

Student assistance in higher education: The trajectory of the national student assistance program at the Federal University of Ouro Preto

Assistência estudantil na educação superior: A trajetória do programa nacional de assistência estudantil na Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto

Asistencia estudiantil en la educación superior: La trayectoria del programa nacional de asistencia estudiantil de la Universidad Federal de Ouro Preto

Jacqueline Kelly Almeida Cunha¹ , Breyenner Ricardo de Oliveira¹ ,
Natália Rigueira Fernandes¹ 

¹ Federal University of Ouro Preto, Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Corresponding author:

Breyenner Ricardo de Oliveira

Email: breyenner@ufop.edu.br

How to cite: Cunha, J. K. A., Oliveira, B. R., & Fernandes, N. R. (2023). Student assistance in higher education: The trajectory of the national student assistance program at the Federal University of Ouro Preto. *Revista Tempos e Espaços em Educação*, 16(35), e18808. <http://dx.doi.org/10.20952/revtee.v16i35.18808>

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the trajectory of the National Student Assistance Program (PNAES) at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP), from the perspective of the institution's high-ranking implementers. Likewise, it intends to analyze the evaluation reports of the execution of the program in the institution, in the period from 2017 to 2019. giving priority to students from public basic education schools or with a per capita family income of up to one and a half minimum wages. At UFOP, the program is carried out by the Dean of Community and Student Affairs, which defines the criteria and methodology for selecting beneficiary undergraduate students. The research is quantitative and qualitative, descriptive and is structured in three phases: (1) survey of the legal/institutional frameworks of the program at national and local level; (2) analysis of data available at UFOP on the evaluation of the implementation of the PNAES in the institution, from 2017 to 2019; (3) and interviews with high-ranking bureaucrats, responsible for PNAES implementation actions at PRACE. The data analyzed reveal that, between 2017 and 2019, an average of 11,141 students were enrolled in face-to-face teaching at the institution. Of these, 60.7% are public school graduates and 25.2% received financial aid via PNAES. Regarding academic performance, data indicate that scholarship holders have a better average coefficient than other students, in addition to lower dropout rates. The data indicate that the program at the university

includes students from public schools in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability, contributing to the reduction of social inequalities through the insertion and permanence of students and, consequently, the completion of higher education.

Keywords: Student Assistance. Educational inequalities. College education. Implementation of educational policies. National Student Assistance Program.

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a trajetória do Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil (PNAES) na Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP), a partir da percepção dos implementadores de alto escalão da instituição. Da mesma forma, analisa os relatórios de avaliação da execução do programa na instituição, no período de 2017 a 2019. O PNAES foi instituído pelo Decreto n.º 7.234/2010 com a finalidade de ampliar as condições de permanência dos jovens na educação superior federal, atendendo, prioritariamente, estudantes oriundos de escolas públicas de educação básica ou com renda familiar per capita de até um salário mínimo e meio. Na UFOP, o programa é executado pela Pró-Reitoria de Assuntos Comunitários e Estudantis, que define os critérios e a metodologia de seleção dos alunos de graduação beneficiados. A pesquisa é quanti-qualitativa, descritiva e se estrutura em três fases: (1) levantamento dos marcos legais/institucionais do programa ao nível nacional e local; (2) análise dos dados disponíveis na UFOP sobre a avaliação da execução do PNAES na instituição, no período de 2017 a 2019; (3) e entrevistas com os burocratas de alto escalão, responsáveis por ações de implementação do PNAES na PRACE. Os dados analisados revelam que, entre 2017 e 2019, em média 11.141 alunos estavam matriculados no ensino presencial na instituição. Destes, 60,7% são egressos de escola pública e 25,2% receberam auxílio financeiro via PNAES. Sobre o desempenho acadêmico, os dados informam que os bolsistas têm melhor coeficiente médio que os demais alunos, além de menor evasão. Os dados indicam que o programa na universidade contempla estudantes oriundos de escolas públicas em situação de vulnerabilidade socioeconômica, contribuindo para a redução de desigualdades sociais por meio da inserção e da permanência dos alunos e, conseqüentemente, da conclusão do ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Assistência Estudantil. Desigualdades educacionais. Educação Superior. Implementação de políticas educacionais. Programa Nacional de Assistência Estudantil.

RESUMEN

El artículo analiza la trayectoria del Programa Nacional de Atención al Estudiante (PNAES) de la Universidad Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP), en la perspectiva de los altos ejecutores de la institución. Asimismo, se pretende analizar los informes de evaluación de la ejecución del programa en la institución, en el período 2017 a 2019, dando prioridad a los estudiantes de escuelas públicas de educación básica o con ingreso familiar per cápita de hasta un año y medio. salarios mínimos. En la UFOP, el programa es realizado por el Decanato de Asuntos Comunitarios y Estudiantiles, que define los criterios y la metodología para la selección de los estudiantes de grado beneficiarios. La investigación es cuantitativa y cualitativa, descriptiva y está estructurada en tres fases: (1) relevamiento de los marcos legales/institucionales del programa a nivel nacional y local; (2) análisis de los datos disponibles en la UFOP sobre la evaluación de la implementación del PNAES en la institución, de 2017 a 2019; (3) y entrevistas con altos funcionarios burócratas, responsables de las acciones de implementación del PNAES en el PRACE. Los datos analizados revelan que, entre 2017 y 2019, una media de 11.141 alumnos se matricularon en docencia presencial en la institución. De estos, el 60,7% son egresados de escuelas públicas y el 25,2% recibió ayuda económica a través del PNAES. En cuanto al rendimiento académico, los datos indican que los becarios tienen un mejor coeficiente promedio que otros estudiantes, además de menores tasas de deserción. Los datos indican que el programa en la universidad incluye a estudiantes de escuelas públicas en situación de vulnerabilidad socioeconómica, contribuyendo a la reducción de las desigualdades sociales a

través de la inserción y permanencia de los estudiantes y, consecuentemente, la culminación de la educación superior.

Palabras clave: Asistencia Estudiantil. Desigualdades educativas. Educación universitaria. Implementación de políticas educativas. Programa Nacional de Atención al Estudiante.

INTRODUCTION

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This article analyzes the trajectory of the National Student Aid Program (PNAES) at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) from the perception of high-ranking implementers about the program of the student assistance policy in the institution. Likewise, it analyzes the evaluation¹ reports of the implementation of PNAES at UFOP from 2017 to 2019 so that this path is evidenced. The PNAES was formulated by the federal government in 2007, in the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, through Normative Ordinance No. 39 of December 12, 2007, and established later as a Decree on July 19, 2010. It is implemented in the Federal Education Institutions in Brazil under the coordination and funding of the Ministry of Education (MEC).

