization of research. It consists of an interdisciplinary, political, educational, cultural, scientific and technological process which promotes the transformative interaction between higher education institutions and others sectors of society, by means of production and application of knowledge, in permanent integration with teaching and research.²

There are five guidelines that should serve as a basis for the formulation and implementation of university outreach activities: 1) dialogical interaction; 2) Interdisciplinarity and interprofessionalism; 3) Teaching-research-outreach inseparability; 4) Impact on student education; and 5) Impact on social transformation.³

The first official records on university outreach appeared in the Statute of the Brazilian University, provided for in Decree-Law No. 19,851/1931 and Law No. 4,024/1961, National Education Bases and Guidelines Law, centered on the modality of transmission of knowledge and assistance.^{4,5} The University Reform of 1968, Law No. 5540, made outreach programs mandatory in all higher education institutes and universities, as special courses and services extended to the community.⁶

Law nº13.005/2014 approved the National Education Plan (PNE), which establishes guidelines, goals and strategies for the Brazilian educational policy for a period of ten years. PNE is composed of 20 goals and approximately 250 strategies. Strategy 12.7 seeks to ensure at least ten percent of the total curricular credits required for graduation can be completed in university outreach programs and projects, preferably the ones in areas of great social relevance.⁷

Although article 207 of the 1988 Constitution and the National Education Plans establish the inseparability between teaching, research and outreach, it was only in 2018 that the Resolution of the National Education Council - CNE/CES No. 07/2018 was published. It established the guidelines for outreach programs in Brazilian higher education and regulated the inclusion of outreach activities in a comprehensive and integrated manner in the curricula of undergraduate courses.²

Outreach activities are considered as interventions that directly involve communities outside higher education institutions and that are linked to student education, according to their characterization in the political-pedagogical projects of courses, offered in the form of programs, projects, courses, events or services provision.²

This paper seeks to present, through critical reflections, the inclusion of university outreach in the undergraduate courses of the Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro (INJC) (Josué de Castro Nutrition Institute), Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro). It will present the history of outreach at INJC, emphasizing the analysis of actions for student education in the Gastronomy and Nutrition undergraduate programs

ORGANIZATION OF UNIVERSITY OUTREACH AT THE UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO (FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO)

The concept of university outreach adopted by UFRJ is the one defined by the Forum of Outreach Pro-Rectors of Brazilian Public Institutions of Higher Education (FORPROEX) in 2012,³ after a broad open debate held at national meetings in 2009 and 2010:

University outreach, under the constitutional principle of the inseparability of teaching, research and outreach, is an interdisciplinary educational, cultural, scientific and political process that promotes the transforming interaction between universities and other sectors of society.³

FORPROEX organized the work of university outreach into eight thematic areas: health, education, work, environment, communication, human rights and justice, production technology and culture and 53 lines of outreach, which can be registered in any of the areas.⁶

At UFRJ, outreach activities can be credited as defined by the inclusion of a single Supplementary Curriculum Requirement (RCS), introduced in the curriculum of each undergraduate program. It corresponds to the total number of hours that students are supposed to complete in outreach activities.^{8,9} The aforementioned RCS is automatically available for students to enroll in from their first period of active enrollment throughout the total duration of their program; in other words, it works as a "compensatory time" system.^{8,9} At the same time, students have access to a list of outreach activities, and they have to follow procedures similar to those of enrollment and comply with the same rules applied for curricular courses. The class hours will be registered in the university's Integrated Academic Management System (SIGA).

New outreach activities are proposed in any of the modalities and in a continuous flow; they are evaluated and approved by the outreach department coordinator and by the members of the academic unit of the respective coordinator. Later, they are made available by UFRJ's Dean of Outreach (PR5) at SIGA and can be selected by students.

