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REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SiEM PROJECT AT UFSC

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Abstract

The Simulation of International Organizations for High School Students (SiEM) is an extension project, carried out at the Federal University of Santa Catarina, in Brazil. It seeks to simulate the main debate tables and decision-making in international organizations, such as the UN General Assembly, the European Union, the United Nations Security Council, among others. The objective is to encourage its participants to deepen their knowledge in the most varied areas of expertise, such as International Politics, Environment, International Trade, History, and Law. The project is aimed at high school students in the state of Santa Catarina. It is noteworthy that it is a completely free project, allowing the participation of students from both private and public schools.

Keywords: Extension; High School; Simulation.

RELATO DA EXPERIÊNCIA DO PROJETO SiEM NA UFSC

Resumo

A Simulação de Organizações Internacionais para alunos do Ensino Médio (SiEM) é um projeto de extensão, realizado na Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina que busca simular as principais mesas de debate e tomadas de decisão nas organizações internacionais, tais como a Assembleia Geral da ONU, a União Europeia, o Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas, entre outras. O objetivo é estimular seus participantes a aprofundar conhecimentos nas mais variadas áreas do saber, como Política Internacional, Meio Ambiente, Comércio Internacional, História e Direito. O projeto é direcionado ao estudante de ensino médio do estado de Santa Catarina. Ressalta-se que é um projeto inteiramente gratuito para todos os estudantes participantes, o que possibilita a participação de estudantes de escolas tanto da rede privada, quanto da rede pública.

Palavras-chave: Extensão; Ensino Médio; Simulação.

INFORME SOBRE LA EXPERIENCIA DEL PROYECTO SIEM EN UFSC

Resumen

La Simulación de Organismos Internacionales para Estudiantes de Bachillerato (SiEM) es un proyecto de extensión, realizado en la Universidad Federal de Santa Catarina, que busca simular las principales mesas de debate y toma de decisiones en organismos internacionales, como la Asamblea General de la ONU, la Unión Europea, el Consejo de Seguridad de Naciones Unidas, entre otros. El objetivo es incentivar a sus participantes a profundizar sus conocimientos en las más variadas áreas del conocimiento, tales como Política Internacional, Medio Ambiente, Comercio Internacional, Historia y Derecho. El proyecto está dirigido a estudiantes de secundaria del estado de Santa Catarina. Cabe destacar que se trata de un proyecto completamente gratuito para todos los alumnos participantes, lo que permite la participación de alumnos de colegios tanto privados como públicos.

Palabras clave: Extensión; Escuela Secundaria; Simulación.



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INTRODUCTION

SiEM - Simulation of International Organizations for High School - is an extension project of the International Relations program at the Federal University of Santa Catarina in which high school students are invited to participate in simulations of the main International Organizations (UN, COP 15, European Union, etc.), acting as delegates and representing different countries with their respective foreign policy. The project aims to offer high school students the opportunity to debate conflicting issues on the international agenda, whether social and humanitarian issues or latent diplomatic conflicts and crises. The project seeks to develop the analysis and critical sense of its participants, as well as allowing, through experience and interaction of students from different realities, with different thoughts and attitudes, guiding these young people to discover that dialogue is always the best alternative in a conflict situation. Hence, it is intended to stimulate in the young high school student both the ability to understand international events, as well as the culture of tolerance. Thus, allowing students to actively participate in the negotiations of international conflicts through simulations, so they can demystify the concept of “the other”, a fundamental condition for the culture of tolerance and for dialogue between different peoples.

The project is based on simulation models carried out in several Brazilian and foreign universities, which attract hundreds of students interested in the themes to be discussed. It is remarkable, however, that the focus of these projects is the simulations, through which each participating delegate, whether undergraduate or high school student, registers for the event and is responsible for their individual preparation. SiEM at UFSC, therefore, focuses on university extension as a fundamental element within the education tripod: teaching, research, and extension. Therefore, the main objective of the project is the interaction with the external community, in this case, public and private high schools. In this way, unlike other simulation projects, in addition to being completely free, the students who are part of the SiEM team are responsible for preparing the high school students, which allows undergraduates to go to schools and share part of the knowledge acquired at the university.

The project started in 2011 and, since then, the number of participating schools has increased each year. In each new edition, the project receives new requests for participation from schools. In 2020, the health crisis prevented the tenth edition of SiEM from taking place in person and the project became the “SiEM at home”. The expectation is that the 2023 edition can happen in person again.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

UFSC's SiEM project targets high school students from high schools in Santa Catarina and involves a whole year of work.

