



Article

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Self-assessment as a planning strategy in a graduate program

Autoavaliação como estratégia de planejamento em um programa de pós-graduação

La autoevaluación como estrategia de planificación en un programa de posgrado

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Abstract: Self-assessment is characterized by a self-analysis process carried out collectively by the actors involved in the process, highlighting strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. Self-assessment represents a collective effort to implement a process of critical, democratic and participatory reflection. This article aims to present the process of formation and performance of the Self-Assessment Committee (SAC) of the Graduate Program in Health Sciences-Professional Master's at the *Universidade Federal de São Paulo* in 2021 and 2022. A Self-Assessment Plan was developed by a working group constituted within the scope of SAC, with the participation of members of the Graduate Teaching Committee and an extended meeting with professors and students. The plan addressed the importance of self-assessment as a powerful strategy for planning and interventions in search of improvements to the program. To achieve its objectives, SAC based its actions on the PDSA proposal (plan-do-study-action). The process resulted in the involvement of different actors to create the Self-Assessment Plan and implement priority actions in the short and medium term.

Keywords: self-assessment; graduate studies; teaching.

Resumo: A autoavaliação caracteriza-se por um processo de autoanálise realizada coletivamente pelos atores envolvidos no processo, destacando as potencialidades, as fragilidades e as oportunidades de melhorias. A autoavaliação representa um esforço coletivo para a implementação de um processo de reflexão crítica, democrática e participativa. Este artigo tem por objetivo apresentar o processo de formação e atuação da Comissão de Autoavaliação (CAA) do Programa de Pós-Graduação Ensino em Ciências da Saúde-Mestrado Profissional da Universidade Federal de São Paulo no período de 2021 e 2022. Um Plano de Autoavaliação foi desenvolvido por um grupo de trabalho constituído no âmbito da CAA, com participação de membros da Comissão de Ensino de Pós-Graduação e de reunião ampliada com docente e discente. O plano abordou a importância da autoavaliação como estratégia potente para o planejamento e intervenções em busca de melhorias do programa. Para o alcance dos objetivos, a CAA fundamentou suas ações na proposta PDSA (*plan-do-study-action*). O processo resultou em envolvimento de diferentes atores para a construção do Plano de Autoavaliação e implementação de ações prioritárias a curto e médio prazo.

Palavras-chave: autoavaliação; pós-graduação; ensino.

Resumen: La autoevaluación se caracteriza por un proceso de autoanálisis realizado colectivamente por los actores involucrados en el proceso, destacando fortalezas, debilidades y oportunidades de mejora. La autoevaluación representa un esfuerzo colectivo para implementar un proceso de reflexión crítica, democrática y participativa. Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar el proceso de formación y actuación del Comité de Autoevaluación (CAA) del Programa de Posgrado en Ciencias de la Salud-Maestría Profesional de la *Universidade Federal de São Paulo* en el período 2021 y 2022. Se desarrolló un Plan de Autoevaluación mediante un grupo de trabajo constituido en el ámbito del CAA, con la participación de miembros del Comité Docente de Posgrado y una reunión ampliada con profesores y estudiantes. El plan abordó la importancia de la autoevaluación como una poderosa estrategia de planificación e intervenciones en busca de mejoras al Programa. Para lograr sus objetivos, CAA basó sus acciones en la propuesta PDSA (*plan-do-study-action*). El proceso resultó en el involucramiento de diferentes actores para crear el Plan de Autoevaluación e implementar acciones prioritarias en el corto y mediano plazo.

Palabras clave: autoevaluación; posgraduación; enseñando.

1 Self-assessment as a planning strategy in a graduate program

[...] self-assessment, carried out in a systematic and continuous manner, ensures proximity between evaluator and evaluated and allows for in-depth studies of a qualitative and contextualized nature (CAPES, 2019, p. 5, own translation).

There is a growing movement on self-assessment in graduate studies and its impacts on the assessment system, the development of which occurs both in the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES - *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior*) and in universities.

Assessment with a regulatory function, under the responsibility of CAPES, establishes control and inspection procedures, seeking to ensure conditions for the existence of a good quality graduate system. However, this regulatory function should not end in itself. It must be articulated with the function of educational assessment that develops as a social practice aimed at producing the graduate program quality (Dias Sobrinho, 2003).