For Imperatori (2017, p.298) (our translation), the PNAES “represents a breakthrough in recognition of student assistance as a social right,” with the State now intervening to democratize the conditions of permanence for young people, reducing the effects of social and regional inequalities in federal public higher education. In this context, PNAES is seen as a public policy, the fruit of the State's action to solve an action considered relevant, from complex processes that become measures of interests, of mobilization, of agreements and disagreements, involving several aspects, be they cultural, educational, social, among others.

In this perspective, Fichter Filho, Oliveira, and Coelho (2021) reinforce the relevance of apprehending the trajectory and the scenario in which the subjects are inserted. For the authors, policies do not have a single direction, and the notion of trajectory allows us to understand the social and historical processes in which these actors are inserted. The trajectory, therefore, allows us to understand the senses, meanings, and interpretations of policies and programs. According to Gussi and Oliveira (2016), they build a dialogue between temporalities and territorialities, revealing a historical, collective, and social dimension. In this direction, the authors consider that the policies/programs do not have only one single meaning because they can be re-signified according to the institutional and personal daily life of the actors involved, the organizational and cultural dynamics of the institutions, and the relationships with the beneficiary subjects, where the implementation of these policies/programs occurs.

Part of the federal network of higher education that receives the budgetary resources of the program, UFOP has almost 11,000 students enrolled in its undergraduate courses. Two thousand six hundred students are included in the Student Assistance Policy via PNAES. At UFOP, the program is under the responsibility of the Dean of Community and Student Affairs (PRACE), a department directly responsible for designing, monitoring, and evaluating student assistance programs.

The analysis of the program's trajectory focuses on the perceptions that high-ranking bureaucrats (BAE) have about the PNAES at the institution. According to Pires (2012), high-ranking bureaucrats formulate the strategies for public policy implementation and are stationed, according to Fuster (2016), in decision-making positions and functions with political responsibility

¹ We will adopt the concept of vulnerability, according to the National Policy for Social Assistance, which defines it as “families and individuals with loss or fragility of affective, belonging and sociability bonds; life cycles; stigmatized identities in ethnic, cultural and sexual terms; personal disadvantage resulting from disabilities; exclusion due to poverty and in the access to other public policies; use of psychoactive substances; different forms of violence coming from the family nucleus, groups, and individuals; precarious insertion or non-insertion in the formal and informal labor market; differentiated survival strategies and alternatives that may represent personal and social risk” (Resolution n. 145, 2004, p.33).

policymakers. Considering the institutional organization, they are at the top of the implementation chain.

In this research, we analyze the PNAES based on the perceptions of high-ranking bureaucrats linked at some point to PRACE and the program implementation process. To this end, we conducted semi-structured interviews with three actors who held management positions in the pro-rectory (Paulo, Simone, and Elza, fictitious names). The research is descriptive and was structured in three phases: (1) a survey of the legal/institutional frameworks of the program at the national and local level; (2) an analysis of the data available at UFOP on the evaluation of the execution of PNAES in the institution, in the period from 2017 to 2019. (3) Interviews with high-ranking bureaucrats responsible for PNAES implementation actions at PRACE.

For this research, the profile of students who received PNAES benefits in the period from 2017 to 2019 considered: (1) the number of scholarship students about the total number of enrolled students; (2) the proportion of students who entered UFOP through quotas, contemplated by PNAES scholarship; (3) the proportion of students coming from public school who are scholarship students; (4) the courses with the highest number of scholarship students; and (5) the academic performance of these students, based on the analysis of data on the average academic coefficient, academic merit, and dropout rate.

This article is organized into four sections, besides the introduction and final considerations. The first section presents the political, economic, and social context of the expansion of Brazilian higher education since 2003 and the implementation of social policies to democratize access. The second section presents the insertion of student assistance after the expansion of higher education, aiming at the democratization and permanence of students in federal higher education institutions.

In the next section, we present the data analysis of the evaluation reports of the execution of PNAES made available at UFOP from 2017 to 2019. In the fourth section, the perception of high-ranking implementers about PNAES in PRACE was analyzed, considering five dimensions: (1) the program at the national and local level; (2) the change in the profile of students post-PNAES, (3) evasion and monitoring of the student beneficiary of the program; (4) compliance with the objectives of the decree; (5) budgetary resources.

THE EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: DEMOCRATIZING ACCESS FOR VULNERABLE STUDENTS ²

The Constitution of 1988, responsible for numerous advances in social protection policies in Brazil, ensures the guarantee of education as a right, assigning the State the duty to ensure access to compulsory basic education, the universalization of high school, and the expansion of access to higher education. Yet, despite the right being assured, the inequality of educational opportunities is part of the reality of Brazilian children, adolescents, and youth, especially those in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability, compromising the access and permanence of these students.

Oliveira (2019) states that social inequality in Brazil has complex social and historical origins and is associated with regions, color, race, gender, and income. Political moments that demarcated the prospect of social change for economically and socially vulnerable citizens were the Lula and Dilma governments (2002-2016), a period marked by a series of initiatives to promote citizenship

² We will adopt the concept of vulnerability, according to the National Policy for Social Assistance, which defines it as “families and individuals with loss or fragility of affective, belonging and sociability bonds; life cycles; stigmatized identities in ethnic, cultural and sexual terms; personal disadvantage resulting from disabilities; exclusion by poverty and in the access to other public policies; use of psychoactive substances; different forms of violence coming from the family nucleus, groups, and individuals; precarious insertion or non-insertion in the formal and informal labor market; differentiated survival strategies and alternatives that may represent personal and social risk” (Resolution n. 145, 2004, p.33).

and raise social inclusion rates in the country. This period was characterized by hard work to expand a social safety net, which allowed for a series of results such as a decrease in the poverty rate and income concentration, an increase in the number of jobs and consumption, making the capacities of public institutions in the area of social assistance more solid.

From this perspective, the emphasis given to policies aimed at economic growth and the guarantee of social rights can be observed in the implementation of educational policy projects aimed at expanding vacancies in Basic Education and strengthening public institutions, in addition to the expansion of the number of Brazilian public universities. For Senkevics (2021), it is undeniable that such expansion was important for guaranteeing social inclusion and the rights of the impoverished population in Brazil.

The governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff (2003-2016) effectively treated education as a right, through policies established for all levels, stages, and modalities of education, with emphasis on basic education. After enacting the Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities (REUNI) in these governments, decree n. 6.096/2007, more than 100 university campuses were opened, and 14 federal universities were created. Another relevant aspect concerns Law 11.892/2008, which created the Federal Institutes of Education, Science, and Technology (IF) that, according to Senkevics (2021), totaled 653 schools in 2021. According to Paula (2017, p.307) (our translation), the REUNI has as guidelines: "The reduction of dropout rates, the occupation of vacant positions, and the increase of openings, especially in the evening period; the expansion of inclusion and student assistance policies; the articulation of graduate and undergraduate programs and higher education with basic education".

Data on the socioeconomic and cultural profile of students were revealed by the V Research of Socioeconomic and Cultural Profile of Undergraduates of Higher Education Federal Institutions (IFES), organized by the National Forum of Pro-rectors of Community and Student Affairs (FONAPRACE³) (V National Research, 2019). The survey reported that there had been an important change in the socioeconomic profile of students in public universities, which demarcated an essential aspect of ensuring the social protection of socially and economically vulnerable students in Brazil: the growth of more than 260% in vacancies offered between 2003 and 2017 in public universities.

The same survey also revealed that 53.5% of undergraduates in the IFES are in the monthly family income per capita range of up to one minimum wage, and 70.2% are in the monthly family income per capita range of up to one-half minimum wage. Historically, it can be observed from the data that the percentage of students belonging to families with monthly per capita income up to 1 and a half minimum wage jumped from 44.3% in 1996 to 66.2% in 2014, reaching 70.2% in 2018, the highest level in the historical series. Senkevics (2021) states that it was possible to notice a heterogenization of the student public from the insertion of inclusive educational policies in Brazil's first decade of the 2000s, which enabled a new composition of universities.

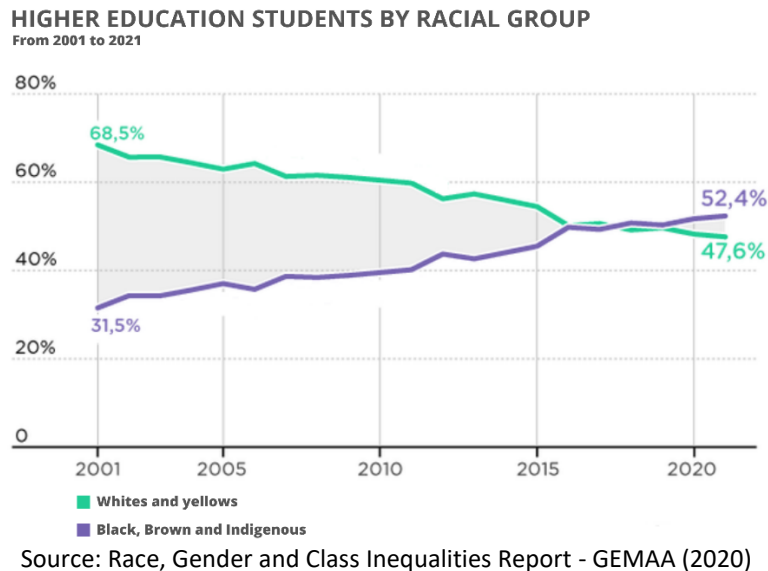
Part of this movement stems from the strong expansion of public higher education and investment in social policies for the poorest layers of the population since the early 2000s. FONAPRACE (V National Survey, 2019) points to the changes in the last 20 years in the composition by color or race of students in Brazilian higher education. Expanding the Right to education for socially and economically vulnerable youth in Brazil was the creation of the Quotas Policy. Through Law No. 12,711, of August 29, 2012, the reservation of places for students from public schools and ethnic minorities was foreseen.

The Multidisciplinary Study Group on Affirmative Action (GEMAA), in presenting the report on race, gender, and class inequalities (2021), states that in 2001, 68.5% of Brazilian higher education students declared themselves white and yellow, while 31.5% of students declared

³ Observatory of the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Student Affairs.

themselves black, brown, or indigenous. According to graph 1, the group analysis shows that, in 2021, most higher education students are black, brown, and indigenous, totaling 52.4%, an expressive number compared to the 47.6% who declared themselves white and yellow. When the data are expressed in absolute numbers, the number of black, brown, and indigenous students rose from 318,457 in 2001 to 1,268,046 in 2021. The absolute number of white and yellow students increased from 691,465 to 1,153,368.

Chart 1. Higher Education Students by Racial Group (2001 to 2021)



It is clear from this discussion that, besides the conditions for entering, it is important to analyze the policies that ensure the permanence of these students since many of these individuals come from families in situations of social and economic vulnerability. In this sense, reflecting on the state capabilities of federal public institutions in serving these students is a latent aspect when reflecting on the social policies for serving students configured through the university student assistance policies.

STUDENT ASSISTANCE AFTER THE EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BRAZIL: DEMOCRATIZATION AND PERMANENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

During the Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva administration (2003-2010), policies were implemented to expand Brazilian public higher education, committed to increasing the supply of openings in federal institutions through the creation, expansion, and interiorization of public universities.

In this sense, were instituted: the University for All Program (PROUNI, created in 2004), the Support Program for Restructuring and Expansion Plans of Federal Universities (REUNI, established by Decree No. 6.096/2007), and the Unified Selection System for admission to Higher Education (SISU, created in 2010). Later, in the Dilma Rousseff government (2011-2016), the Quotas Law was sanctioned in 2012. All these policies stand out as important strategies for expanding and democratizing public and higher education in Brazil.

Analyzing the expansion axis in federal universities, REUNI is one of the actions that materialize the goals of the National Education Plan because it brings together a set of measures to resume the growth of Brazilian public higher education (V National Survey, 2019). Such a program is planned to create conditions for expanding access and permanence in higher education, at the undergraduate level, for better use of the physical structure and human resources existing in federal universities (Decree n. 6.096, 2007).

For these goals to be achieved, investments related to infrastructure, human resources, increased vacancies, and access to federal educational institutions were not enough. More than that, it was necessary to think about guaranteeing rights, aiming at access to material and subjective resources to ensure, with responsibility, the permanence of students in vulnerable situations so that they could finish higher education.

According to the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research (INEP), in 2003, the Brazilian public higher education network comprised 45 federal universities. In 2018, still according to the same institute, the number advanced to 63 federal universities, corresponding to a 40% expansion, and from 148 campuses to 321 campuses/units, with a 117% growth. According to the Census of Higher Education conducted in 2018, the period between 2008 and 2018 grew 89.7% in the number of enrollments in the federal higher education network (Census of Higher Education, 2019).

After the progressive increase in the number of IFES and, consequently, in the offer of vacancies, a broad discussion began in various entities related to higher education, especially FONAPRACE, linked to the National Association of Directors of Federal Higher Education Institutions (ANDIFES), which reinforced the importance of ensuring the conditions for young people to remain in federal public higher education in a regulated way.

