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## Sandra de Deus in “University extension, trajectories and challenges”

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EDITORIAL / INTERVIEW

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*Sandra de Deus em “Extensão universitária, trajetórias e desafios”*

### INTRODUCTION

University Extension has been, over the last few years, a theoretical and practical field for a portion of academia, which values one of the dimensions of the constitutional tripod Teaching-Research and Extension. The path involves the hard work of legitimizing extension as a powerful way of training citizens in the most different areas of knowledge and strengthening the scientific production of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The trajectory of “becoming” an extensionist is surrounded by the most varied discoveries, which mix with rigid normative knowledge about legislation, resolutions and macropolitical goals, and unfold into philosophical, social, cultural, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge. Along this path, with no set date for arrival, the teacher must dedicate herself/himself to reading and interpreting different paths of knowledge and allowing herself/himself to connect with different authors, being open to (re)knowing a complex and vulnerable world, which is soon there, right next to it. In addition to learning from literal reading, aspiring extension teachers must develop their ability to learn from encounters - encounters with authors,

students, places, communities, territories, objects, bodies, feelings. This exercise operates as a guiding thread for other multiple encounters, which involve each other, get closer, and transform.

However, aware of the embarrassment that the beginning of dialogue with university extension can cause for teachers and collaborators at HEIs, it is up to those who have already started the journey to shed light on pertinent reflections. In this perspective, the Health Extension and Education Magazine Medical Sciences chose to start a relationship with its readers “arranging a meeting” with the author Sandra de Deus - Journalist, professor at *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*, Vice-Rector of Extension since 2012, ex-president of FORPROEX.

**Sumaya Cecília**



**[Sumaya] You have been following the development of FORPROEX activities since the 1990s. There have been many years of studying and fighting for topics that are dear to Extension. After 31 years, how do you evaluate your trajectory?**

**[Sandra de Deus]** *[I] consider FORPROEX's trajectory to be fundamental for us to get to where we are now, not just in university extension, but in Brazilian universities in general. See that it was FORPROEX that brought tension and closely monitored the entire debate that will culminate in the implementation of affirmative actions in universities. It was FORPROEX that fought bravely for the implementation of funds for university extension, and, during a precious period, they were of great importance for the advancement of university/society interaction. [...] I was president of the Forum, and I am very proud of the fact that, together with other important colleagues, we made the National Extension Policy available to Brazilian society, starting in 2012.*

**[Sumaya] What is the “situation”, if we can call it that, of Brazilian extension, nowadays, in 2022?**

**[Sandra de Deus]** *We live in a very special moment as we are in the pandemic and this prevents the face-to-face presence that is what we do, eye to eye, tight hugs, long meetings. However, it was through university extension that universities presented themselves to society, when, in March 2020, all activities were paralyzed. **There were extension workers looking for alternatives, which at times represented the***

**IN THE PICTURE: PROFESSOR SANDRA DE DEUS**

*certainty of life during chaos. The journey was not without traumas, but marked by many questions and difficulties that bordered on assistance and increased the need to understand the formative role of university extension, whose focus is student training, social commitment, and dialogue with other sectors of the society. Parallel to these emergency activities, many important projects emerged in virtual format, which does not mean that we are operating within normality. Our normality is in-person. Many debates, conferences and meetings have also been and are being held aimed at implementing curricularization. Our leaders have busy schedules to lead each university to a more effective debate on the implementation of 10% extension credits in all undergraduate courses.*

**[Sumaya] What are the achievements, for HEIs, with the curricularization of extension?**

*[Sandra de Deus] A new teaching! The curricularization [of extension] represents a profound curricular reform allowing training that is more appropriate to the reality of the Nation in which we live. The proposed changes, contained in the extension curriculum, that is, the inclusion of extension credits in all undergraduate courses, require construction based on dialogue, not a closed action by a group of notables. It is not simply adapting the curriculum to comply with the legislation, such as including a new subject that deals with extension. The proposal is to curricularize extension and not “disciplinaries” extension. It means thinking about curricula that represent new social actors and the changes that have occurred in society.*

**[Sumaya] At Faculdade Ciências Médicas de Minas Gerais (FCM-MG), we formally started the curricularization of the extension in 2020. Since then, there have been many transformations and challenges. Many times, I notice professors and technicians still distressed by the epistemological bases within the extension. What do you believe cannot, under any circumstances, be left unstudied by aspiring extensionists?**