CAPES (2019) current guidelines and Institutional Development Plan (IDP) (2021) and Institutional Pedagogical Project (IPP) (2021) of *Universidade Federal de São Paulo* (UNIFESP) assumptions guided the structure of the self-assessment proposal of the Graduate Program in Teaching in Health Sciences - Professional Master's Degree (PPGECS-MP - *Programa de Pós-Graduação Ensino em Ciências da Saúde - Mestrado Profissional*) at UNIFESP. A Self-Assessment Committee (SAC) was created with the aim of guiding the construction of the self-assessment process and preparing the strategic planning of PPGECS-MP.

For Leite (2005), democratic and participatory management promotes co-management, being considered a fundamental condition for the quality and improvement of graduate programs. In this regard, the involvement of different actors allows for a broader view of self-assessment and collective decision-making processes.

Self-assessment is understood as "a process of self-analysis carried out by the community involved, highlighting strengths and weaknesses of their achievements with a view to improving the quality of their institutional work, with a view to overcoming weaknesses and diagnosed difficulties" (Leite, 2008, p. 466).

When referring to organizations, self-assessment has as its main objective the development of learning on a certain topic or process, enabling reflection on adopted contexts and policies, culminating in systematization of data, through a participatory and collaborative process, which leads to decision-making, since it is planned, conducted, implemented and analyzed by individuals who are formulators and agents of the actions to be assessed (CAPES, 2019).

It is understood that self-assessment represents a collective effort to implement a process of critical reflection that is eminently democratic and participatory. Thus, it is considered that a permanent evaluative and reflective perspective, by different actors (professors, students, graduates and administrative technicians and educational subjects technicians), is a fundamental condition for identifying potentials, gaps and possibilities for improving PPGECS-MP.

Authors such as Saul (2002) and Leite *et al.* (2020) highlight the importance of self-assessment as a path that, alongside external assessment, can form a model for improving graduate programs. For Saul (2002), external assessment and self-assessment are complementary modalities and important dimensions of the same educational assessment process.

The self-assessment process seeks to break with bureaucratic and quantitative assessments that, often, far from the programs, do not reflect their reality and culture. Furthermore, it brings with it the democratic and collaborative process that foresees the participation of the various actors that make up the program.

According to Leite (2018), self-analysis, carried out by the community based on systematization of data that interests them, is transposed by negotiation arising from an awareness stage when the values and obstacles of a self-managed process are studied. For the author, self-management, when governed by collaboration between several actors, will certainly be more successful.

Leite (2018) also portrays that self-assessment carried out in an efficient and competent way results in knowledge about a given reality, seen from actors' perspective in relation to the results to be constructed, considering the social, professional and public responsibility of a program or institution. The process, carried out in a collaborative and participatory way, contributes to ensuring that ethical principles, honesty and transparency are observed and respected, giving emphasis to self-assessment.

A self-assessment process of a graduate program deals with democracy practice through assessment, ensuring "the quality of what differentiates us and the difference of this quality - social insertion, internationalization, scientific production, respect for students in their diversity and their training in the face of an uncertain future" (Leite *et al.*, 2020, p. 335). These authors add that reflection on the results obtained is central to the process and takes into account the correction of trajectories and projected futures, reinforcing that self-assessment requires time, resources and dedication.

2 Contextualizing the self-assessment proposal's scenario

PPGECS-MP is linked to the Center for the Development of Higher Education in Health (CEDESS - *Centro de Desenvolvimento do Ensino Superior em Saúde*), a complementary body of a scientific nature to UNIFESP, administratively located on the São Paulo *campus* and academically linked to the *Escola Paulista de Enfermagem* (EPE).

CEDESS aims to reflect and contribute to professor training and development in higher education, with an emphasis on health and education, in addition to discussing different methodological strategies and evaluative practices for the teaching-learning process, implementing and developing innovative pedagogical strategies and instructional resources continuously and systematically.

PPGECS-MP aims to research and produce knowledge about teaching in health sciences as well as providing technical, creative and potentially transformative qualifications for professors and higher education professionals for teaching in the health area.

In the latest CAPES assessments, PPGECS-MP has expressed the consolidation of its inter-administrative (CEDESS and Institute of Health and Society (ISS - *Instituto Saúde e Sociedade*)) and inter-*campus* nature, since CEDESS is linked to the São Paulo *campus* and ISS is linked to the Baixada Santista *campus*, expanding its spaces for publishing and disseminating its research and educational products, with special emphasis on the UNIFESP Institutional Repository and the program's official page. Another point to be highlighted is the continuous articulation of PPGECS-MP with policies that induce health training reorientation, advancing scientific production and development of intervention products on interprofessional education and comprehensive health care.

