ALUMNI MANAGEMENT: GUIDELINES FOR A POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM

GESTÃO DE EGRESSOS: DIRETRIZES PARA UM PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO

GESTIÓN DE EGRESADOS: DIRECTRICES PARA UN PROGRAMA DE POSGRADO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: this paper aims to propose guidelines for alumni management by a Brazilian Postgraduate Program in Administration.
Methodology: qualitative research, based on interviews with course coordinators and consultation of Lattes curricula of graduates of the program studied, as well as analysis of documents, reports and alumni portals of reputable alumni programs in the area.
Results: proposal of guidelines for alumni management based on categories arising from the qualitative analysis carried out: awareness and prioritization by the Program; student awareness; monitoring graduates; communication; maintaining the link; and monitoring the results.
Limitations of the research: this study is restricted to the area of Administration, although it may also serve as a basis for the strategic management of postgraduate programs in general, with the necessary adaptations for other programs.
Originality: this paper promotes a discussion on the management of alumni by postgraduate programs, expanding theory and knowledge about university management and proposing a practical guide for managing this relationship.

Keywords: Alumni. Alumni management. Postgraduate management.

RESUMO

Objetivo: este artigo teve como objetivo propor diretrizes para a gestão do relacionamento com os egressos de um Programa brasileiro de Pós-Graduação em Administração, modalidade *stricto sensu*.
***Design*/metodologia/abordagem**: pesquisa qualitativa, com base em entrevistas com coordenadores, consulta aos currículos Lattes dos egressos do programa estudado e análise de documentos, relatórios e portais de egressos dos programas melhores avaliados na área.
Resultados: proposição de diretrizes para a gestão do relacionamento com egressos, as quais se basearam nas categorias resultantes da análise qualitativa: a conscientização e a priorização pelo Programa; a sensibilização do discente; o acompanhamento de egressos; a comunicação; a manutenção do vínculo; e o monitoramento dos resultados.
Limitações da pesquisa: limitação do estudo à área de Administração, podendo, no entanto, servir de base para a gestão estratégica dos programas de pós-graduação de forma mais abrangente, com as adaptações necessárias às suas realidades.
Originalidade: o estudo promove a discussão sobre a gestão de egressos na pós-graduação, ampliando a teoria e os conhecimentos acerca da gestão universitária e propondo um direcionador prático para a gestão do relacionamento com ex-alunos dos programas de pós-graduação.

Palavras-chave: Egressos. Gestão de Egressos. Gestão da Pós-Graduação.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: este estudio tuvo como objetivo proponer directrices para la gestión de la relación con los egresados de un Programa Brasileño de Posgrado en Administración.
Metodología: investigación cualitativa, basada en entrevistas con coordinadores y consulta a los currículos Lattes de los egresados del programa estudiado, así como el análisis de documentos, informes y portales de egresados de los programas mejor evaluados en el área.
Resultados: propuesta de directrices para gestionar la relación con los egresados a partir de las categorías resultantes del análisis cualitativo realizado: sensibilización y priorización por parte del Programa; sensibilización del alumno; seguimiento de egresados; comunicación; mantenimiento del vínculo; y el seguimiento de resultados.
Limitaciones de la investigación: limitación del estudio al área de Administración, aunque puede servir de base para la gestión estratégica de los programas de posgrado de manera más integral, con las necesarias adaptaciones a sus realidades.
Originalidad: el estudio promueve una discusión sobre la gestión de egresados de posgrado, ampliando la teoría y el conocimiento sobre la gestión universitaria y proponiendo una guía práctica para la gestión de la relación con los egresados de los programas de posgrado.

Palabras clave: Egresados. Gestión de egresados. Gestión del Posgrado.

THIAGO LUIZ DE O. CABRAL, FERNANDA C. DA SILVA, ANDRESSA SASAKI V. PACHECO E PEDRO ANTÔNIO DE MELO

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities are a specific type of institution that, along with university centers and colleges, form what are called, in Brazil, Higher Education Institutions (IES) by the Ministry of Education (MEC, 2016). Among the purposes of these institutions is to provide professional training at different levels of human knowledge. Therefore, it is essential for them to have a good knowledge of the reality of those they are training (Act # 9.394, 1996; Lousada and Martins, 2005; Teixeira and Maccari, 2014a).

Maintaining contact with former students, after graduation, is an important task for these institutions, but it is often not straightforward. Maintaining the link requires a connection that should be encouraged from the time the student enters the institution, when he or she should be made aware of the cycle of paying back to the university and society (Queiroz, 2014; Teixeira and Maccari, 2014a). Furthermore, as pointed out by Coelho, Carraro, and Silva (2021), there is an urgent need for strategies to maintain the link between teachers, students, and graduates, and to examine the opportunities for joint actions between these actors.

For Oliveira (2021), graduates provide essential information to their training institutions; former students are better placed to offer a more impartial evaluation than current students, offering an effective means of evaluating the quality of the training received and the career growth that this training has led to.

Thus, managing the relationship with the former students is essential for universities, and this includes postgraduation programs and *stricto sensu* programs, the specific focus of this study. For graduate programs, the importance of former students can be seen, for example, in the reports submitted to the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (Capes), responsible for evaluating these graduates at master and doctoral levels in Brazil. One of the items of the Capes annual report is "monitoring former students", and this item also features in the periodic evaluations (previously triennial, now quadrennial), which cite, for example, the social insertion of graduates in the proposal of academic programs, and the quality of the work produced by former students in professional programs (Capes, 2013, 2015, 2016a).

In terms of the relevance of the studies for graduates, universities need to monitor, communicate and manage the relationship with their former students, regardless of the academic title obtained, so that graduating is not an end in itself, and the university's commitment to its graduates does not end when the course is completed.

Graduates represent, for the Institution, a permanent part of the result of a process of personal and social changes, acting as a link between the university and the society that maintains it. Yet we find very few studies on the subject, and those that do focus mainly on the graduates' profile.

The authors conducted a systematic literature review in 2021, searching on postgraduation alumni in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations, Web of Science, and Scopus. Forty-eight types of research on the theme were identified; one in three of these studies focused on the professional performance of former students. Others focused on monitoring former students, evaluation of the course by former students, evaluation of programs from the perspective of former students, the former students' network, and services for former students. This scenario shows that the theme of postgraduation has been studied from an individual perspective of the different approaches that the theme can encompass, but without any broader, systematic focus on the integration of these different facets, i.e., the management process.