In this direction, the actions on student assistance, which had been developed in a fragmented and individualized way and based on budget resources from the IFES themselves, were regulated via Normative Ordinance (No. 39, December 12, 2007) and later via Decree (No. 7234, July 19, 2010). In this way, these actions had their scope expanded and had their budget guaranteed by the MEC in the government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The PNAES, run under the MEC, was regulated as a decree in 2010, aiming to ensure the permanence of young people enrolled in federal public higher education, serving, as a priority, students from public schools or with per capita family income of up to 1.5 minimum wages. The program plans to promote equity in the conditions of permanence in the IFES and establishes, among its objectives, democratize the conditions of permanence of young people in federal public higher education; minimize the effects of social and regional inequalities in the permanence and completion of higher education; reduce rates of retention and evasion; and contribute to the promotion of social inclusion through education (Decree 7.234, 2010).

Decree No. 7.234/2010 ensured its budget line and pre-established actions for student assistance, enabling the greater organization of the ten areas covered by the program and for students in socioeconomic vulnerability: student housing; food; transportation; health care; digital inclusion; sports; daycare; pedagogical support; access, participation and learning of students with disabilities, global development disorders and high abilities and overdose. Even with the advances achieved, it is important to emphasize that the PNAES still needs to be legitimized as a consolidated law by the National Congress, ceasing to be a government policy to become a public policy of the State fully.

THE EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PNAES AT UFOP: WHAT DO THE REPORTS (2017-2019) REPORT?

At the Federal University of Ouro Preto, the Dean of Community and Student Affairs PRACE was created in 2008 and is responsible for preparing, monitoring, and evaluating the actions and programs of student assistance, whether funded or not by PNAES. In the university's organizational structure, other bodies participate in PRACE's financial planning, such as the Dean of Planning and Administration, the Dean of Finances, and the Dean's Office.

To access the programs with resources linked to PNAES, the vulnerable student must request a socioeconomic evaluation from the institution's social workers. According to University Council

Resolution 1.380/2012⁴, the following criteria are considered: (1) gross monthly family income; (2) family assets; (3) occupation of those responsible for the student. The adoption of affirmative action policies, with the reduction of disparities in access to higher education, became relevant in the face of persistent inequalities also reflected in Brazilian higher education.

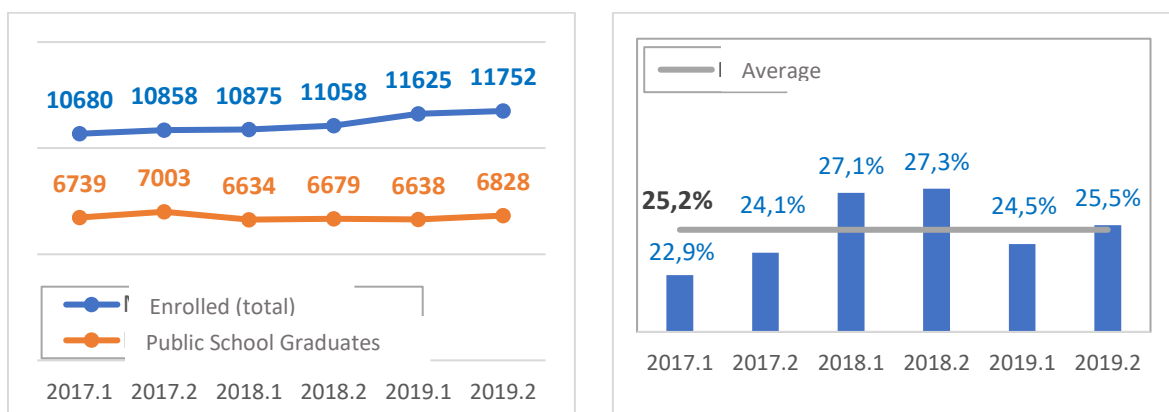
This information corroborates the discussion of Fernandes and Oliveira (2022) when they analyze the presence of students from popular university strata. For the authors, the new composition of Brazilian universities after the first decade of the 2000s imposes that these institutions meet “demands revealed by inequalities associated with the permanence of these students in these spaces” (FERNANDES & OLIVEIRA, 2022, p.1290) (our translation).

PRACE's programs and projects are intertwined with the structuring axes and rules of the PNAES, based on actions carried out in the following areas: priority assistance; promotion and prevention; support and monitoring; inclusion and citizenship. In this way, analyzing the evaluation of this program at UFOP will make it possible to understand which actions, practices, and effects have emerged in the institution's implementation context.

Regarding monitoring and evaluating the PNAES in federal institutions of higher education, the II subsections of Article 5 of the decree provided that such institutions must set mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the program, aiming at monitoring and enforceability of the program's actions. For example, at UFOP, the annual execution reports (2017 to 2019), made available on the institution's virtual portal, spell out such strategies.

The reports reveal that, on average, 11,141 students were regularly enrolled in face-to-face education at the institution (Evaluation Report, 2017, 2018, 2019). Of these, 25.2% received aid from the budget allocated via PNAES, and 60.7% were egressed from public schools (Figure 1). This last data is close to the statistics presented by the Fifth National Undergraduate Profile Survey (2019). According to the survey, in 2018, 64.7% of students at federal higher education institutions attended high school in public schools, and as for students from public schools, 36.8% were contemplated with PNAES aid.

Figure 1. total enrolled students and public-school students (a). The proportion of scholarship students among those enrolled by semester and an average of the period (b).



v (a)

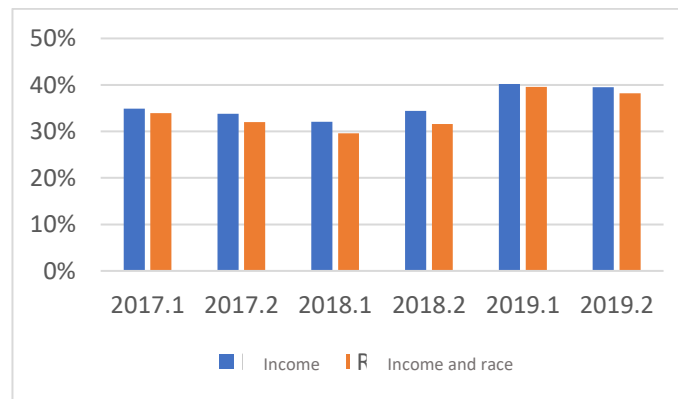
(b)

Source: Report on the Evaluation of the Execution of PNAES at UFOP (2017, 2018, 2019).