These points of advancement and strengths maintain a political-academic relationship with IDP UNIFESP (2021) and IPP UNIFESP (2021), which are committed to inducing permanent self-assessment processes for continuous improvement of courses and creation of a reference framework for formulating proposals and policies for systematic self-assessment, with a strong emphasis on building a socially referenced university and an organic relationship between teaching, research and extension/care.

Taking the Quadrennial Assessment Report (CAPES, 2017) as a guide, some aspects and dimensions of PPGECS-MP stand out that require improvements and improvement: indicators that are still timid regarding co-production between supervisees and advisors in articles, books, book chapters, educational products (EP); EP prepared in line with the program's dissertations have also presented a regular to medium impact in terms of the community's demands and needs, requiring new resizing; teaching intellectual production is of high quality, but has been relatively concentrated in a few

professors; and bibliographic and technical/educational production are considered as regular.

In order to explore the observations contained in CAPES assessment and plan actions to remedy or minimize the aspects identified as program weaknesses, in January 2021, within the scope of the Graduate Teaching Commission (CEPG), the SAC of PPGECS-MP, with teaching representatives from the program's three lines of research (line 1 - Assessment, Curriculum, Teaching and Training in Health; line 2 - Permanent Health Education; and line 3 - Health Education in the Community), in addition to students from both *campi* and representative of administrative technicians in education (ATE). The coordination of SAC was taken over by a permanent professor who is part of SAC. The aforementioned committee began its activities with CAPES assessment analysis for the 2013-2016 quadrennium and developed the proposal for a Self-Assessment Plan, which was appreciated and approved by the PPGECS-MP community and other bodies involved.

3 Self-Assessment Plan creation process

The CEDESS/UNIFESP PPGECS-MP Self-Assessment Plan was developed collectively by a self-assessment working group (WG) constituted within the scope of SAC, with the participation of CEPG members and an expanded meeting with teaching and student representation.

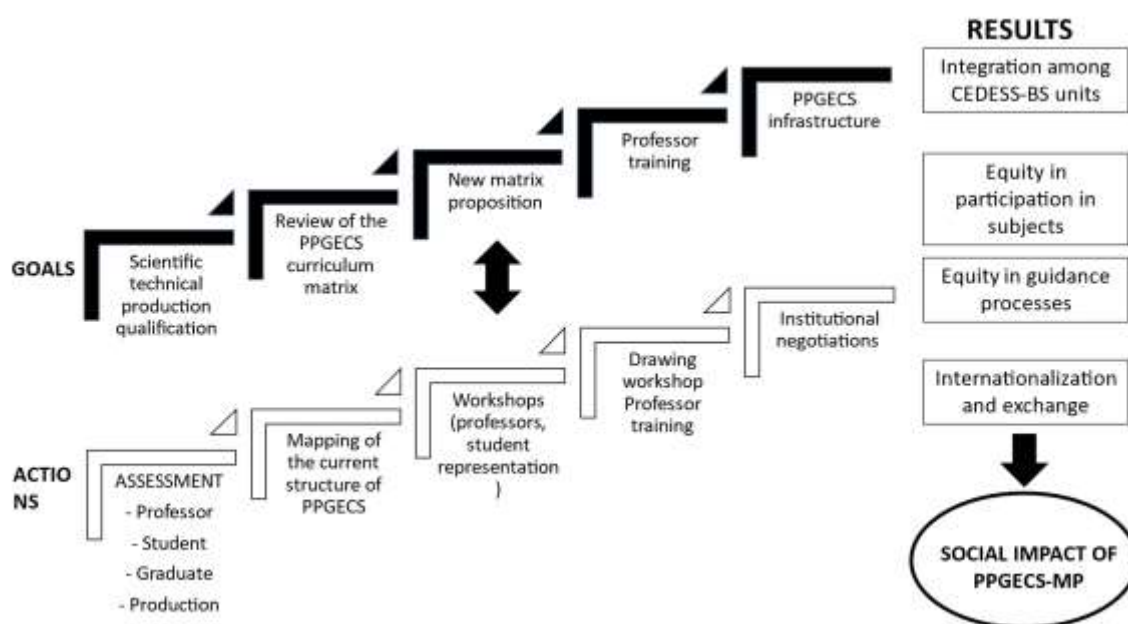
To achieve its objectives, SAC bases its actions on the PDSA proposal, an acronym for plan-do-study-action, understood as planning/plan, carry out/do/develop, study/analyze and action/act; the latter anchoring collective decisions on maintaining planning or redirecting and/or resizing (Leis; Shojania, 2017).