It is also notable that studies on alumni in the postgraduation context have focused mainly on surveying data related to students' education, and investigating the effectiveness of practices carried out by HEIs with graduate students, but without seeking to systematize a set of guidelines for the management of these alumni. In other words, previous studies have been mostly diagnostic, rather than propositional or geared towards university management. This led to the following research question: What guidelines can be considered for alumni management by a Postgraduation Program in Administration?

In view of the lack of studies on managing alumni of postgraduate courses, this study aims to propose guidelines for managing the relationship with the former students of a Graduate Program in Administration in *stricto sensu* modality. To this end, it was necessary to identify the strategies for managing the relationship with these former students, to find out their profile, and to identify the practices of postgraduate courses of other Brazilian institutions in this regard.

The guidelines drawn up and presented in this study are the result of an applied research study with a descriptive, predominantly qualitative approach, analyzing data from interviews, documents, reports, and electronic websites.

Regarding the contribution of this research to scientific advancement in the field, it contributes to the systematization of the body of knowledge, resulting in a proposed set of guidelines that can be used by university management. It also offers a discussion of studies on the subject, and presents a compilation of practices related to the management of alumni, categorizing these practices. In practical terms, this study proposes guidelines for alumni management that can be applied in the context of Brazilian *stricto sensu* postgraduation programs, especially in the area of Administration.

The following sections outline the theoretical foundations of this study, emphasizing the importance of alumni for institutions and their postgraduation programs, and the need to manage the institutions' relationship with these former students. Next, the methodological procedures of the research are presented, i.e., the methods and techniques used to obtain and discuss the results, which are dealt with in the subsequent section. At the end, some final considerations of the research are presented, with a list of references to works cited in the article.

2. ALUMNI IN THE EVALUATION OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Regardless of the level of study, completing an academic course represents a passage of time in which the student becomes an alumnus, whether temporarily or permanently, of the institution from which he or she graduated. However, even if the distance between former students and the university is permanent, it is a fact that the bond between them continues throughout life and is never broken. (Teixeira and Maccari, 2014a).

According to Coelho and Oliveira (2012, p. 9)

> The relationship between the university and society can be materialized through the graduates, since, with the title received, they will be professionally representing the educational institution anywhere in the world where they exercise their profession, through a legal document called a diploma.

Graduates are the university's opportunity to promote social transformation. Thus, the main social contribution of a university should be, first, to its alumni. This contribution and the university's responsibility do not end when the diploma is handed out (Marcovitch, 1998), since education constitutes a lifelong bond.

According to Teixeira and Maccari (2014a), graduates are a university's most valuable asset, and the quality of their training elevates the name of the educational institution from which they graduated.

According to Oliveira (2021, p. 16):

> The institutional planning, objectives, and goals of an HEI become much clearer and more consistent when the mapping of its graduates and the results of the surveys on the follow-up of graduates are taken into consideration, as they monitor and measure the educational policies in action, besides making it possible to obtain feedback on the activities performed, the results achieved, and the corrective or preventive actions required to achieve increasingly satisfactory and ambitious results of educational actions.

Therefore, alumni are essential for enabling educational institutions to obtain feedback on the training and preparation of students and, consequently, for helping graduate programs and universities achieve their social objectives.

When it comes to postgraduate programs, the importance of the former students can be seen in the evaluation criteria of the programs included in the annual reports and the quadrennial evaluations of Capes.

The annual follow-ups are divided into items, which must be filled out by the postgraduate programs. The items are broken down into sub-items, with their respective descriptions, some of which present the alumni as a key point (Capes, 2014). These cases can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Alumni as a key point in the annual Capes collection.

Item	Sub-item	Part of the description that includes alumni
Proposal	Objectives	Outcome Profile: characterization of the expected profile of the alumni, in terms of scientific and/or professional competencies that should be developed by the course.
	Curricular Proposal	Curricular organization logic that will ensure the profile of the alumni desired by the program.
	Solidarity, nucleation, and visibility	Follow-up of alumni: identifying strategies for follow-up of alumni, and their role in strengthening the national graduate system.
	Social insertion	Evaluation of how alumni contribute to the understanding of and intervention in relevant social problems.
External participants	Personal data and titles	Recording of information about the involvement of alumni in program activities, such as publications, acting as members of examining boards, co-authors, and other participations with nominal citations in some application document.
Final Paper	Link	Verifying expectations of professional performance of alumni from postgraduate courses. Non-mandatory information that is important for understanding the job expectations and availability of alumni.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Capes (2014).

The information requested by Capes in its annual follow-up reports demonstrates a concern, by the evaluating body, over inconsistencies between the proposals of graduate programs and the competencies that they seek to develop in their graduates. It is also clear that the programs should have a curriculum based on the desired graduate profile, including the contents required for training in the area of concentration of the program. It is also noticed that Capes seeks to identify, in the information made available by the programs, the contribution of alumni to society through the advancement of science and graduate programs.

Alumni are also considered in the periodic evaluations of Capes. The questions, items, and objects of evaluation relating to master's degree and doctoral programs in the last two periodic evaluations (2013 and 2017), taking as an example the area of Public and Business Administration, Accounting, and Tourism, which presented alumni as a relevant point of analysis, can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2.
Alumni as the main point of analysis in the Capes 2013 and 2017 evaluations.

Requirement	Item	Object of evaluation that considers alumni
Proposal of the Program	Planning the program with a view to its future development, considering the challenges and goals for a richer social insertion of its graduates.	Evidence of the importance of the program at regional, national, or international level, and of its impact in training students to masters and doctoral levels.
Faculty	Compatibility and suitability of the faculty profile to the Program Proposal.	Compatibility of the faculty with the graduate profile desired by the program.
Student Body, Theses and Dissertations	Quality of scientific production and publications of the program's graduates.	Participation of former students as authors in the scientific production of the program.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Capes (2013; 2017).

Analyzing the aspects under which alumni were included in the triennial evaluations of 2013 and the quadrennial evaluations of 2017, as described in Table 2, it can be seen that the proposals of the programs, as well as those of the faculty, need to be aligned with the profile of the alumni sought by the program, and that the scientific production of former students was also considered in the latest evaluations.