First, the project's coordinating team chooses the topics to be addressed and the international organizations in which the discussions will be held. As a way of exemplifying the project's dynamics, the themes chosen for the ninth edition, carried out in 2019, are mentioned below:

- The Civil War in Syria – topic discussed at the United Nations General Assembly;
- The financing of international terrorism and the leading role of the Islamic State – a topic discussed at the Security Council;
- The migration issue – topic discussed at the Council of the European Union;
- The demarcation of Guarani Kaiowá lands – a topic discussed in the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States;
- The humanitarian crisis affecting the Rohingya population in Myanmar - topic discussed at the East Asia Summit;
- UN Sustainable Development Goals Summit;
- The South Sudan refugee crisis - topic discussed at the African Union

After choosing the themes to be simulated, the execution of the project begins, which is divided into three stages:

1. Research on the topics to be discussed in the simulations and preparation of study materials;
2. Visits and monitoring in schools;
3. The realization of the event (the simulations highlighted above), which takes place at the UFSC's Convention Center throughout the day.

After defining the topics to be debated and the organizations in which the debates will take place, registration opens so that undergraduate students can be part of the organization of each of the three project stages. On the other hand, students are not required to be involved in the three stages, being optional to participate in only one or two of the stages, according to their specific interests. Hence, the aim is to engage students who do not have time to participate in all stages of the project but wish to get involved with the extension through the execution of some tasks, according to their availability.

For the execution of the first phase (preparation of the study material to be distributed in schools), the students decide which of the selected themes they would like to study, forming teams responsible for the research and preparation of a material that will, becomes “booklets” (the Study Guides and an International Positioning Guide), which will be handed out to schools. Each Study and Positioning Guide explains the conflict at hand and the official position of each country participating in that debate. For example, the Study and Positioning Guides on the debate on the issue of migration within the scope of the Council of the European Union present a problematization of the issue and what has been the position of each of the countries that belong to the Council on the subject. The objective with the Guides is that, based on this material, schools participate in the simulations, assuming the position of the country they represent. Thus, based on the information provided in the Guides produced by the undergraduates, the high school students are encouraged to research central themes on the international agenda, as well as on the culture and politics of the countries they will represent.

In the second stage of the project, undergraduate students visit participating schools to present the project and define the number of visits that will be required at each school. The number of visits per school normally varies between three and eight visits, depending on the specific needs of each school. During visits to schools, graduates accompany the preparation of high school students participating in the project through classes, films, and debates on the topics covered. Some schools choose to do this preparation internally (in this case, the number of visits is three), while others prefer that the project's graduates do this preparation (in this case, the number of visits to the school is approximately eight).

Regarding secondary school participants, as the demand from schools has increased over the years, the project offers a specific number of places for each school, each one defining the internal selection criteria. Thus, for each school, we offer a certain number of places for delegates from different countries in the different simulations that will take place at the event (General Assembly, Security Council, Council of the European Union, African Union, etc.).

On the first visit to schools, undergraduate students also present the possibility for the high school students to participate in the event as a member of “International Media”, covering all the daily simulations and spreading news throughout the day on the event social networks. To this end, a team from the SiEM organization (formed only by students) is responsible for coordinating preparatory meetings with high school students who choose to participate in the event as a “journalist”, covering all the daily simulations. The “International Media” preparatory meetings are held at the UFSC's computer labs and, in this case, it is the high school students who go to the University during the event's preparation phase.

These first two stages, in 2019, involved approximately 50 undergraduate students and 28 high schools. Given the growing demand from schools for project graduates to extend their preparation visits for the event, it was created CineSiEM in 2019. This activity took place a few weeks before the simulation and was organized by the SiEM team in partnership with one of the cinema networks in Florianópolis, which made its rooms available for free.

The aim was to bring all the schools and their students together before the final event for an overall review of the topics. Thus, for one morning, participants of the SiEM project and members of the external community were able, with free admission, to discuss and review the themes to be addressed in the simulations on the day of the event. Due to the strong adhesion of the participating schools and the external community to the project (which entered the movie theaters to listen to the debates), it was decided to keep the activity for the next editions. Unfortunately, the 2020 health crisis began in the week that CineSiEM would have taken place again.

The third phase of the project is the day of the event when all scheduled simulations take place (General Assembly, Security Council, African Union, etc.). At this time, young people from different schools meet at the UFSC's Conference Center and Rectory to roleplay diplomats and journalists in the various international organizations on the chosen topics, experiencing the discussions to exercise their negotiation and understanding skills on the different existing realities. Students are led to deal with conflict resolution and seek negotiations through diplomacy.

In order for the event to be successful, it is necessary to set up a scenario that makes them experience the reality of negotiations in international organizations. This point is mandatory so that young students can interpret their role and feel respected for their efforts and preparation. This way, undergraduate students are also responsible for the event's logistics, space preparation, and composition of the boards that govern the progress of the meetings of each simulated international organization. It is noteworthy that SiEM's entire effort to simulate the space of negotiations in the most convincing way possible has always been recognized by schools and their students who, in turn, participate in simulations with due preparation about the country's culture they represent, bringing several interesting elements for the simulation.