To strengthen outreach programs, the University Outreach Council (CEU) was created at UFRJ in 2019. It has the same hierarchical level as the higher faculty committees of undergraduate and graduate education. CEU, among other powers, is in charge of formulating the university's rules and standards in matters of outreach or its amendments; complying with and enforcing the outreach department's general resolutions and regulations; appraising and approving proposals relative to the creation of courses, programs, events and outreach projects; and approving the university outreach policy guidelines proposed by the pro-rector and the sectoral plans for the university's outreach activity areas.¹⁰

REPORTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OUTREACH DEPARTMENT AT THE INSTITUTO DE NUTRIÇÃO JOSUÉ DE CASTRO (JOSUÉ DE CASTRO NUTRITION INSTITUTE)

INJC was created in 1946, initially under the name of the Instituto de Nutrição da Universidade do Brasil (INUB) (Nutrition Institute of the University of Brazil). The course for dietitians/nutritionists was implemented in 1948. It was the fourth in Brazil.¹¹ In 2011, INJC implemented the undergraduate degree in Gastronomy, the first public undergraduate program in this field in the Southeast Region. Also, it offered an innovative pedagogical-curricular proposal.

Being aligned with society's demands is, and has always been, a need for INJC. The various activities in community environments, either by demand for curricular practices, or by spontaneous social demand, have marked

the institution's history since its beginnings, when it still operated in the former headquarters in Largo da Misericórdia, in the historic center of the city of Rio de Janeiro.

The university outreach is one of the pillars for the education of undergraduate students at INJC, even before credit completion became mandatory. However, there was no institutional system at UFRJ to record outreach activities; therefore, their entire history cannot be possibly recovered.

University outreach activities should be conceived as an alternative to global capitalism, and the role of universities is to actively help build social cohesion, strengthen democracy, fight against social exclusion and environmental degradation, and advocate for cultural diversity.¹²

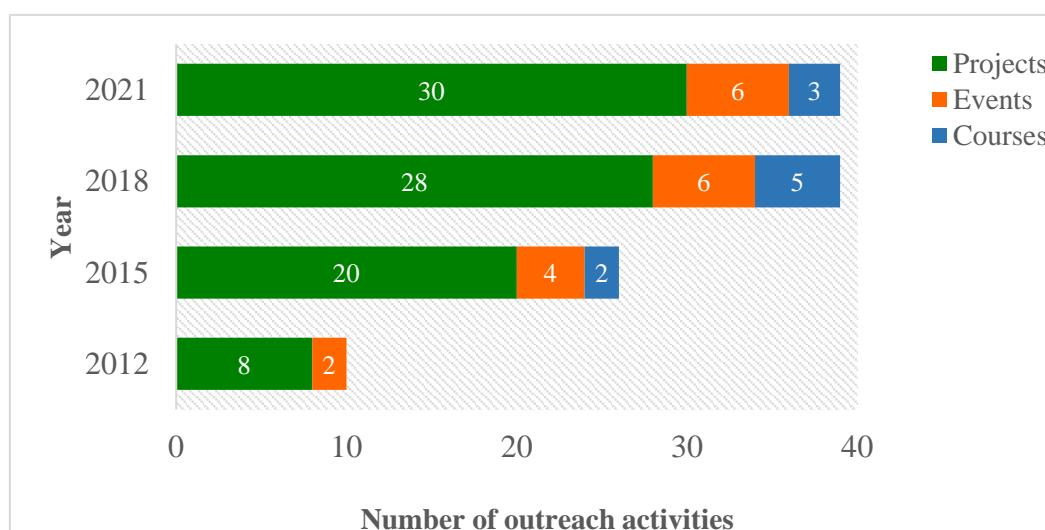
Brazil is beset with social problems arising from economic, political, environmental and cultural crises, which become more intense after the outburst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, the food system and the diet of Brazilians were affected by an increase in food prices and in the number of households with food insecurity; high consumption of ultra-processed products and low consumption of fruits and vegetables; an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable chronic diseases; the occurrence of deforestation and the intensive use of pesticides in food production, with loss of biodiversity and food culture.¹³⁻¹⁶