Considering the alumni in the evaluation of universities is significant, as these former students are a valid parameter for gathering information about the quality of the course offered (Coelho and Oliveira, 2012). Thus, the former student "[...] is the one who can give an opinion about the valuation of what was learned, materialized in the world of work and life" (Coelho and Oliveira, 2012, p. 6-7). It is understood that maintaining the link between postgraduation programs and their alumni is, therefore, fundamental.

3. MANAGING ALUMNI RELATIONS

Since the university is the source of graduated professionals ready for professional practice in society, these institutions must obtain information about their graduates (Lousada and Martins, 2005) so that they can receive feedback on their effective contribution to society (Teixeira and Maccari, 2014a).

According to Lousada and Martins (2005), failure to obtain information about the teaching offered by the university, from its alumni, makes it impossible to implement any necessary changes to the curricula and the teaching-learning processes of the Higher Education Institutions. HEIs must have a good knowledge of the profile of their former students, the suitability of the training offered for the job market, and the careers taken by their graduates after graduations, as well as their graduates' skills and expectations.

When it comes to managing the relationship with the former students, from the alumni's perspective, a study by Bernal and Mille (2013) points out that institutions should be attentive to three main points: communication, loyalty and socio-professional interactions.

As regards communication, the survey showed that former students consider it extremely important to maintain this relationship and to stay informed about their educational institution, by receiving relevant and personalized communications.

Regarding loyalty, the graduates stated that the positive experiences they had while students at the institution provided them with a desire to give back, and a sense of loyalty to the institution, indicating the importance of managing the relationship with former students from the time they enter the university. Finally, socio-professional interactions correspond to the involvement and participation of the alumni in the social and professional activities of the institution, such as continuing education, mentoring, and events (Bernal and Mille, 2013).

Unlike the North American and European contexts, in the Brazilian university panorama, there is a close relationship with the student while they are at the university, but this relationship becomes practically non-existent after the diploma has been handed to the student. This can lead the student to feel a sense of abandonment by their HEI, which often does not understand the importance of following-up students in their postgraduation careers (Queiroz, 2014).

However, simply monitoring former students may not be sufficient to foster close ties; a two-way partnership is needed.

As seen in Brazilian studies that address the theme of alumni, failing to foster and maintain this relationship can end up distancing former students from their educational institutions.

Maccari, Rodrigues, Alessio, and Quoniam (2008) point out that former students do not recognize the importance of updating their information on the Lattes Platform and the importance of this for the evaluation of the program from which they have graduated. This may be down to a lack of communication between the university and its students.

Teixeira and Maccari (2014b) emphasize that former students do not share the culture of keeping data available and updated; they do not show interest in the evaluation processes of HEIs, and they do not understand that the feedback on their experiences can influence the quality of the courses of an institution.

Specifically in the context of *stricto sensu* postgraduation, Coelho et al. (2021) point out that a distancing of former students from their programs is common after the course has been completed.

Simon and Pacheco (2017) highlight that most HEIs need to develop their actions of monitoring former students, as universities tend to resort to the inductive method, gathering information about former students whenever it is needed, but without any planned or continuous application.

According to Coelho et al. (2021, p. 8):

> Regular monitoring of graduates, with appropriate methodology and instruments designed around the dimensions of characterization, professional training, intellectual production, teaching activities, research and extension, and political-organizational activities, has led to the effective advancement in the elaboration of strategies to improve course quality, plan management actions, and provide reflective criticism on the system of training at *stricto sensu* level in Brazil [...].

To overcome the challenge of maintaining its alumni, universities must manage this relationship, strengthening ties and creating lasting bonds. For this, they can use strategies such as virtual portals, information systems, and associations of former students (Queiroz, 2014; Teixeira and Maccari, 2014a, 2014b).

THIAGO LUIZ DE O. CABRAL, FERNANDA C. DA SILVA, ANDRESSA SASAKI V. PACHECO E PEDRO ANTÔNIO DE MELO

Silva, Mineiro, and Favaretto (2022) point out that alumni portals can be important platforms for strengthening the relationships between current students, the institution, and its alumni. They also enable the voice of former students to be heard, which can promote the process of democratic management in HEIs.

Thus, it is observed that managing the relationship with graduates, although still embryonic in the planning of Brazilian institutions and *stricto sensu* programs, should be considered not as something that sets institutions apart, but as an essential practice, due to its importance for enabling institutions and graduate programs to achieve their goals.

4. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This is an applied study (as it is considered that the knowledge produced will have practical application); with a predominantly qualitative approach (as it does not use statistical methods and techniques, but uses a real environment as its source of data collection); it is descriptive as to its objectives (as it describes characteristics or facts of a population or object of study, without the interference of the researcher) and bibliographic, documentary, and case study, in terms of procedures (Silva and Menezes, 2005; Jacobsen, 2009, Prodanov and Freitas, 2013).

To achieve the general and specific objectives of the research, certain methodological procedures were adopted, the details of which are presented in this chapter.

To gather information about the graduates of the analyzed Graduate Program in Administration, we contacted the Administrative Secretary of the program to obtain the list of graduates of master's and doctoral courses who had entered the institution in 1998.

The year 1998 was defined as the cut-off date as this meant that the graduates included would be registered in the new Capes evaluation system, which was reformulated in that year (Balbachevsky, 2005).

The Program's Secretariat provided a basic report with information about the graduates of the courses. These data were checked against the list of graduates of Postgraduate courses provided by the University's institutional alumni portal. The data provided in the reports were: the graduate's name, course taken (master or doctorate), advisor's name, year of the entry, year of course completion, and date of birth. These data were used to search the curricula hosted on the Lattes platform, and for the initial analyses.

After the initial analysis of the institutional reports, we searched the Lattes curricula of the graduates, to check other data about the graduates. Of the 286 graduates of the Master's program, twelve did not have a Lattes resume, corresponding to 4.20% of the total. It was not possible to ascertain why these twelve graduates had not registered with the Lattes portal. It is important to point out that when the names of former students were not found, alternative searches were carried out using Boolean operators, e.g. searching on first name "+" institution of education "+" level of education of the former student. For the doctoral graduates, it was noted that all former students had curricula registered on the Lattes platform.