During all phases of its implementation, SiEM uses its social networks to encourage participants and facilitate contact among everyone, whether high school or undergraduate. In addition to this, approximately one month before the event, SiEM starts a project called "Final stretch", posting videos recorded by the organization itself on the themes for secondary school students and updating information about each debate, to stimulate the curiosity of participants.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Although its target audience is high school students from public and private schools, SiEM has the participation and involvement of many UFSC members and the external community. Given a growing participation, in 2019, the IX SiEM had more than 950 high school students on the day of the event. When it comes to the involvement of undergraduates, considering all three stages of implementation, 135 undergraduate students participated.

Furthermore, on the day of the event, in addition to the presence of 950 registered high school students and undergraduates who participated in the organization of the event, institutional representatives of the schools and external visitors interested in the project were also present, such as parents, undergraduate teachers and other from non-participating schools, as well as other graduate students and members of the wider community in general. In 2019, from an attendance list, it was possible to register the presence of 700 circulating people in the event, but not directly involved with the project.

It is possible to notice the project's growth when comparing the data in participation of high school students in the first edition of SiEM, in 2011, with the participation in the ninth edition, in 2019. From the first event to the ninth, the participation of high school students increased from 250 to 950 students, as well as the number of participating schools. The expectation for 2020 (before the health crisis) was 1100 high school students.

As for the participation of undergraduate students, there is a large and growing number of students (including students from other courses) as volunteers at all stages of the project. Many undergraduates who get involved in SiEM have already participated in the project as high school students and, after joining UFSC, they want to collaborate with the project because of the impact that the experience had on their education. Although the project has great enthusiasm on the part of undergraduate students, the main challenge is obtaining scholarships, since the entire structure needs to be organized by a responsible team.

The number of participating schools has also grown over time. The project started with seven schools, only two of which were public schools. Since then, SiEM's effort has been to expand the participation of public schools. Thus, in the 2019 edition, the project had the participation of twenty-eight public and private schools in Florianópolis, São José, Palhoça, Balneário Camboriú, and Araranguá, being fourteen public schools and fourteen private schools.

As a result, SiEM has been consolidated in Santa Catarina as a large simulation project, awaited by many students and schools. In fact, many of the schools are already anticipating the event by including in their pedagogical calendars a space for preparatory activities for SiEM,

articulating the topics covered by the simulations with their history, geography, writing, Portuguese, and philosophy classes.

The financial cost has also been increasing. However, although there is a growing demand for new schools to participate in the project together with the schools that already participate, it has been increasingly difficult to accept these requests due to the increase in the number of students involved.

As for the financial costs, the project needs materials to make country plates, delegates' badges, notepads, pens, country flags, etc. Additionally, as the project involves the arrival of high school students who will spend the entire day at UFSC, it takes the opportunity to offer students, mainly from public networks, the possibility of having lunch at the University Restaurant, requiring the purchase of some passes for the University Restaurant in advance.

The biggest cost of the project is 2 coffee breaks that take place on the day of the event, one in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Coffee breaks have a relevant meaning in the project as they are the moments in which delegations from different countries can make agreements and negotiations, as they occur in official negotiations. The project is relatively inexpensive, but this cost becomes higher as the number of participating students increases from 250 to 950.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the beginning, SiEM has been a project that seeks to articulate extension with research.

During the study guide development stage, International Relations undergraduate students formulate a reference manual for secondary school teachers and students. This manual contains all the relevant information for each debate that will take place on the day of the event:

- a) Explanation of the topic, defining the causes that led to the conflict. The explanation also involves a brief historical review of the countries involved in the conflict.
- b) Positioning of each country that will participate in the meeting, in accordance with the country's foreign policy.
- c) Rules for the functioning of decision-making in the forum where the debate will take place.

The preparation of this material requires that undergraduate students organize themselves into groups and develop research on various subjects that, although not covered in classrooms, are of interest to all participants (students selected the topics to be discussed).

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In the next phase (school visits), undergraduate students can articulate their research with the extension, taking the knowledge acquired to schools through classes, debates, preparation of teaching material (mainly in public schools).

Furthermore, we consider that the project plays a relevant role within the extension, since it not only collaborates with an audience outside UFSC, but, at the same time, it brings this audience inside UFSC. It is important to emphasize that the possibility of high school students visiting UFSC and having lunch at the University Restaurant is an opportunity that is highly valued by everyone, since, for the vast majority, UFSC is the future's option.

In 2020, the project would have had its 10th edition, which was unfeasible by the health crisis. Thus, the project had to be restructured to become the “SiEM EM CASA” project. From that moment on, the SiEM team produced four informative booklets, aimed mainly at schools participating in the project, about the progress of the pandemic in the international system and the international efforts towards the studies of a vaccine, which were shared through Instagram.

The themes of the booklets were:

1. General information about coronavirus;
2. The pandemic in Brazil;
3. The pandemic seen by International Organizations;
4. The pandemic around the world.

In 2021, SiEM did not occur and the same will happen in 2022. The project is expected to resume in person in 2023.

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