The prepared plan established self-assessment goals based on principles, guidelines and methodological frameworks regarding the implementation of self-assessment as a procedural and systematic practice over the next 2021-2024 quadrennium.

The self-assessment WG, in its work process, analyzed the assessment practices of other graduate programs, as well as looked at documents issued by CAPES (2019), articles on the subject and materials made available at scientific conferences. In addition to these materials, the WG also used official documents as supporting material, such as IDP UNIFESP (2016-2020), IDP UNIFESP (2021-2025), IPP UNIFESP (2021), Own Assessment Commission (OAC) guidelines, UNIFESP Dean of Research and Graduate Studies guidelines, self-assessment sheets from the CAPES teaching area, proposals for assessing programs within the scope of the Sucupira Report as well as the experience of formulating a Self-Assessment Plan for graduate programs at EPE and ISS at UNIFESP.

As a working methodology for PPGECS-MP SAC, fortnightly meetings were held from January 2021 to April 2022, in which the theoretical-methodological aspects of self-assessment were discussed. A matrix (Figure 1) was organized containing goals, actions to be implemented and expected results, culminating in the expected social impact of the program.

Figure 1 - Matrix of goals, actions and expected results for PPGECS-MP, UNIFESP, 2021



Source: UNIFESP (2021).

SAC demands and progress were shared with the CEPG of PPGECS-MP, which actively participated, contributing with content relating to the program's needs and challenges.

As a first action, SAC, after analyzing the CAPES Quadrennial Assessment Report (2013-2016), highlighted the possibilities for improvements related to production between advisors and students, relevance of EP within the community and intellectual production concentrated in some professors.

After an immersion in self-assessment, a first version of the Self-Assessment Plan was sent for consideration by CEPG of PPGECS-MP, with consequent approval. Below is a synthesis of the actions carried out to date.

4 Diagnosis and planning

Seeking appropriate SAC performance, a matrix of actions and an execution schedule were developed.

Two WG were established: WG1 worked with data collection and development of instruments for data collection with different actors involved in the program; and WG2 took on the task of preparing a research project to be assessed by the Research Ethics Committee, since, according to SAC's prospection, opinion data and suggestions will be collected from the PPGECS-MP community.

The research project "*Autoavaliação do Mestrado Profissional Ensino em Ciências da Saúde da UNIFESP: do protagonismo da comunidade acadêmica científica aos resultados à sociedade*" was approved by the UNIFESP Research Ethics Committee, Project REC/UNIFESP 1167/2021, Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Consideration Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Assessment (CAAE - *Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética*) 52312321.0.0000.5505, under Opinion 5,171,614 of 12/16/2021.

The project focused on the stages of implementing the self-assessment process, with a view to monitoring the program quality, comprising its training process, knowledge production, performance and social and educational impact. These aspects were recommended by Barata (2019), who addressed the necessary change for assessing Brazilian graduate studies.

To obtain knowledge about the production related to the program, dissertations and technical-educational productions published from 2017 to 2020, the period following the last quadrennial assessment, were collected from the Sucupira Platform and also on the official PPGECS-MP page, with the aim of identifying dissemination formats and congruence between productions, considering that the data contained in the Sucupira Platform are used to carry out program assessment.

Another action was to survey professors', students' and graduates' opinions, as, to guarantee the success of the actions proposed by SAC, it was considered essential to start by listening to the actors involved in the process, sharing the findings and involving the actors in the creation of intervention proposals, anchored in their perspectives, demands and points of view.

SAC created electronic forms, specific instruments for each of the categories: professors/ATE, students and graduates.

The instruments followed the Self-Assessment Plan proposals and addressed the program's structure, pedagogical proposal, teaching performance, knowledge about EP and perceptions about the social impact of the program.

Knowing students' and professors' opinions and opposing the opinions of graduates allows the program to reveal weaknesses and potentialities of the training process, moving beyond the assessment restricted to scientific or technological production as well highlighted by Barata (2019). After all, for changes to occur in results, changes to the process are necessary.

According to Engstrom, Hortale and Moreira (2020), another important aspect, which can be revealed based on graduates' opinion, is the adequacy of the training process experienced, aligning with the real demands of professional practice scenarios as well as the impacts of training on graduates' personal and professional lives.