Based on the results of the initial searches on the Lattes platform, we then carried out more in-depth analysis of the graduates' profiles. This was only possible for those who had registered their resumes on the Lattes platform, given the lack of information in the institutional reports. Thus, the total number of master's graduates included in the study was reduced from 286 to 274, due to the exclusion of the twelve cases not registered in the Lattes portal.

Where there were inconsistencies between what was presented in the institutional report and the former student's resume, such as the advisor's name or date of course conclusion, the information presented in the former student's resume was considered accurate. These analyses were performed using descriptive statistical procedures.

To identify the strategies used by the institution to manage its relationship with its alumni, interviews were conducted with the two most recent Coordinators, covering the period from 2011 to 2017; these individuals are identified as C1 and C2. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes and followed a semi-structured script, composed of 19 questions.

The Program's website was also analyzed, as well as the institutional portal for former students and, finally, the annual report sent to Capes for the year 2015, more precisely, in its item monitoring former students.

Finally, to investigate the practices used to manage the relationship with alumni of Brazilian Postgraduation Programs, it was first necessary to examine, in the Sucupira Platform, which Programs in area of evaluation "Public and Business Administration, Accounting Sciences and Tourism" had courses with Capes grades higher than those of the analyzed Program, in order to then determine what practices were already in place for managing the relationship with former students, as cited in the annual reports of the Programs.

The reports of the registration data of programs, on the Sucupira Platform, were examined, searching for programs in the abovementioned area of evaluation that were currently "in operation" and with Capes grades set at "5", "6" and "7", higher than those of the analyzed program (4). This analysis was based on the information contained in the annual report sent to Capes in 2015, under the item "Monitoring former students" (Capes, 2016b), as well as on the practices found on the websites of those programs. The year 2015 was chosen because this was the last complete year before the data collection stage of this research in which the reports were delivered in completed form to Capes.

The research resulted in thirty records, corresponding to the Postgraduation Programs, divided into academic and professional, at the Master's or Master's and Doctoral level. Through these records, it was possible to identify the practices used by the Institutions to maintain alumni relations.

To supplement the reports from the programs, searches were also carried out on electronic sites and/or former student portals, both specific to the graduate programs and general to the Institutions. To carry out this search, the online search tool Google was used, initially entering the keywords "former student" '+' "name of the program '+' "name or acronym of the HEI". When no results were retrieved, the keywords were changed to "former student" '+' "name or acronym of the HEI". Only the first page of results (ten occurrences) was consulted, as this was considered to be indicative of the ease of finding a website or portal.

Both the primary data analysis (interviews with coordinators) and the secondary data analysis (websites, reports, and former student portals) were conducted using qualitative data analysis (Yin, 2016). According to Yin (2016), qualitative data analysis occurs in five stages: compilation of the database; decomposition of the data; recomposition of the data; interpretation; and conclusion.

The compilation stage involves organizing the data into groups. This step is comparable to creating a database, in which qualitative information can be found and accessed more easily. But before this, it was necessary to transcribe the interviews carried out. The data decomposition step, meanwhile, involves transforming the previously compiled qualitative data into smaller fragments. The recomposition step consists of refining the codes created in the previous step, submitting the data categorized in the first level to a second level of categorization. In the fourth step – interpretation – the decomposed data are used to construct a (new) narrative in which the researcher's interpretation reveals and gives meaning to the data. The final step is the conclusions, which are drawn from the preceding interpretations. The conclusion consists of a series of overarching statements capable of taking the results to a higher conceptual level or a broader set of ideas (Yin, 2016).

In this study, while the compilation, decomposition, and recomposition steps were applied individually to each of the data sources, the interpretation and conclusion steps were carried out at once for all sources, since the aim was to consolidate all the findings, to compose the guidelines for the management alumni relations.

One of the limitations of the study is that the data and information contained in reports, electronic sites, portals, and online platforms were studied without directly consulting the graduates themselves, or the coordinators of the graduate programs whose practices were analyzed. Furthermore, the study considers documents and experiences of a specific assessment area in its preparation (Public and Business Administration, Accounting and Tourism).

5 RESULTS

The Graduate Program in Administration at the university studied was founded in 1978, giving rise to the Master's Course in Administration that year. Three decades later, in 2008, the program began to offer doctoral-level training as well. It graduated 331 students in the period from 1998 to 2016. Of these, 286 (86.40%) are former master's degree students, while 45 (13.60%) are former doctoral students. The doctoral course began its activities in 2008, resulting in graduates from 2012.

Concerning the former master's degree students who received their doctoral degree from the Program, it was found that of the 45 former doctoral students, 12 had already received a master's degree from the Program, corresponding to 26.67% of the total number of doctoral graduates. Regarding the age of the graduates, approximately 61% were aged between 23 and 38 years old at the time the data were gathered for this research. At doctorate level, approximately 64% of the graduates were aged between 27 and 38 years old.

Thiago Luiz de O. Cabral, Fernanda C. da Silva, Andressa Sasaki V. Pacheco e Pedro Antônio de Melo