⁴ Resolução CUNI 1.380. Regulamenta os Programas de Assistência Estudantil. Recuperado de https://prace.ufop.br/sites/default/files/cuni1380_anexo_-_alterado_pela_cuni2139-1.pdf

In the period studied, 35.8% of the quota students with income of up to 1.5 minimum wages per capita received a scholarship from the program. In the cut-off of income and race quota holders, the values are similar: 34.2% received a scholarship. However, when checking the students who entered UFOP through the quota policy, the reports show that the aid destined via PNAES resources attended slightly more than a third of them (Figure 2).

Figure 2. The proportion of students who entered by income and race quotas by semester.



Source: Evaluation Report of the Execution of PNAES at UFOP (2017, 2018, 2019).

Law 12,711/2012 mentions that 50% of the vacancies should be reserved for students from families with income equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages per capita. As shown in figure 2, the data suggest that the number of students benefiting from PNAES could be higher since the conditions to participate in the reservation of vacancies by income (having a per capita family income of up to 1.5 minimum wages) are similar to the criteria established by the program.

In addition, it is worth noting that admission to UFOP through quotas/income does not guarantee access to the scholarship since the analysis for admission to the university differs from the socioeconomic evaluation for access to student assistance. The mere economic factor is analyzed in the entrance to prove the Family income⁵. On the other hand, to get aid from PNAES actions, socioeconomic indicators and the vulnerability of the family group presented by the student are considered.

Based on the data derived from the V Pesquisa de Perfil Socioeconômico e Cultural dos Graduandos e Graduandas das Instituições Federais de Ensino Superior, the Caderno Temático IV, published by FONAPRACE/ANDIFES, deals with Affirmative Policies in Higher Education. In this publication, Jesus and Meireles (2021) reinforce that the PNAES, in article 2, establishes as an objective the democratization of the conditions of permanence of students in higher education institutions in the country, considering the regional specificities, besides acting to minimize the effects of social inequalities. Thus, the decree highlights the concern to ensure the permanence and completion of higher education, seeking to reduce retention rates and student dropout in higher education and promoting social and educational inclusion in the country.

Regarding the permanence in the institution, based on the classification carried out through socioeconomic evaluation, among the scholarship recipients, 79.4% had difficulty in staying at the university, categorized between medium and high, due to unfavorable family conditions. This information aligns with Senkevics' (2021) statement when the author discusses inequality and exclusion in Brazilian higher education. According to the researcher, it is necessary to reconfigure

⁵ Proof of family group income documentation or presentation of the Summary Sheet from the Federal Government's Unified Registry for Social Programs. Edital PROGRAD nº 50/2022. Recovered from https://vestibular.ufop.br/arqdown/Edital_Prograd_50_Completo__Comprov._Renda_SiSU_UFOP_2022_2.pdf

the relationship of higher education with students from popular classes, who experience uncertainty that can lead to worsening inequalities and, consequently, drop out.

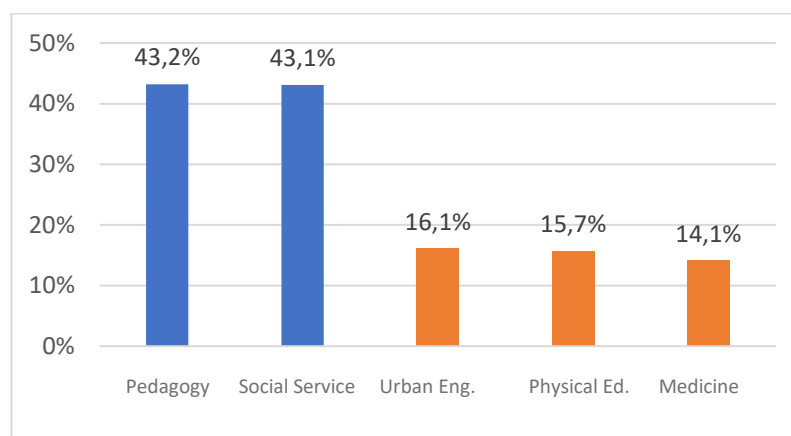
Zago (2006) analyzes the adversities experienced by low-income students entering and remaining in the university. The author deals with educational inequalities and states that university permanence - school success - is beyond the poor student's successful choice of a course at a public university. The challenge to achieve academic success involves staying at the university in the face of inequalities and adverse conditions in the student's education.

Senkevics, Carvalhães, and Ribeiro (2022), when discussing the social origin of students and performance in access to higher education, state that poorer students tend to face more difficulties in entering the public university due to what they call a "double mechanism". The authors point out that this process can include obtaining lower scores on the National High School Exam, in addition to the difficulty in overcoming the rigidity that socioeconomic barriers can cause in accessing the university, which keeps them away from wealthier students for the same reasons, due to the protection that their social class offers them.

From this perspective, the authors state that the fact that the public university has historically had easier doors for wealthier students reinforces a tendency to "reinforce the pre-existing inequality of origin," which can "make the disparity in the transition more acute the lower the proficiency acquired" (Senkevics, Carvalhães, & Ribeiro 2022, p.19) (our translation). However, what can be inferred from the data presented is that inequalities continue to be a reality in the permanence of these university students, which may lead to an increase in the dropout rate.

In this sense, when analyzing the undergraduate courses at UFOP, the courses of Social Service and Pedagogy were the ones that presented the highest rate of scholarship students. In the Social Service course, 43.1% of the students received scholarship aid in the analyzed period, while in the Pedagogy course, this proportion is 43.2%. In these courses, students enrolled who, in their majority, are in a situation of socioeconomic vulnerability. On the other hand, the Medicine course had only 14.2% of its students receiving scholarships, the lowest rate at UFOP in the period. Other courses that presented low rates in different periods were Urban Engineering (2018, with 16.1%) and Physical Education (2019, with 15.7%).