The actors were invited to access the data collection instrument through the link provided to collaborate in filling it out and also to publicize among their peers the importance of participation from the perspective of implementing the PPGECS-MP self-assessment process. The forms were made available from October 2021 to February 2022 via CEDESS social networks and on the program website.

The instrument prepared for assessment with professors collected data on: sample characterization; number of guidance per professor; coordination and/or collaboration in the offering of subjects; participation in internal selection processes; representations and participation in committees related to PPGECS-MP; professor development activities; and publications originating from EP and/or dissertation.

For assessment with students, the instrument collected information on: sample characterization; research topics and products developed; program structure; the program's pedagogical proposal; subjects that contributed to EP preparation; teaching performance; EP classification in line with CAPES typology; moments of EP discussion, definition and elaboration during the master's degree; EP implementation; and program's social impact.

For assessment with graduates, the instrument sought information on: sample characterization; contributions from the program's mandatory subjects and lines of research; contents and course hours; classification of their EP in line with that proposed by CAPES; program's influence on personal and professional life; current place of work; and career progression depending on master's degree.

Another form was prepared and sent to permanent professors and program collaborators containing the actions that constitute the Self-Assessment Plan so that they could indicate their priorities in relation to emergency topics. The response to this demand supported the planning and implementation of SAC's initial actions.

The preferred topics, listed in order of priority, were as follows: EP qualification; scientific production qualification; review of the program's curricular matrix; program infrastructure assessment; verification of the social impact of the program; aspects relating to teaching participation, considering equity in guidance processes; professor training; and greater integration between the program units based on the São Paulo *campus* and the Baixada Santista *campus*.

5 Actions implemented based on the priorities identified among actors

It should be noted, as previously mentioned, that the implementation of the actions included joint planning, prepared between SAC, PPGECS-MP coordination, CEPG and actors linked to the program.

To respond to the demand related to EP qualification, an item with the greatest indication of preference and priority by professors, a cycle of thematic workshops was planned. The workshops were inserted into the UNIFESP extension actions registration system, which made registration for the event and certification of participants possible, highlighting that participation in the workshops was restricted to PPGECS-MP actors.

For each of the workshops, support materials were previously sent to the electronic address of those registered, with the purpose of bringing participants closer to the topic and optimizing reflections and discussions in the lecture with the guest professors and in work rooms. Each workshop lasted four hours, covering the methodology of opening lecture, work in small groups, plenary session to share discussions and final report preparation. The workshops were held virtually.

The first workshop was recommended to read the article by Rizzatti *et al.* (2020). Professor Gisele Roças, *Instituto Federal do Rio de Janeiro* (IFRJ), was the guest speaker, who spoke about the "Fundamentals for the elaboration of technical-educational products", providing theoretical-conceptual elements to support discussions in thematic rooms and in the plenary.

Three thematic rooms were created, comprising the topics "Technical/Educational Product Conception", "Technical/Educational Product Creation and Development" and "Technical/Educational Product Implementation and Dissemination". Each room was managed by a team of coordinator, facilitator and rapporteur previously selected and trained for their roles. As participants, professors, students and ATE were present, who expressed their opinions based on triggering questions about the challenges and opportunities for improvement of EP in the program.

This first workshop served as a trigger for the debate on EP, in order to offer guidelines and parameters to advance the understanding and improvement of the products developed in the program.

The second workshop, "Analysis of the development of educational products", was held by Professor Elizabeth Teixeira, *Universidade Estadual do Pará* (UEPA), and leader of the Educational Technology Studies Network (RETE - *Rede de Estudos de Tecnologias Educacionais*), who discussed the "Product Development Cycle and Methodological Studies", presenting the essential elements for EP planning and preparation.

When planning the second workshop, SAC carried out a search on the EduCAPES Portal to identify an EP that covered the essential elements related to the product creation, development and application. Having selected an educational production that met the previously established criteria, SAC sent the EP to registrants' email with instructions for prior assessment of the material.

A roadmap for EP analysis was prepared by SAC based on the CAPES assessment form for the 2017-2020 quadrennium and the article by Rizzatti *et al.* (2020).

On the day of the workshop, participants were divided into three groups, ensuring heterogeneity between professors, students and ATE. The script with EP analysis items was shared, through a presentation on a computer screen, with the members of each virtual room. Each small group had professors in the role of coordination and facilitation and a rapporteur.

EP, made available in advance, was analyzed based on the understanding of each item in the script prepared for this purpose, which had space to highlight the relevance of aspects assessed and an additional column to insert comments and suggestions for improvements to ensure item clarity and objectivity.