Based on the information obtained from the institutional reports and the Lattes Platform, Figure 3 summarizes the predominant profile of the program's alumni at master's level.
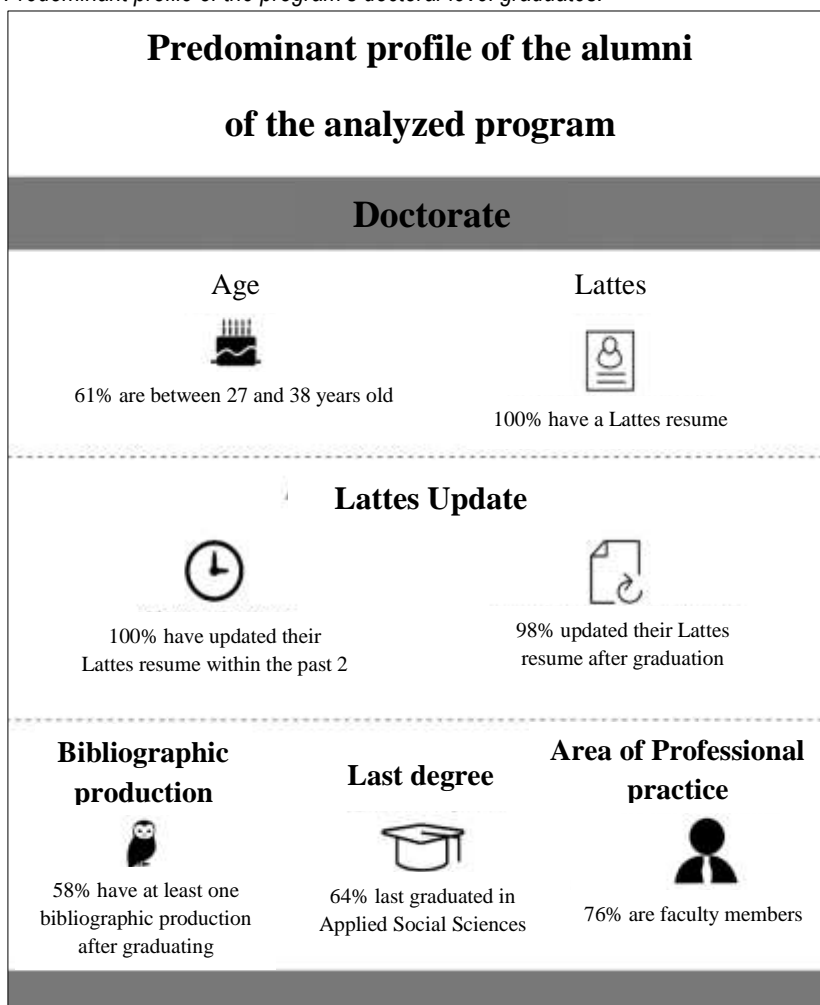
Figure 3.
Predominant profile of the master's level graduates of the Program.
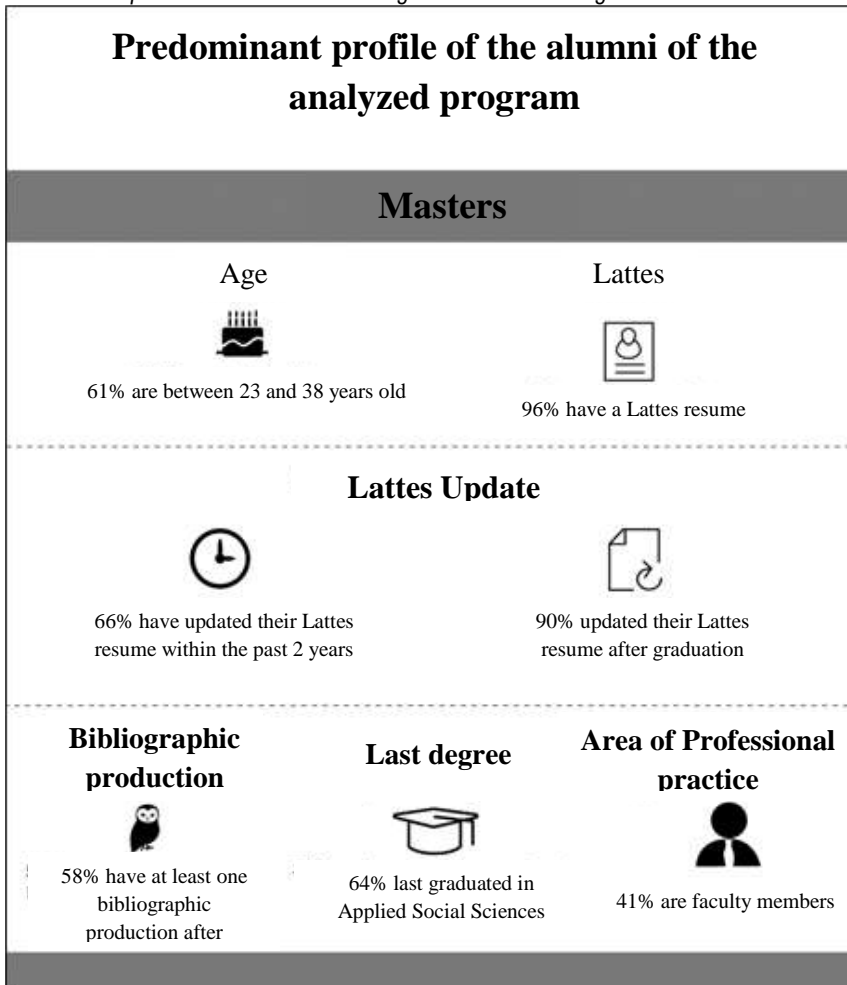
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Regarding the predominant profile of the program's doctoral alumni, Figure 4 summarizes the profile found:

Figure 4.
Predominant profile of the program's doctoral-level graduates.

Predominant profile of the alumni

of the analyzed program

Doctorate

Age

61% are between 27 and 38 years old

Lattes

100% have a Lattes resume

Lattes Update

100% have updated their
Lattes resume within the past 2

98% updated their Lattes
resume after graduation

Bibliographic production

58% have at least one
bibliographic production
after graduating

Last degree

64% last graduated in
Applied Social Sciences

Area of Professional practice

76% are faculty members

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Based on the interviews conducted with the last two coordinators of the Program studied, it was found that the Program in question has encouraged research on monitoring and evaluation of former students. These incentive actions have already born some fruit, as highlighted by interviewee C1:

> [...]I had a practical experience of this; I supervised a dissertation that was to evaluate [...] the use and application of the production of the former students in the market. We had good responses and were able to evaluate whether our work is bearing good results or not, and these results were average. The academic body dedicates itself to it, but in general, the practical application of it in the market has been little used. A lot of work ends up staying on the shelf due to a lack of practical application.

It is seen that academic studies focused on the monitoring and evaluation of former students help the management of the Program, as they can provide information about the training received. This fact is pointed out by Lousada and Martins (2005), who warn about the risks of not gaining knowledge of the suitability of graduate's training to the market needs. This result also converges with the discussion proposed by Oliveira (2021), who emphasizes that follow-up of former students enables the HEI to gain feedback on its activities, which can contribute to achieving more satisfactory and ambitious results.

Although Maccari et al. (2008) highlight the fact that the former students are not aware of the importance of keeping their information updated in the databases, it should be noted that making former students aware of the need to keep their data up-to-date, both on the Lattes platform and in internal databases belonging to the Program, can be an important strategy as part of the alumni follow-up, as the report of practices of monitoring students after graduation is one of the evaluation criteria of Capes, under the sub-item "solidarity, nucleation, and visibility" (Capes, 2014). Notably, this

Thiago Luiz de O. Cabral, Fernanda C. da Silva, Andressa Sasaki V. Pacheco e Pedro Antônio de Melo

raising of awareness is a possibility in the process of evolution necessary for the actions of alumni follow-up investigated by Simon and Pacheco (2017), as it enables a planned and continuous data collection.