Figure 3. proportion of scholarship students per course



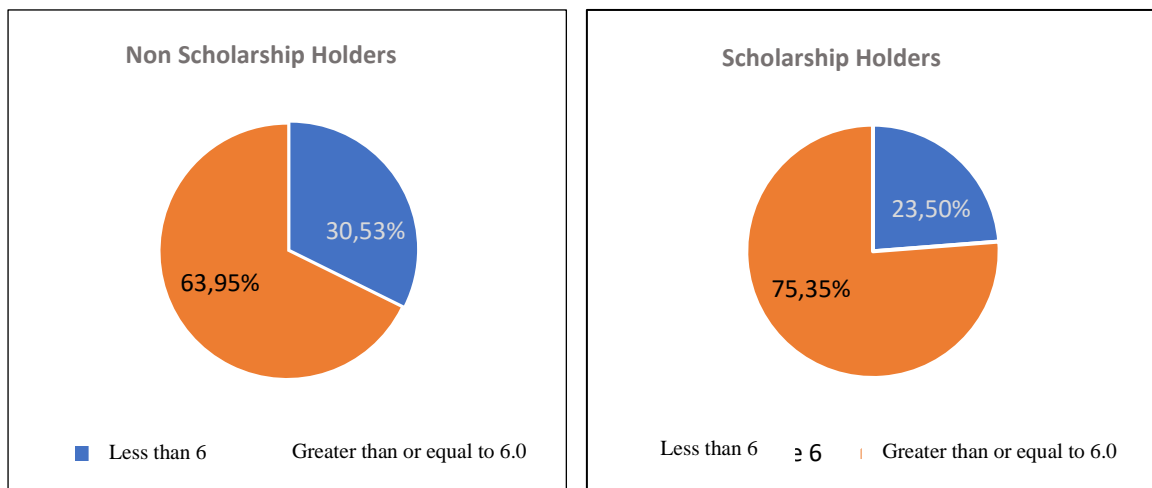
Source: PNAES Execution Evaluation Report at UFOP (2017, 2018, 2019).

In this regard, highly selective courses have a lower rate of scholarship students. Similarly, as seen in Figure 3, students applying for university assistance services are more representatively present in courses where the poorest students are. In addition, Senkevics (2021) calls this process "cumulative advantages and compensatory advantages in different directions and magnitudes for young people from different social backgrounds" (p.155) (our translation). According to the

researcher, such a process can be explained by the economic disparities strongly present in Brazilian society, in addition to the accumulation of cultural capital throughout the school life of these students.

As for the academic performance variable, an important aspect deserves to be observed. The scholarship students had a better average coefficient than those in several analyzed indexes. Among the scholarship students, 75.4% had an average coefficient above 6.0 during the period. Among the other students, this index was 64% (Figure 4).

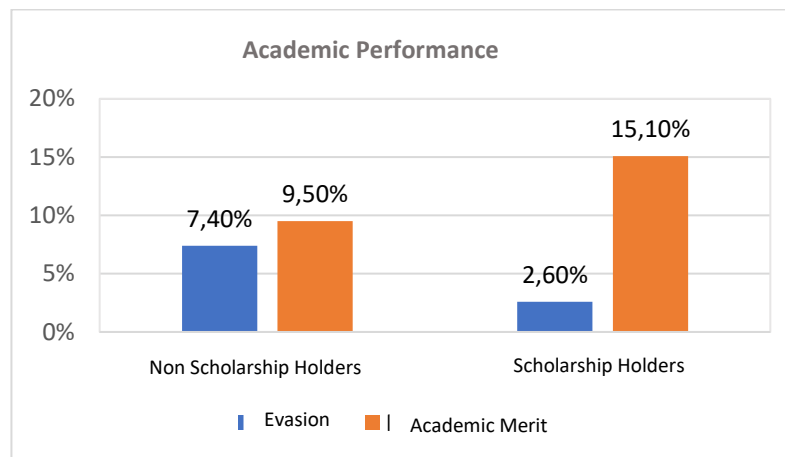
Figure 4. Average coefficient between scholarship and non-scholarship students.



Source: Evaluation Report of the Execution of PNAES at UFOP (2017, 2018, 2019).

Regarding dropout rates, it is worth comparing students who benefit from student assistance policies with those with higher socioeconomic levels, who enter and remain assured by their social status. In this sense, the dropout rate is lower among scholarship recipients. The data from the reports show that only 2.6% of scholarship students drop out of undergraduate programs. This rate is almost three times higher among the other students, with an average of 7.4% in the period studied. These values are important to demonstrate the importance of the program to guarantee the permanence of socio-economically vulnerable students in the university. Moreover, on average, 15.1% of the scholarship recipients were contemplated by academic merit programs, such as scientific initiation and extension. This participation among the other students is only 9.5%. Finally, the figures show that the PNAES scholarship aid has contributed to the students' better academic performance, as shown in figure 5.

Figure 5. dropout rate and approval in academic merit programs, comparison between scholarship recipients and non-grant recipients.



Source: Evaluation Report of the Execution of PNAES at UFOP (2017, 2018, 2019).

Academic performance is another essential aspect to be analyzed from the perspective of PNAES resources and the granting of scholarships to university students. Figure 5 shows the dropout rate and approval in academic merit programs at UFOP between 2017 and 2019, a comparison between students with and without scholarships can be observed. The data collected dialogues with Ristoff (2020) and his statement that the dropout and evasion rates of quota-holder students are lower and their graduation rates are higher when compared to other students.

From the same perspective, Jesus and Meireles (2021) state that quota-eligible students have performed well in the face of relations that demarcate inequalities and the construction of strategies for permanence in the public university when facing the interface of challenges inherent to their reality. Thus, it can be inferred that Affirmative Action Policies have contributed to the democratization of educational opportunities in the face of historical social stigmas in Brazil.

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH-LEVEL IMPLEMENTERS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAM OF STUDENT ASSISTANCE AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF OURO PRETO

The evaluation reports of the implementation of the PNAES present and mobilize a large volume of quantitative data, corroborating the statements of Boulosa, Oliveira, Araújo, and Gussi (2021) when they state that in the field of evaluation in public policies in Brazil, there are quantitative and objectivist logics marked by little reflexivity. Jannuzzi (2019), when analyzing the field of evaluation, points out that, despite advances, there are still difficulties experienced both by those who demand evaluations and by the evaluators involved in the evaluation process, especially in the context of program implementation: reduction or contingency of funding; obstacles in the federative relationship or with actors involved; difficulties in composing technical teams, (in)sufficient human resources, adequate working conditions and places; and insufficient dialogue with the user population, in addition to deficiencies in social control.

As the previous section presented the panorama of the program at the university and discussed important findings revealed by the reports, in this one, we will advance in the analysis of the trajectory from the perception of the high-level implementers involved in the implementation of PNAES, and who act/acted as pro-rectors in the Dean's Office of Community and Student Affairs. At PRACE, the high-ranking bureaucrats assume the role of interlocutors with the coordinators who work at intermediate levels, with other pro-rectorships, with the Rector's Office, with the University Councils, and with other actors external to the university.

PNAES IMPLEMENTATION: CHANGES IN THE INSTITUTIONAL TRAJECTORY AND THE STUDENT'S PROFILE

According to Paulo, one of the high-ranking bureaucrats interviewed, the student assistance policy was institutionalized at UFOP in 1987 after hiring the institution's first social worker. The actions for students in socioeconomic vulnerability were punctual and without budgetary resources available under their heading. The reports of all the high-ranking bureaucrats interviewed who work/acted in PRACE as pro-rectors express that the student assistance policy on the national and local levels has grown significantly as of two moments: 1) with the advance of the economic and political conjuncture in 2) and from the opening of dialogue between collectively organized sectors and the Federal Government, culminating in implementing PNAES at the national level.

