

# Transparency and affirmative actions are strengthened in graduate selection processes

Elsthor Hansen / 12 de dezembro de 2024 / In English



**Education | From 2024 onwards, all selection notices for admission to the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) Postgraduate Program (PPG) must reserve vacancies through affirmative actions. In addition to strengthening equity a new resolution, published in June, provides clear guidelines and legal provisions that seek to provide stability to candidates**

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\*Photo: Flávio Dutra/JU

A popular educator for around three decades in Porto Alegre city and a black woman, Mrs. Paulina dos Santos Gonçalves has dreamed of entering a public university since the 90s. She graduated in Social Work and specialized in private institutions, and her dream of postgraduate studies lingered over the years. "I spent more than 20 years looking at official notices, but without any real opportunity", describes the current doctoral student.

In 2019, through a friend, I found out about the **Affirmation in Postgraduate** course. "I was selected for the course, and, in the very first class, I was motivated to get a master's program recruitment that was open in Education theme. It was challenging because, at the time, I was working 40 hours coordinating a team," she says. To keep up with the routine, I studied late at night and on weekends.

Soon the pandemic came, and the challenges of caring for life and family overlapped with other tasks. Even so, Mrs. Gonçalves managed to get her master's degree in 2021 and participate in the selection process for a doctoral training in the same line of research. The 53-year-old researcher is now studying in Education at the UFRGS. "So, in a way, I started the postgraduate course in 2019 and have continued here, still investigating homeless youth and the possible learning processes, especially in preservation of life," she summarizes.

Just like Mrs. Gonçalves, Mrs. Graziela Oliveira Neto da Rosa, 42 years old, is a black woman, with a similar origin and pathway. She prepared herself in the Affirmation in Postgraduate extension course, completed her master's degree in 2021 and entered her doctorate in 2022 at UFRGS. "I come from the outskirts of Porto Alegre city. I studied in public school my whole life. And, when I finished high school, I faced serious difficulties in accessing public universities," she recalls.

When Mrs. Rosa began preparing to enter postgraduate studies, there were still no affirmative actions, in addition to the need for working to survive. Only 12 years after completing high school, upon completing her first degree, did she find the courage to face the postgraduate selection process.

*"I also experienced a process of not belonging, because I was educated to understand that UFRGS was not my place. This ended up delaying my arrival."*

— Graziela da Rosa

## Departure and arrival

The support Mrs. Gonçalves and Mrs. Rosa needed to access postgraduate studies at a public university was obtained in the Affirmation in Postgraduate course. The extension initiative began in 2018, when the first selection processes for postgraduate studies at UFRGS with affirmative actions emerged. "I can say that it was born from listening to others. On one occasion, during an activity by the Department of Education and Social Development (DEDS), in partnership with *Sopapo Poético*, a poetry black spot, a participant asked when we could do a project to help black men and women, especially those who have been away for a long time from academia, to entering postgraduate courses", recalls Mrs. Rita de Cássia dos Santos Camisólo, coordinator of Affirmation in Postgraduate.

The course schedule addresses relevant issues that the candidate will face in the selection processes in general: preparation of a preliminary research project, organization of a CV and descriptive memorandum, and preparation for an interview. Furthermore, the idea is to provide a meeting between interested parties and postgraduate students already enrolled in postgraduate programs through the reservation of vacancies. With each edition of the course, activities may also be reformulated, based on the evaluation carried out with the participants of the course. According to Mrs. Camisólo, normally the preparation of the research project and the lattes' curriculum are the elements most cited as fundamental in training.

The course helps in qualifying participants to face the application process, but also with coexistence in the university environment that affect candidates' personal aspects and self-esteem, which are equally important in preparing for entry into postgraduate studies. "In order to enroll in the master's degree, the biggest challenge was breaking away from the idea that postgraduate studies were not for me", says Mrs. Gonçalves. This negative self-judgment was overcome in the preparatory course. "I always say that my lattes CV was born during the course", she adds.

Not coming from UFRGS, not knowing the professors, not knowing how the stages of the process work and, for all this, not feeling capable of occupying this place of intellectuality were also difficulties that had to be deconstructed by Mrs. Rosa in preparation for the selective process. "We need to be within the academia to help in this decolonization process, in this environment that is still Eurocentric. When in doubt, seek support from other people who have already gone through this process", she advises. After that, just read the official notice carefully and face the process calmly.

### How to prepare for a postgraduate selection process within affirmative actions? Mrs. Rosa and Mrs. Gonçalves give some tips:

1. Understand yourself as a person that has the right to education and affirmative actions.
2. Carefully read the official notice and guidelines for each stage and establish a personal schedule to provide the documents required.
3. Organize time for readings and productions, make records, keeping those that better speak with your research interests.
4. Search the program page to find out who the professors are, their research, the groups of advisees and publications.
5. Use the communication channels with the postgraduate program to answer your questions.
6. Understand that affirmative actions are a path forward, but they still face challenges.