This work also investigated the stimulus for the participation of former students in research groups linked to the Program. Through the interviews, we were able to identify that stimulus occurs while the students are in training, and comes mainly from the supervisor. This may indicate a need for joint actions between professors, students, and graduates, as highlighted by Coelho et al. (2021). According to interviewee C2, a former student is more likely to maintain contact with research groups when there is a link between these groups and the student during the course. For the interviewees, there is a greater chance of the former student maintaining the link with research groups related to the Program when the former student follows a teaching career. According to interviewee C1: "[...] once he (the former student) enters the job market, he forgets about the research groups".

Although former students are encouraged to participate in joint actions with faculty and students (such as research groups) in the researched program, these actions are not sustained consistently. This can, in part, be explained by the context of recurrent distancing of graduates from the *stricto sensu* postgraduation after their graduation, as pointed out by Coelho et al. (2021).

Regarding the orientations/mentorships in the line of research of the program's former students, interviewee C2 reported that this happens more in research groups, and that perhaps a better term than "orientation" would be "teamwork". The author also points out that "the great work of the Program is to encourage research groups". Interviewee C1 commented that, sometimes, though rarely, former students who have not pursued academic life are invited to become co-supervisors in academic research.

It should be considered that the participation of former students in activities of the Postgraduation program, such as publications in partnership with professors, involvement with research groups, acting as members of examining boards, and participation in other activities, is considered in the evaluations of Capes. Bernal and Mille (2013) highlight that former student's desire to get involved and participate in social and professional activities of the HEI may be favored by a positive experience during their graduation. This suggests that a desire to pay back, and a sense of loyalty among alumni towards the institution, should be stimulated even before the end of the course.

Therefore, it is believed that the Program Coordination could promote the involvement of former students in these activities, collaborating in the academic studies and professional careers of their former students and in strengthening the link between the Program and its former students, helping to improve the quality of their courses and, perhaps, improve their Capes scores.

Besides promoting the participation of former students in Program activities, it is also necessary to record information about the involvement of former students in these activities, as these records need to be included in the annual reports submitted to Capes (Capes, 2014).

When considering the studies of Bernal and Mille (2013) on the recognition by former students of the importance of relevant and personalized communication from the Institution to its former students, it is observed that the studied Graduate Program in Administration has some opportunities to improve the management of its relationship with its alumni, through the basic communication initiatives proposed in the theory. An alternative is the use of alumni portals, pointed out by Silva et al. (2022) as important instruments for strengthening relations between the HEI and its former students. Portals also act as a channel for former students to express their hopes, ideas and experiences. This can help maintain the bond with former students and mitigate the sense of abandonment that former students may feel when they leave the institution, as pointed out by Queiroz (2014).

Finally, interviewees C1 and C2 mention strategies that could improve communication and help maintain links with former students of the Program. They mention aspects such as disseminating news (thesis defenses, events, and competitions), strengthening research groups through the involvement of former students, inter-institutional partnerships, monitoring the Lattes portal, and the use of information systems for the interaction between the Program and its former students.

In the survey of practices already in place on the best-evaluated programs in relation to the program studied, considering the moment of data collection in this study, as presented in the methods section, nineteen different actions carried out by the thirty studied programs were identified. Of these, nine actions were considered innovative practices in managing the alumni relations, since such practices were not identified in the researched theory. It is worth noting that each practice was considered only once, regardless of the number of institutions that reported their applications.

Considering the consulted theory, the interviews, and the management practices carried out by the thirty programs studied, Figure 5 was constructed; it presents the synthesis of the twenty-two practices associated with the management of relationships with former students identified in the different data sources.

Figure 5.
Summary of Practices of relationship management with alumni of Brazilian Postgraduate Programs.

Code	Alumni management practice	Is the practice mentioned in the researched theory?	Is the practice carried out by the analyzed Program?	Is the practice carried out by programs with Capes grades 5, 6, and 7?
Practice 1	Application of academic works such as dissertations and thesis of former students of the institution.	-	-	✓
Practice 2	Strengthening ties between alumni and the Program, with the intermediation of former mentors.	-	-	✓
Practice 3	Census of former students.	-	-	✓
Practice 4	Consulting government portals (RAIS) to follow the careers of the former students.	-	-	✓
Practice 5	Inviting former students to participate in consulting projects.	✓	-	✓
Practice 6	Contacting former students via email, inviting them to give registration and publication details.	✓	-	✓
Practice 7	Creating email accounts for alumni.	-	-	✓
Practice 8	Creating and strengthening alumni associations.	✓	-	✓
Practice 9	Creating/updating a database to store information about former students.	✓	-	✓
Practice 10	Alumni meeting.	✓	-	✓
Practice 11	Involvement of former students in activities developed in research centers linked to the programs.	✓	-	✓
Practice 12	Encouraging the submission and publication of academic works and participation in events organized by the National Associations of Graduate Programs in the area.	-	-	✓
Practice 13	Studies on the perception of former students regarding the education received.	✓	-	✓
Practice 14	Tributes to outstanding former students.	-	-	✓
Practice 15	Encouragement of research on the monitoring and evaluation of former students.	-	✓	-
Practice 16	Inclusion of alumni in the program's evaluation processes.	-	-	✓
Practice 17	Monitoring former students' Lattes curricula.	-	✓	✓
Practice 18	Participation of former students as members of boards.	✓	✓	-
Practice 19	Institutional alumni portal with news, events, benefits, interaction with course colleagues, interaction with faculty, and professional opportunities.	✓	✓	✓
Practice 20	Student mentoring/student co-mentoring programs	✓	✓	✓
Practice 21	Network of former students.	✓	-	✓
Practice 22	Raising awareness of the need to constantly update the Lattes curriculum	✓	-	-

Source: Prepared by the authors.

THIAGO LUIZ DE O. CABRAL, FERNANDA C. DA SILVA, ANDRESSA SASAKI V. PACHECO E PEDRO ANTÔNIO DE MELO

The Practices identified in Figure 5 were analyzed both individually and together, to improve the categories created, submitting the data initially categorized in the first level to a second level of categorization, configuring the recomposition step, as presented in the methods section. This step allowed the identification of five categories. Namely, raising student awareness, monitoring graduates, communication, maintaining links, and monitoring the results.