The PNAES is the result of a historical mobilization of universities, especially the Forum of Community and Student Affairs Pro-rectors, based on the perception that a policy to value social diversity was necessary, aiming at the allocation of resources to make possible the presence of students in socioeconomic vulnerability, representatives of minorities that, historically, experience processes of social, economic, and cultural inequalities.

All the interviewees provided an opinion about the importance of the implementation of PNAES nationwide, assuring that this would bring more investments and increase the budget for student assistance by the Federal Government, which would strengthen the administration of UFOP since they pointed out that the program would have a positive impact (aid, scholarships, and assistance) on the permanence of low-income students in the institution. In this sense, we can say that the PNAES induced a relevant strategic change in the student assistance policy at UFOP: The Coordination of Community Affairs, linked to the Dean of Administration, was elevated to the status of pro-rector, with the creation of the Dean of Community and Student Affairs. In this sense, there is an interlacing of the actions of the pro-rectorate with the PNAES and the consolidation of a sector and an agenda in the university, which has social and administrative relevance, reinforcing the assistance policy implemented in the institution.

Simone points out that, after REUNI, educational policies were coordinated to broaden access and expand federal higher education. She also mentions that the creation of ENEM, SISU, and the Quotas Law contributed to the change in the profile of students and, consequently, to the growth of plurality, representativeness, and permanence in public higher education. At UFOP, it has been no different. According to the reports analyzed in the previous section, most of those enrolled in the institution (between 2017 and 2019) are egresses from public schools, reinforcing the importance of the democratization policies and expansion of federal higher education.

In this sense, the change in the profile of entrants to the IFES can be noted through the implementation of educational policies. Over the years, we have observed the continuous growth of public-school students in high school and vulnerability, as can be seen in research on the national socioeconomic and cultural profile of undergraduate students in federal institutions of higher education, conducted and published by ANDIFES/FONAPRA ⁶.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS OF PNAES

Decree 7.234/2010 provides that each federal institution must implement student assistance actions, considering their local specificities. At UFOP, these actions are linked to eight coordinations: student housing; socioeconomic evaluation; student monitoring and guidance; Mariana student affairs; João Monlevade student affairs; restaurants; accessibility and inclusion, and community health.

⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.fonaprace.andifes.org.br/site/>

Regarding the fulfillment of PNAES objectives, Simone and Elza's interviews show that PRACE is aware of the actions and goals of PNAES, as well as of the institutional rules related to UFOP's student assistance policy. During the interview, Elza said that UFOP fulfills the prerogatives of PNAES, mostly according to the profile of the public attended. Simone said that PRACE's regulations meet the decree's purpose and that institutionalizing the regulations in the University Council demonstrates a "seriousness in fulfilling the programs".

Moreover, we highlight the institutionalization, in 2019, of the Permanent Committee for Student Assistance⁷ (COPAE), linked to PRACE, which administratively advises student assistance actions at UFOP. To this end, the committee meets monthly with the equal participation of students and all the administrative and academic bodies of the Federal University of Ouro Preto, prioritizing debate, encouraging social participation to discuss needs, and collectively building the institution's student assistance policy.

When asked about the flexibility of the goals and actions of the student assistance policy in the institution, Simone points out that PRACE's norms are not fixed, and they can be revised based on collective demands from COPAE and the perception of the technical team, citing some examples that have already been remodeled, such as alteration of the housing regulations for the inclusion of trans people; inclusion of access to the children of servers and students in the university restaurant; 100% free food at the University Restaurant for scholarship students; and the insertion of new programs such as the Incentive Program for Diversity and Coexistence (PIDIC) and the Social and Academic Development Program (PRODESA).

PNAES BENEFICIARY STUDENTS: FOLLOW-UP AND EVASION

The 5th article of the decree mentions some conditions for the student enrolled in the IFES to be served by the PNAES, such as being egresses from public school or having per capita family income below one and a half minimum wages, without prejudice to other requirements set by federal institutions of higher education (Decree 7.234, 2010). In this sense, not all students who requested the insertion in the program were contemplated. Due to budget constraints, there are cases in which the student had his request denied or was partially supported, increasing the degrees of targeting and selectivity of the policy. Elza reports that this is a significant concern of PRACE, that is, to receive the student who was not contemplated or was partially contemplated, as we can see in the report below:

Because it is a great challenge for us... to make the student not be... that the student that is not contemplated, that will not be considered, because the policy does not allow it, but still feel heard and welcomed. Because institutionally, I became the institution that tells him: "there is no way - there is no way, you will not be attended to. The policy still does not take care of your needs. But I have to build a relationship to tell him about it, and he feels accepted. [Elza]

Regarding the monitoring of the student beneficiary of PNAES, Paulo states that the coordination of student monitoring and guidance contributes largely to maintaining this student profile in the institution. He states that the scholarship recipients are monitored by a technical team that aims to follow up with the students, especially those who did not reach the minimum coefficient of five points. These students are summoned for individual consultations so that the team understands the reasons for the low performance and creates strategies to increase their coefficient with the student. Failure to attend the appointments can lead to the suspension of aid.

⁷ Resolution CUNI 2300 (2019).

The student orientation team has always evaluated and pondered a lot. It is not rigid, cut, and has no dialog! [...] they offer him an opportunity to see what was happening with his performance because you can't have a student receiving all the aid and not at least compensating for his academic performance. [Paulo, BAE]

Regarding student dropout at UFOP, we observed in the management reports (2017-2019) analysis that the dropout rates of scholarship recipients are lower than those of other enrolled students. Simone points out that, in some cases, students evade from one course to another in the institution itself and that this fact can raise the number of evasion rates. According to the report presented in 1996 by the Special Commission for Studies on Evasion, evasion is associated with complex factors, which may be related to the student's characteristics, internal and external factors to the institutions, that is, social, economic, cultural and academic, intervening directly in university life.

In addition to these factors, we highlight the importance of actions aimed at mental health. Published in 2018 by FONAPRACE, the V National Survey of Socioeconomic-Cultural Profile of IFES undergraduates 2018, mentions that "83.5% of undergraduates interviewed responded that they experienced some emotional difficulty that interferes with their academic life" (V National Survey, 2019, p.204). PRACE's senior implementers mention that issues related to students' mental health have generated, even if occasionally, relational problems between students and servers, such as verbal aggression, threats, and harassment. According to the interviewees, the pro-rectory has promoted actions such as conversation rounds, welcoming and guidance with psychologists, dance and yoga classes, and the Student Welcoming and Care Group to foster spaces for reflection and interaction in university spaces.