Adequate and healthy eating consists of going beyond the food nutrients; it also includes respecting regional eating habits and considering the impacts of the forms of production and distribution of food on the environment and society. The act of eating must be part of people's daily lives, as a pleasant and socializing event. Access to reliable information and accessible language on the theme can enable autonomous food choices and allow society to demand compliance with the human right to adequate and healthy food, in accordance with the *Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population*.¹³

Food, as a complex social theme, is present across INJC's outreach activities, as evidence of interdisciplinarity and interprofessionalism in student education, by encompassing biological, agronomic, environmental, sanitary, historical, cultural and aspects as well as social rights.

Based on the analysis of historical documents and consultations with the information, registration and data storage systems of UFRJ (SIGA and Project Management and Information System-SIGPROJ), it was found that from 2012 to 2021, there was an increase by around 74% in the amount of outreach activities (projects, courses and events), particularly projects which represent the majority of registered actions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Evolution of the total outreach activities, projects, events and courses at the Instituto de Nutrição Josué de Castro (Josué de Castro Nutrition Institute)



Almost all activities are coordinated by professors, with a low rate of participation of technical staff. This increase is especially due to the growing social demands for changes and transformations, to the needs arising from mandatory credit completion and to greater academic recognition of outreach programs at the national and local levels. Even during the suspension of academic activities because of the COVID-19 pandemic, new activities were created and hardly ever were there situations in which an activity had to be temporarily suspended. This fact highlights the university community's ability to adapt to remote work.

On the part of students, in addition to the requirements for credit completion, there is a growing interest in activities that promote greater interaction with different audiences and proximity to society's aspirations for better living conditions and opportunities. Additionally, owing to the policy of outreach scholarships at UFRJ, the activity has been gaining prestige at levels similar to those of novice research at the scientific initiation level, with notices for funding being published for more than a decade.

The main areas covered in outreach activities are strongly related to the institution's undergraduate degree programs. In June 2021, INJC had 39 active activities registered in SIGA, distributed into 30 projects, six events and three outreach courses, in the thematic areas of Health, Culture, Education, Environment and Work, Technology and Communication. The activities are coordinated by 37 professors, who account for more than half of the faculty, and by two members of technical-administrative staff.

The ongoing activities currently offer 288 vacancies for undergraduate students at UFRJ, not only from INJC but also from other academic units, especially in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences. The activities are carried out for different age groups (children, adolescents, young people, adults and the elderly) and population groups (such as elementary and high school students and teachers, LGBTQIA+ community, athletes, *quilombo* residents, seacoast populations, family and agroecological farmers, health professionals, gastronomes, food entrepreneurs and groups with specific food needs). Despite the diversity of work objects, food is a theme addressed in all the three types of activities performed.

Outreach activities at INJC are committed to 16 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely: Good health and well-being; Responsible consumption and production; Zero hunger and sustainable agriculture; Quality education; Reduced inequalities; Decent work and economic growth; Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Gender equality; Climate action; Sustainable cities and communities; Clean and affordable energy; Clean water and sanitation; Life on land/below water; Peace, justice and strong institutions; Partnerships for the goals. It should be noted that some of the SDGs maintain an important interface with the theme of food and population groups at nutritional and social risk, especially in the territories where INJC operates (slums in Manguinhos, Maré, UFRJ's residential village, Jardim Gramacho, Quilombo do Campinho, and environmental protection areas and rural regions of the state of Rio de Janeiro, among others).

The projects, courses and events are carried out particularly in the following lines of outreach defined by PR5: food and nutrition security, human health, rural development and agrarian issues, environmental issues, science spaces, cultural, historical and natural heritage, solid waste, vulnerable social groups, childhood and adolescence, entrepreneurship, employment and income, professional education and people with disabilities and special needs.

The target public outside UFRJ is expected to consist of approximately 22,000 people. In addition to the external public, it is estimated that they reach 4,366 students, 951 professors and 513 technical and administrative staff from the internal university community.