In terms of raising student awareness, we considered the alumni management practices carried out while students are still in program, i.e., before graduating. The category monitoring graduates included practices such as monitoring former students' academic and professional careers. The communication practices were those that involved establishing contact with former students. Maintaining links included practices that involved former students in the activities of the program or institution. Finally, monitoring the results included actions in which the program uses information, perceptions, and opinions of former student to establish management indicators.

It should be noted that a single practice might correspond to more than one category, given the complementary nature of the five categories identified. The categorization of the practices can be seen in Figure 6:

Figure 6.
Categorization of the alumni management practices.

Raising student awareness	Monitoring alumni	Communication	Maintaining the link	Monitoring the results
Practice 15 Practice 20 Practice 22	Practice 3 Practice 4 Practice 6 Practice 9 Practice 13 Practice 14 Practice 17	Practice 5 Practice 6 Practice 7 Practice 10 Practice 12 Practice 19 Practice 22	Practice 1 Practice 2 Practice 5 Practice 7 Practice 8 Practice 10 Practice 11 Practice 12 Practice 14 Practice 18 Practice 19 Practice 20 Practice 21	Practice 4 Practice 13 Practice 16

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The results suggest that the categories listed above can guide the management of alumni relations, as they are based on the management practices identified in the theory, on the practices of the best-evaluated postgraduation programs in the area, on the perception of the managers of the program studied, and on the institutional documents analyzed.

It is clear to see that before any of the practices identified are actually put into practice, they need to be carefully considered and developed within their specific context. Thus, for an action related to former students to be put into practice, it is first necessary to recognize the need and importance of such action, and envision the results and gains associated with it. Thus, although the identified practices did not include actions to raise awareness about the importance of managing alumni relations, it is evident that this is a basic direction for the feasibility of all other practices, this being an implicit category in the findings of this study, resulting in six categories that guide the practices of management of alumni relations. Based on the six categories identified in this study, the following guidelines were established:

- **1st Guideline:** the former student is a permanent part of the Institution and fundamental for the achievement of the Program's objective, and must be considered in the management;

- **2nd Guideline:** the relationship with the alumni begins even before the student graduates, and students should be made aware, during their course, of the importance of keeping the institution informed about how the education received has impacted on their academic and professional careers;

- **3rd Guideline:** the Program should follow up the academic and professional careers of its former students, to ensure that the desired profile of the former students is being reached;

-

- **4th Guideline:** the Program should establish two-way communication, both receptive and proactive, with its alumni, making communication channels available so that the alumni are heard and responded to, as well as receiving relevant and personalized information;

- **5th Guideline:** it is indispensable for the Program to involve its alumni in the activities promoted, establishing a relationship of partnership, stimulating a culture of returning to the institution, and promoting a sense of belonging to the Institution;

- **6th Guideline:** the Program should define indicators linked to the actions taken to comply with the above guidelines, the results of which will support the identification of needs for change in the program's proposal or in the management plan for the relationship with its alumni.

It can be seen that the first guideline is related to something internal to the program, i.e., it is related to the former students, but does not involve them directly. Regarding Guidelines 2, 3, 4, and 5, it can be observed that, while Guidelines 3, 4, and 5 are related to the management of the former student after the individual's education, Guideline 2 suggests that some practices should be carried out during the student's education. Finally, Guideline 6 has a two-directional relationship with Guidelines 2, 3, 4, and 5, as it recommends a constant action of the program management to define indicators, monitor, evaluate results, and develop action plans to improve practices. Based on this analysis, the diagram presented in Figure 7 was prepared, which visually summarizes the guidelines identified in this research.

Figure 7.
Guidelines for managing the relationship with the program's graduates
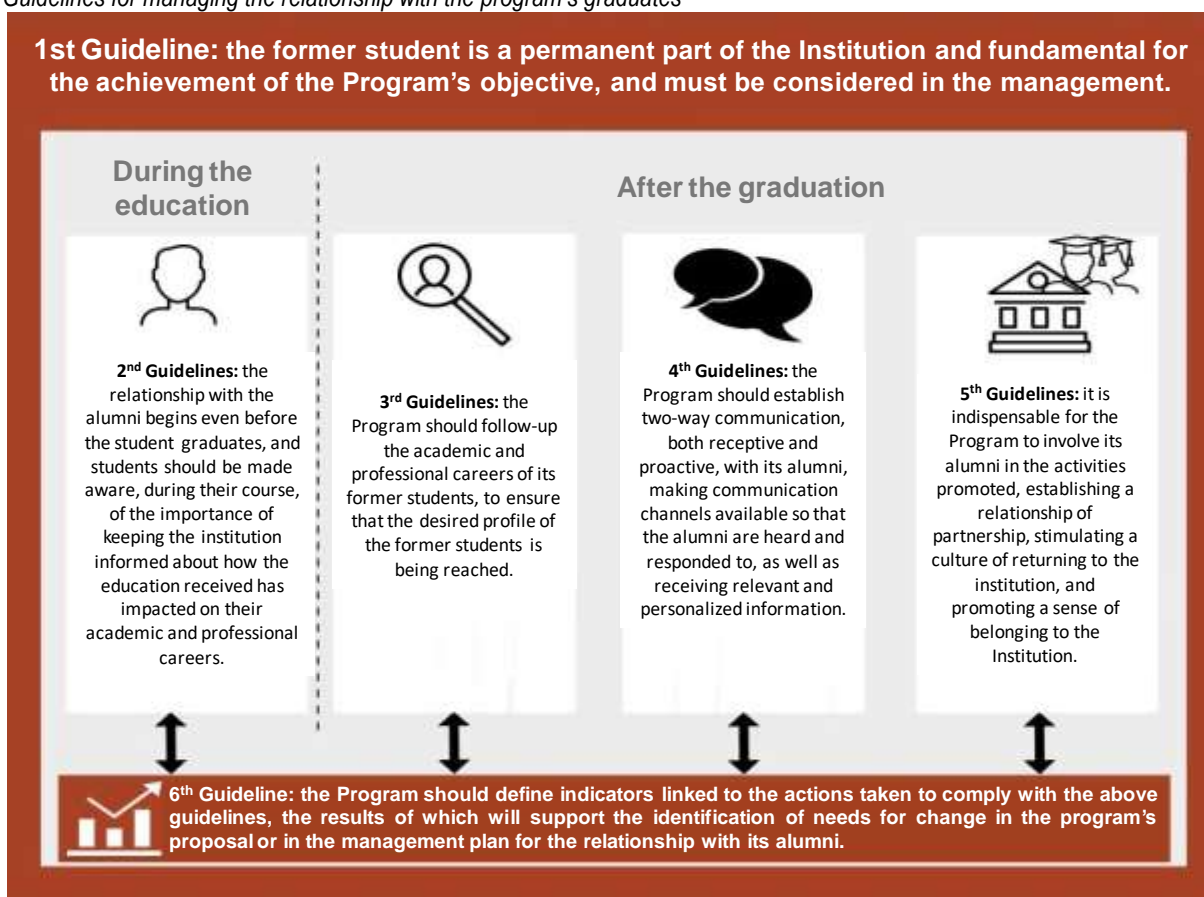
Source: Prepared by the authors