*[Sandra de Deus] There are many challenges posed by Brazilian society. As a structuring part of these challenges, of this new reality [which is the curricularization of extension] are the perspectives on a heterogeneous and unequal society, mainly regarding to race, gender, and class. Black people, poor people, indigenous people and women still appear at the bottom of any scale we adopt; rural women and men who fight in an organized manner are seen as part of radical movements that must be criminalized and, therefore, must be silenced; the poor, the vast majority of our country, continue to be marginalized when it comes to access to education, health and effective public policies; the number of people, destitute of any and all social programs, trying to survive on the streets is growing; black and indigenous people, original peoples, are still objects of studies and not subjects of history. **Any extension project or program that we wish to make viable must pay close attention to this reality, under penalty of distancing itself from the principles and guidelines of university extension.** It is important to consider that universities have an important role in societies like ours, where diversity prevails and that, for this reason, we must be careful so that these institutions do not become a space that increases inequality, which invests in ac-*

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tions individuals without paying attention to the collective, which worsens the disrespect for human rights. It is necessary to develop concern within university extension. And, in this way, it means prospecting participatory methodologies that allow feedback to those involved and evaluations of participants.

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**[Sumaya] Regarding contemporary extension authors, would you recommend some names?**

**[Sandra de Deus]** *I am suspicious because there are many comrades who focus on the topic specifically and many others who deal with topics that are important for university extension. I'll take a risk and point out Oscar Jara, Humberto Tommasino and Agustin Cano.*

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**[Sumaya] What are the challenges of Brazilian extension, for the present and future, and how do you believe we can address them?**

**[Sandra de Deus]** *Given the tensions that we find within universities, there is an added delay in understanding who and to whom we speak, by whom produced, with whom we produce, with whom we exchange knowledge, which is also the result of the structure of accommodation in the face of a system consolidated and resistant to change. It is true that university extension is based on the idea of social commitment of universities in relation to their social, political, and cultural environment, which already generates purposeful or instrumentalized tension between the acts of politicizing and partisanship. **It is also true that this commitment cannot be expressed only through university***

**extension and, allowing the other functions of the university to remain isolated from the real conflicts in society, which are reflected in everything from access policies to curricula and research.** Internal and external tension. The internal dispute, hidden in certain situations in the name of a consensus, also ends up being harmful to the emergence of new actors and consolidates the maintenance of hegemonic forces installed in universities. **There is, however, a recurring bias in university education as a place of knowledge production, the view that the only knowledge that has value is that produced within higher education institutions. It is this distortion that keeps students away from the extension where activities are more complex and require a look at the “other”.** Complexity is the result of this presence of an “Other” that is not passive and has something to say. The answer lies in the way the university adopts to face the new challenges arising from its relationship with society and its own constitution, particularly through the implementation of affirmative actions that begin to modify the reality on campus. For those who try to use a magnifying glass to identify this situation, they will find the dispute between conceptions of the university, which requires exchanges that give rise to knowledge that is sometimes the result of dialogue and sometimes dispute, of the tensions that involve the university as part of society, but which needs to be listening that recognizes differences.

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**[Sumaya] In your e-book ([click here](#)) there is a passage that says “ University Extension is part of the constitutional precept that defined the “principle of inseparability” among Teaching, Research and**

**Extension (Article 207 of the Brazilian Constitution), however, has been seen as a “third way” or “poor daughter” within Brazilian universities [...] There is always a quote about the world-class research carried out in laboratories and postgraduate programs, but when it comes to Extension, the questions arise: what exactly is it? What is it for? How much is invested? The truth is that, without being clear about the nature of Extension within the institution itself, it is difficult to say what it is for — and even more complex is guaranteeing a percentage of resources for its development in the universities’ budgetary matrix”. This excerpt reflects well the situation of many Higher Education Institutions in the country. What do you, after all these years dedicated to extension, see as possibilities for overcoming these challenges?**

*[Sandra de Deus] An immense and almost insurmountable challenge is the understanding, on the part of university managers and government officials, that university extension is not a minor task for the university. As it is not a “framed action” through which we immediately find the result, university extension is detached from easy discourse and statistics, thus making it difficult to understand within the vertical vision of the university. The numbers of how many people were served in an extension activity are not reported, recognizing the impact of the activity. By presenting the ills and riches of the university institution, whose capital is the generation of knowledge capable of accounting for the well-being of society university extension prevents the reality that numbers by themselves are not enough to transform life in certain territories from being hidden. As there are many responsibilities of university extension, there are*

*also many “does” of the university that are allocated to extension, although some do not have any extension attribute. Here, it lies a good debate to separate what is simple service provision, which universities based on competence can perform, and what is university extension that implies training, which therefore requires the presence of advisors, society and students.*