Na imagem da capa e acima, a estudante do curso de Pós-graduação em Educação da UFRGS, Mrs. Gonçalves, pesquisa temas relacionados à educação popular, principalmente com jovens pessoas sem-teto (Foto: Flávio Dutra/JU)

## Equity and meritocracy

For the director of DEDS and professor at the **Department of Specialized Studies at the Faculty of Education at UFRGS (Faced)** Mr. José Antônio dos Santos, those who maintain public universities are the poorest, who are the majority of the Brazilian population, black men and women. The professor highlights that it is fair for these people to occupy these spaces and open the doors for others, as they have done since the beginning of the national discussion on quotas, in the early 2000s, for other impoverished groups (indigenous people and poor white people from public schools).

The FACED professor emphasizes that meritocracy is a polysemic word that combines power and merit. Starting from this, according to Mr. Santos, merit and effort, in general, would justify individual performance in achievements. In this sense, he emphasizes that he does not believe in meritocracy, but in achievements resulting from the efforts of many people or collectives.

*"No one does anything alone. We all need people, friends, family, workers who help us in our achievements, seen as individuals in the Western capitalist understanding"*

— José Antônio dos Santos

Still according to the professor, for an indigenous or black person, for example, achievement is never individual. The justifications for preserving inequalities are supported by the ideas of meritocracy, he points out.

Equity is a fairer reference which takes the unequal conditions of competing candidates into account. "Regarding the issue of equity, we have a current resolution that covers at least 30% of vacancies in each PPG destined for candidates from affirmative actions", states the dean of Postgraduate Studies at UFRGS, Mr. Júlio Barcellos.

He refers to Resolution No. 837/23 of the Postgraduate Chamber (CAMP), approved in June this year. The resolution covers a relatively broad universe, which allows people from different backgrounds to be included in postgraduate studies. "We even shelter foreigners, refugees", he points out. It also highlights that this is something innovative in a university as big as UFRGS, as there are practically a thousand students entering through this system, which results in a more inclusive, culturally rich postgraduate course, even while valuing and maintaining the merit of quality. "We really believe in this system", he points out.

In addition to ensuring admission, there is the challenge and a special emphasis on permanence, according to the dean. "We will have to create specific maintenance programs for these candidates who are included by affirmative actions", he analyzes. This is because, according to Mr. Barcellos, permanence is not an exclusively financial issue, but also encompasses access, reception, specialized care, among other actions that are the dean's focus.

*"Currently there is a very significant decrease in student demand for master's and doctorate degrees, and some studies point to a lack of interest in research, low scholarship cost, a large dropout rate at graduation and an increase in the number of vacancies in Brazil"*

— Julio Barcellos

Therefore, there is a series of actions to increase and expand the diversity of postgraduate candidates. These include more publicity of selection processes, including on social media, participation in internal seminars with business segments and online tests nationally and internationally. "All this to increase the pool of candidates," highlights Mr. Barcellos.

UFRGS has a set of 110 stricto sensu graduate programs, covering practically all areas of knowledge, grouped into 47 areas established by **CAPES** (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel). Currently, only 17 graduate programs do not have a doctorate. "This basically occurs because we expanded our postgraduate programs with new programs, and these initially receive a grade of 3 to be authorized to operate", explains the dean. After the first evaluation, carried out every four years, the program, upon receiving a grade of 4, is authorized to request a doctorate.



Mrs. Rosa, PhD student in the Postgraduate Program in Education, during a demonstration on Student Day against the New High School reform (Photo: Flávio Dutra/JU)

## Transparency

CAMP Resolution 837/2023, as well as 003/2018, stipulates minimum requirements for selection processes, such as the registration and CV evaluation stage. PPGs have the autonomy to propose as many and whatever steps as they deem necessary, respecting these minimum parameters. The legislation also provides for elements related to the different forms of student entry, such as biannual official notices and continuous official notices. In this sense, the new resolution did not change elements that were present in the previous resolution, as there is an understanding that, in relation to the heterogeneity of selection processes, UFRGS had and still has a good normative instrument.

"CAMP's members understood that it was necessary to clarify elements related to transparency in the selection processes and affirmative actions in postgraduate studies at UFRGS", highlights the president of CAMP, Mr. Igor Salomão Teixeira. He emphasizes that the requirement for a table with CV scoring items is one of the examples.

In order to reach the current stage, the approval of Resolution 15/2023 of the University Council (CONSUN), which provides for affirmative actions in postgraduate studies, was decisive, says Mr. Teixeira. Furthermore, according to him, in CAMP's work, it was observed that many steps were requested based on items related to the filing of appeals, CV scoring, requirements of documents and items in registration forms, motivating the editing of new rules for postgraduate selective processes. "We then tried to explain the procedures related to the items that receive the greatest number of investigations," he summarizes.

As a result, the 2024 academic period will, in practice, be the first in which 100% of the selection official notices for admission to UFRGS PPGs will be published, with providing for this reservation was approved through affirmative actions. "This is important to emphasize", observes Mr. Teixeira. When the resolution regulating this matter was approved by CONSUN, there were official notices already approved, published or in progress for entry in 2023 that did not include the entirety of Resolution 15/2023. The president of COMPG understands that the main challenge now will be to help PPGs implement affirmative actions, and the official notices are the first stage of this implementation.

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