The guidelines defined here, although portrayed in a static figure, are dynamic and need to be aligned with the time horizons of the planning of programs and institutions. They must also be constantly reviewed.

Although this study analyzes a specific *stricto sensu* postgraduation program of an institution, the guidelines presented here may be relevant to Higher Education Institutions in general, especially HEIs that offer courses at postgraduation level. Hence, it is believed that other graduate programs can make use of the guidelines and the theory

Thiago Luiz de O. Cabral, Fernanda C. da Silva, Andressa Sasaki V. Pacheco e Pedro Antônio de Melo

presented in this study to carry out strategic management of former students, which contributes to the achievement of the program's objectives, at the micro level, and those of the institutions and the educational system as a whole, at the macro level.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Alumni are a permanent part of the educational institutions and, consequently, of the graduate programs from which they graduated. Thus, the end of the course should not represent the end of the relationship between the student and the Program, but the beginning of a lifelong relationship.

This study proposes guidelines for managing the alumni relations of a Graduate Program in Administration, in the *stricto sensu* modality.

It was possible to identify the strategies for managing the relationship with former students of the studied program, to find out the profile of the program's former students, and to identify practices of relationship management with alumni of graduate programs in Brazilian institutions.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the management practices of the relationship with the graduates, six guiding categories were identified for the systematization of this management: student awareness, monitoring graduates, communication, maintaining the link, and monitoring the results.

For each of the guiding categories, a corresponding guideline was established for managing alumni relations: **1st Guideline:** the former student is a permanent part of the Institution and fundamental for the achievement of the Program's objective, and must be considered in the management; **2nd Guideline:** the relationship with the alumni begins even before the student graduates, and students should be made aware, during their course, of the importance of keeping the institution informed about how the education received has impacted on their academic and professional careers; **3rd Guideline:** the Program should follow up the academic and professional careers of its former students, to ensure that the desired profile of the former students is being reached.; **4th Guideline:** the Program should establish two-way communication, both receptive and proactive, with its alumni, making communication channels available so that the alumni are heard and responded to, as well as receiving relevant and personalized information; **5th Guideline:** it is indispensable for the Program to involve its alumni in the activities promoted, establishing a relationship of partnership, stimulating a culture of returning to the institution, and promoting a sense of belonging to the Institution; and **6th Guideline:** the Program should define indicators linked to the actions taken to comply with the above guidelines, the results of which will support the identification of needs for change in the program's proposal or in the management plan for the relationship with its alumni.

Therefore, it is understood that the results of this research contribute to the theoretical field, still little explored, as it expands knowledge about the management of alumni in the postgraduation context, analyzes a set of theoretical and empirical practices for the management of former students, and systematizes these practices in the form of guidelines. At the same time, the guidelines proposed here offer practical means for alumni management by Brazilian graduate programs, as instead of focusing on specific issues, they present a holistic and integrated management perspective of the subject.

After conducting this research, it was found that in both the Postgraduate Program studied and the Institution as a whole, there have been advances in their management of alumni relations. An example of this is the participation of the authors of this study during freshers week for new Postgraduate students, when the guidelines defined in this study were presented, seeking to raise awareness among incoming students. It is also worth mentioning the contemplation of the guidelines developed as references for the working group formed by the institution aiming at the structuring an alumni management committee.

As part of University Institutions, graduate programs also have the function of training individuals to meet social demands. It is the responsibility of the HEIs and, consequently, of the Programs, to evaluate the training of their students and monitor their careers, to find out whether this mission is being fulfilled. The results of this process can be used as part of a cycle of Thus, the results of this process can be used to establish a cycle of continuous improvement.

When it comes to Postgraduation in particular, it is reasonable to consider that national development is linked to the graduates, since in Brazil, Postgraduate studies are the locus of scientific and technological development of the nation.

Therefore, going beyond the walls of the researched institution, it is understood that the results of this study can contribute to the National Postgraduation System as a whole, as the results achieved are not restricted only to the area studied but can also be applied to other areas of knowledge.

That said, it is important to clarify that the guidelines proposed in this study are not intended to be prescriptive as to what to do and how to do it, but rather, to show what is observed in regard to the management of alumni relations.

Improving and systematizing the management of this alumni relationship not only provides an opportunity to find out more, and show society the results achieved with the resources invested, but also in the more efficient management of people and resources for the Institution, as it enables a vision of the whole, an understanding of what needs to be done, clarity of the results to be achieved, and reducing (perhaps avoiding altogether) unplanned, often desperate actions when the deadlines for sending information to CAPES are looming.

For management practices related to monitoring of graduates, communication and monitoring the results, it is clear that considerable advances are still needed regarding the development of technological applications that can facilitate and automate costly actions that are performed manually. It is believed that this situation does not justify the possible neglect of these aspects by graduate programs.

A comparative study of international practices related to alumni management by graduate programs is recommended, highlighting the results achieved by institutions. Also, studies to identify other possible practices within each listed category are recommended, as well as the development and application of technological resources that can facilitate the management of alumni relations.

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THIAGO LUIZ DE O. CABRAL, FERNANDA C. DA SILVA, ANDRESSA SASAKI V. PACHECO E PEDRO ANTÔNIO DE MELO

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