

## **Linking students to alumni: Challenges and outcomes**

Priscila Cristina da Silva<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Biologist, Institute of Biology, University of Campinas – UNICAMP, Campinas, SP, Brazil.

e-mail: prisilva@unicamp.br

### **Abstract:**

This article reports the significance of the Alumni Unicamp Platform to promote the institutionalization of the connection between current students, graduates and the current teachers and technical staff of the Institute of Biology – IB. The traditional means of communication and social networks are unable to embrace the specific needs and activities of the community, like the search for mentors or volunteers to answer questions that are specifically related to our academic environment. Thereby, the Alumni Platform came to fill this integration gap between our community.

**Keywords:** Alumni, undergraduate students, graduated, Alumni Platform, Unicamp

### **Background and objectives:**

The Institute of Biology (IB) at Unicamp was founded in 1967 and had its first graduation class in Biological Sciences formed in 1974. Since then, 49 years have passed, totaling around 2,000 Bachelor Biologists trained in the full-time course and around 1,000 Licensed Biologists trained in the night course that began operating in 1993, with the first group graduating in 1998. Therefore, to date, we have formed more than 3,000 alumni from undergraduate courses, not including here alumni from postgraduate courses.

The interpersonal relationship between Biology students at Unicamp is well known. There is a local culture that is maintained for generations, aiming to welcome newcomers in its entirety, considering not only the academic environment but good living conditions in the city of Campinas, District of Barão Geraldo. There is care in receiving and guiding from the first moments at the university. In this regard, the activity of receiving freshmen is called "adoption of the Bixos", in which two veterans "adopt" one or more freshmen to guide them in the first year of the course, both in relation to the disciplines and the new life they will have from then on, with different professional and personal challenges.

During graduation, other events take place, such as the release of the Bixos, symbolizing that the freshmen are already able to fend for themselves, and the Engagement and Marriage of the Bixos, where the freshmen will formalize their peers who will start the next adoption cycle in the year next, and with that, it was even possible to create an IB Family Tree, showing all these correlations between students (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/261724750619792/>).



Figure 1 – Árvore Genealógica do IB means genealogical family tree is a private group created at Facebook to keep the history of all Students from the Institute of Biology at Unicamp.

Many alumni (graduate and undergraduate students) of the Institute of Biology and Unicamp are references in the job market, as creators of large chains such as Cervejaria Landel (<https://cervejarialandel.com.br/>), Rede iFood (<https://www.ifood.com.br/>) and Quinto Andar (<https://www.quintoandar.com.br/>).

We also highlight our team of professors and their efforts in mobilization actions such as the Covid-19 Crisis Committee developing Covid analyzes so as not to overload the Clinics Hospital staff, analyzes to ensure the efficiency of mask fabrics and sprays to disinfect surfaces faster and

more safely. (<https://www.unicamp.br/unicamp/noticias/2021/05/21/reitoria-cria-comite-cientifico-de-contingencia-do-coronavirus>).

After these highlights in the television and print media, we had the satisfaction of attracting more students eager to innovate and make a difference. Our current students are very close to these professors and researchers, seeking references and inspirations to be distinguished professionals.

In my own experience, as a biologist trained at Unicamp, I was able to experience the construction of these friendly links with veterans, freshmen and contemporaries that are extremely strong and momentarily infinite, but they simply are disrupted the day after graduation. This rupture is not due to the absence of emotional ties, but is structural, due to the lack of an efficient means of communication with a common objective. In this scenario, the Alumni Platform presents itself as a tool to identify and contact students in training and graduates willing to help, from the various areas of Unicamp courses, telling their trajectories and stories, stimulating students in training. Therefore, it is essential that everyone knows this platform.

#### **Process:**

Efforts to implement a system that promoted contact between graduating and ongoing students already existed long before the knowledge of the existence of the Alumni Platform. Since its implementation, there has been a great effort in publicizing the platform, reaching almost 6,000 members at its launch; however the Institute of Biology had an incipient membership of only 200 members, a low number considering that we have more than 3,000 alumni, not including postgraduate students.

The new challenges have been to identify the reasons for the low adherence of IB graduates, whether due to lack of interest, lack of knowledge of the platform, form of dissemination or language that has not reached the target audience, not knowing the benefits of being on the platform both to request and offer assistance to peers. In this way, preparing and linking classic IB events through the platform is one of the proposals.

#### **Outcomes, Impacts e Conclusion:**

The institutionalization of these connections through the Alumni Platform can be very useful in promoting guidance and mentoring, enabling communication and diversity at Unicamp and ensuring quality permanence.

It is necessary to develop tutorials for current students to become familiar with the platform, and weekly advertisements on social networks to encourage adherence with activities that maintain the relationship. After identifying the factors responsible for the low adherence of our Institute, it will be necessary to gather new efforts in publicizing the platform and actively seeking out graduates. The projection is that access to the Alumni will be standardized as a search and offer of mentoring between graduates and the IB community, strengthening the partnerships that already exist and opening the way for future projects. With this, we will be able to enrich our database and enable the creativity and dedication of our current students, who will have the opportunity to envision better prospects for opportunities after graduation. We must also consider the quality of an academic training environment that should provide great innovations. Our biggest challenge is to overcome dropouts, investing in quality student permanence, which guarantees, in addition to physical and mental well-being, and motivation for students to complete their course.

#### **References:**

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**Financial Support:** Gabinete do Reitor – Dean's Office, PRG – Dean of Undergraduate Studies, EDUCORP – Escola de Educação Corporativa da Unicamp, Instituto de Biologia – Unicamp.