After the time allocated for this analysis activity, participants met in plenary to share their perceptions about the analyzes based on the reports of each group. After rapporteurs' presentation, the final plenary discussed the main points that could make up the EP analysis script, which will be adopted as a tool to standardize product preparation and assessment by examining boards at the moments of qualification and/or defense at PPGECS-MP.

The second workshop provided elements to advance EP construction and finalization process, offering guidelines and parameters for qualification, product improvement and classification possibilities, in accordance with the existing typology.

According to Rizzatti *et al.* (2020), the product is the center, the core of programs in the professional modality, and there must be a change in the logic previously adopted, in which the dissertation was considered the center and the product was placed in a perspective of future projection. Now greater emphasis must be placed on EP, which is the key element to be developed, applied, assessed and improved throughout the professional master's training period.

Given this understanding, it is essential to have greater clarity about EP typologies and detailed planning so that the product can be created, developed and applied with the target audience. These aspects require a change in culture and a broad discussion about the understanding and definition of the parameters that permeate EP, a central and mandatory element in graduate programs in the professional modality.

It is necessary to change the conception of the work carried out by graduate students, from the perspective of the product constituting a return to the professional practice scenario and the programs' contribution to society, which will reflect on the social impact. Master's or doctoral students must take on the role of transforming agents and inducers of changes in scenarios of action.

In this context, the EP validation process begins in parallel with the development of master's or professional doctoral research, with its validation certified through the examining board's opinion at the time of defense as a final stage of the training cycle.

To enable these changes to occur, it is necessary to structure Supervised Professional Practice, understood as monitoring carried out by an advisor, together with a student so that, in partnership, they can learn about the reality of the work context, in order to raise questions to be studied and thus effectively contribute to improvements in health education, considering the regional, cultural, economic and social singularities of graduate students' field/work environment. In professional programs, this monitoring must occur from the identification of the problem situation to the completion of the training process.

6 Final considerations... what we were, what we are and what we will be...

PPGECS-MP has contributed to training committed and qualified professionals for teaching in health, presenting efforts to monitor changes in needs and approaches with regard to strengthening the area of teaching. Such contributions can be leveraged through assessment processes, specifically through self-assessment processes, which promote interactions between different knowledge and practices, and possibilities for sharing experiences, actions, projects and construction of new knowledge.

With the creation of SAC and Self-Assessment Plan, approaches were possible regarding the views of graduates, students, professors, advisors and ATE on PPGECS-MP and the priorities listed from these views, which supported the implementation of the first actions of SAC.

Among the priorities listed by professors, the Pedagogical Project review was among the most emerging. The priority was discussed as a possibility for change, however, at this moment, there are still no intentional initiatives to operationalize this process. It is noteworthy that workshops, held with the purpose of qualifying EP, fostered powerful discussions about the subjects and also about the need to revisit the program's curricular structure.

Permanent professors, influenced by reflections arising from actions proposed by SAC, began discussions with their peers about the contents and formats of the courses offered, based on the results of actors' opinions on the forms and their impact on the product development processes. This still discreet movement has led to some updates to the curricular structure, which is moving towards meeting the requirement, as pointed out in the CAPES assessment report (2013-2016), ensuring the updating of bibliographic references in subject plans.

The Pedagogical Project review will enable action proposals for greater *inter-campi* integration as well as new teaching modalities meeting demands, mainly from students, who are professionals working in practice scenarios and who seek paths, based on scientific evidence, to meet the complex and growing challenges that arise in health care work environments. The review will also provide qualification of disciplinary contents that prove necessary.

The entire process of change involves movement, listening and consideration of possibilities. Establishing this process based on the results of a self-assessment helps the actors to see themselves as part of a safe process, as they walk supported by structures built in a shared and participatory way. Involving the community of a graduate program is not an easy task, but it is necessary, proving to be an important challenge.

The complexity of self-assessment is highlighted, which requires an internal look to assess one's own curricular structures, academic activities, alignment of professors with the program's objectives and mission and graduate student training processes, especially due to the need for alignment between theory and practice to promote harmony with work, with a view to inducing changes in practice scenarios. Thus, self-assessment demands the involvement of different actors and collective and collaborative decision-making.

Participating in the development and carrying out of self-assessment actions of a graduate program brings opportunities not only for appropriation of it, but for admiration, as it implies understanding its vocation, contribution and social impact.

Thus, it is expected that all PPGECS-MP actors can give themselves the opportunity to commit to the construction of self-assessment processes.

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