PNAES: BUDGETARY RESOURCES AND EVALUATION

After 12 years of implementation, all the high-ranking bureaucrats interviewed affirmed the fragility of the program. Since it is a government policy and not a state policy, the political and economic situation in Brazil after the parliamentary coup in 2016, marked by severe budget adjustments, aggravated by the election of Jair Bolsonaro, contributed to the weakening of the program.

In federal public higher education, this conjuncture destabilized mainly the inclusive policies with successive cuts to HEIs. Silva and Marques (2022) state that, after 2016, there was a decline in the real budget transfer and the per capita values for students contemplated by student assistance policies. Associated with the rise in inflation and the decrease in purchasing power, these factors have directly affected family life and the permanence of the student at the university.

Decree 7.234/2010 mentions, in Article 5, that students from public schools or with per capita family income of up to one and a half minimum wages will be given priority under the PNAES. Because of this, the normative has already targeted socioeconomically vulnerable students, who, we can deduce, have already been assisted by the social welfare policy at some point in their family and school trajectory.

In her interview, Simone pointed out that the understanding of student assistance by the university community has been mistaken with the social welfare policy and that the current economic and social crisis through which the country has been going worsens this scenario once the aid and scholarships become more unstable and concentrated. Thus, we can infer that the student assistance policy can be understood as the welfare dimension of the educational policy, as exposed by Mocelin (2019) and confirmed by Simone's report.

At the beginning of the semester, students called us and said: “Class starts tomorrow, and I don't have a place to live, right? Find a place for me. [Ah, but I can't afford it. My family can't afford it. And my family will only let me go if you guys at the university, you know, guarantee it for me.” [Simone, BAE]

In 2019, PRACE determined the suspension⁸, indefinitely, of the receipt of new requests for socioeconomic evaluation (ASE) of UFOP undergraduates. In February 2020, the ASE processes were reopened. However, Simone says that to maintain the student assistance payments and to be able to meet the high demand (which has increased due to the recession the country has been going through), the pro-rectory had to change/adjust the income criterion that, before the cuts, was up to 1.5 minimum wage (established by the decree) to 1 minimum wage per capita. Consequently, these actions increased the focalization and generated losses for the permanence of students.

The interviews reinforce the Palavezzini and Alves (2019) thesis, which highlights that the program's actions are more prone to a scholarship⁹ to guarantee the essential priority areas to the detriment of the other actions listed in the decree. Indeed, budget insufficiency compromises the implementation of actions under the PNAES. However, Simone points out that, even in the face of budgetary difficulties, PRACE's technical team has developed new measures beyond the transfer of financial resources to students, implementing programs such as PRODESA and PIDIC, which aim at social and academic development, activities involving teaching, research, and extension to foster social inclusion, sexual diversity, racial/ethnic hierarchy, and gender equality, and projects linked to the promotion of affirmative actions and citizenship formation.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzed the trajectory of the National Program for Student Assistance at the Federal University of Ouro Preto, referencing the evaluation reports on the implementation of PNAES (2017, 2018, 2019) and the perceptions of high-ranking implementers who work at PRACE. The data show that the number of students from public schools who received aid from the budget allocated to university student assistance is expressive and that the programs positively affect the academic life of these students. The data also reveal that the difficulty related to university permanence is significant among students with unfavorable socioeconomic conditions, which signals the emergence of possible inequalities and social exclusion in the university space. Such asymmetries are also between and within courses.

It is necessary to pay attention to the conditions to which students are subjected to “survive” in the university space and, at the same time, understand that the management model and the budget priorities of the institutions can be crucial for the dropout rate of students from low-income backgrounds not to be worrying. Data reveals that scholarship students also face the “rigidity” present in the socioeconomic barriers to access the public university.

Thus, the discussion about students' social origin is necessary to face the tendency to reinforce the pre-existing structural inequality. Students in social and economic vulnerability need to be supported by programs and policies that ensure their permanence in the university so that their rights are guaranteed. These students are citizens and, like the others, must have their capabilities defended.

⁸ As per PRACE Ordinance No. 12 of September 10, 2019, available at www.prace.ufop.br

⁹ This term is commonly used in the National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Community and Student Affairs discussions, which refers to the strong tendencies of federal educational institutions to use PNAES resources for actions focused on financial transfers to promote student permanence. For example, in the Commemorative Magazine of 25 years of FONAPRACE, published in 2012, scholarship is cited as a “problematic” action that may exclude expanding the debate on student assistance policy as a guarantee of students' rights.

At UFOP, even in the face of difficulties related to access and permanence, the data show that the academic performance of these students shows the positive effects of the student assistance policy since the scholarship holders had a better average coefficient than the other students in several indexes analyzed. Thus, in addition to promoting permanence, the program corroborates the thesis that the barriers to access to higher education are unrelated to academic performance since these students' grades are equal to or higher than those of students who are not assisted.

At the management level, PRACE's high-ranking implementers reinforced the difficulty in managing the student assistance programs and actions, due to the constant budget contingencies imposed on the MEC and the IFES, in addition to the increase in demands for student assistance, a result of the democratization of the popular strata's entry into federal higher education and the worsening of the social conjuncture. In this direction, the interviewees informed that, in this context of crisis, the student assistance policy played the role of the national social welfare policy.

In other words, in severe fiscal adjustments, Social Assistance, a public policy that makes up the tripod of Social Security, has not articulated its target audience intersectionally with other social policies. Thus, within the university, the student assistance programs fulfill this role, incorporating demands to guarantee the basic human needs of vulnerable students at UFOP. This reproduces, in the IFES, social protection networks aimed at students and, indirectly and probably, their families.

It is important to note that, between 2008 and 2016, the PNAES budget resources grew annually, falling from 2016 (SILVA; COSTA, 2018; SILVA; MARQUES, 2022). Such measures reflect the political context that culminated in the destructuring and dismantling of higher education, strongly tied to the Coup of 2016, the approval of Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016, and the management of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro.

Authors' Contributions: Cunha, J. K. A.: conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting the article, critical review of important intellectual content; Oliveira, B. R.: conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting the article, critical review of important intellectual content; Fernandes, N. R.: conception and design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of data, drafting the article, critical review of important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethics Approval: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Not applicable.

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<https://doi.org/10.1590/S1413-24782006000200003>

Received: 20 December 2022 | **Accepted:** 12 February 2023 | **Published:** 4 April 2023



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