INJC maintains 37 partnerships with entities, social movements, institutions and governmental and non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and local levels, with emphasis on the Departments of Education and Health of municipalities in Rio de Janeiro and Greater Rio, the Landless Workers Movement, Association of Biological Farmers of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Association of Farmers and Artisans of the Fojo Microbasin,

Gastromotiva, Public Ministry of Labor, Nutrition Association of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Regional Council of Nutrition of the 4th Region, among others. These outreach activities interact with a variety of social issues and enable humanist and critical academic education, and they include priority areas of action for integration between university outreach and public policies, according to the National Policy for University Extension.³

The “Institutional Program for Funding of Outreach Activities” at UFRJ, 2021 edition, included 18 INJC activities with 26 scholarships for projects, two for courses and three quotas for events, effective from May 2021 to April 2022. In the series of public notices supporting outreach activities at UFRJ, for more than a decade, INJC has been acknowledged for granting scholarships and funding the unit’s outreach initiatives.

INJC also plays an expressive role in institutional events at UFRJ aimed at students from public and private schools who, traditionally, visit the university to learn about undergraduate degree programs and the production of academic units at UFRJ. In this sense, the event “Getting to know UFRJ” and the “National Science and Technology Week” (SNCT) are noteworthy. Courses and workshops are offered, and students and professors actively participate from planning to implementation. In 2020 and 2021, PR5 promoted the “Knowledge Festival”, an event with wide participation of university professors and students, on a digital platform, enabling the reach of a large external audience. The event “Getting to Know UFRJ” was held in 2020, as part of the “Knowledge Festival”, and SNCT was held online in that same year, in a reduced edition.

Outreach activities at INJC are visible to the academic and external public, through its social media profiles, e.g., on Facebook and Instagram, and on websites linked or not to INJC’s domain. Such platforms enable initiatives for dissemination and popularization of science, which were increased during the period of remote work, as encouraged by PR5.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PROSPECTS

The experience of outreach activities, as of March 2020, with the suspension of academic activities owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrated an ability to adapt to adversities, especially through actions that respond to the demands generated by sanitary and economic crises, i.e., with an increased risk of food insecurity, reaffirming the commitment of INJC and UFRJ to social development.

There is a firm tendency to strengthen university outreach activities, either because of mandatory credit completion by students, or because of the university’s commitment to respond to social demands, which places university outreach at an equivalent level to that of research, as regards academic and institutional importance.

For full recognition, one needs to appreciate and encourage academic production resulting from outreach activities, including the completion of undergraduate and graduate degrees, presentations at events and publications in journals and books. The integration with lines of research in graduate programs is also a strategy for strengthening this core activity. Additionally, the valuation of outreach in the evaluation of teaching performance, with a view to career progression, and in the indicators for granting vacancies for teaching careers at universities, is also a strategy to provide outreach programs with a well-deserved prominent position, in virtue of its role in transforming social reality.

Within the scope of UFRJ, the regulation for the provision of services is currently being discussed as an integral part of the list of outreach activities, considering, above all, the importance of preserving the national guidelines that support university outreach. As a consensus, the provision of services is understood as carrying out work offered by the university or contracted by third parties (community, company, public agency, among others), which may involve issuing technical reports, legal and judicial assistance, occasional services such as advisory, consultancy and curatorship, service to the public in spaces of culture, science and technology, healthcare, among others.

Development agencies are expected to offer greater support to outreach activities and to the integration between research and outreach initiatives, e.g., by providing grants and scholarships, as a way to ensure the implementation of activities that require financial support.

Within the scope of INJC, it is estimated that, in the very near future, the entire faculty and a higher number of technical staff will be coordinating outreach activities. In this way, UFRJ intends to increase the offer of vacancies to students from INJC and from other colleges, as well as to the external public, enabling interdisciplinarity and dialog with social issues. This is essential to the students' academic education and citizenship, which are postulates that underpin university outreach..

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Contributors

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