

International Dual Diploma Program in Undergraduate Nursing Programs between Brazil and Portugal

Jeferson Rodrigues¹, Rosani Ramos Machado¹, Maria da Conceição Saraiva da Silva Costa Bento², Ananda Maria Fernandes³, Antonio Fernando Salgueiro do Amaral⁴, Maria de Lourdes de Souza^{5*}

¹RN, PhD in Nursing, Graduate Nursing Program (PEN/UFSC), Federal University of Santa Catarina, Florianópolis/SC, Brazil

²RN, MSc, PhD student in Porto University, Coordinator Professor in Nursing School of Coimbra, Portugal

³RN, PhD in Nursing, Portuguese Catholic University, Professor, Nursing School of Coimbra, Portugal

⁴RN, PhD in Nursing, PhD in Business Management, Professor, Nursing School of Coimbra, Portugal

⁵RN, PhD in Public Health, Professor, Graduate Nursing Program at UFSC (PEN/UFSC), President of the Institute REPENSUL, Florianópolis/SC, Brazil

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Abstract

International Dual Diploma Programs in undergraduate programs is one of the goals established by the internationalization of higher education institutions. Hence, each institution organizes itself in legal, administrative, teaching, political and financial terms in order to implement such a program. **Objective:** To report the experience of developing and implementing a Dual Diploma Program in undergraduate nursing programs in Brazil and Portugal. **Method:** Experience report. **Results:** An International Dual Diploma Program was established between the Undergraduate Nursing Programs of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Brazil and the Nursing School of Coimbra (ESeNC), Portugal. In Brazil, the process was initiated by the Coordination of the Undergraduate Nursing Program at UFSC, was considered by the university's higher boards and by International Relations and Legal offices within the university. In Portugal, at the Nursing School of Coimbra, the International Relations Office together with the Technical-Scientific Council and the Office of the President of the ESeNC prepared the process. Two Brazilian students started attending the program in the second semester of 2018, after being selected through a public selection process. **Conclusion:** The program is in place and has proven to be feasible.

Keywords: Nursing, Education Nursing, International Cooperation, Global Health.

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INTRODUCTION

The world today is not nor will it be the same anymore: it is shrinking. What happens anywhere in the globe is rapidly known and often has an unpredictable and systemic impact in local contexts. Tension generated by globalization obliges us to increasingly think globally and act locally and cooperate internationally [1-3].

Because of globalization, which is unpredictable by nature, we can no longer train professionals considering only what we have here and now, considering only known, predictable and local contexts [3].

The future requires us to rethink education/training to prepare people and workers to respond to a reality that will systematically change, changes that will modify what we already know or think we know. In this context, there is a search for improved

living conditions accruing from a greater flow of people escaping poverty, war, or poor living conditions. These factors require health workers, particularly nurses, to be able, in view of unexpected and violent transitions, to assist people in reconstructing meanings in their lives and health [3, 4].

In this scenario, the internationalization of higher nursing education can be a possibility to respond to the impact of globalization. Internationalization can be seen as a trend related to the growth of cross-border activities through the encouragement of national higher education systems, physical mobility, academic cooperation, exchange of academic knowledge, and international education [5], as well as a "process of interlocution between peers from different countries, in tune with the so-called globalization process" [6].

The World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century conceives the internationalization of higher education to be a

technology that enables sharing theoretical and practical knowledge among countries and continents, while promoting solidarity, justice, and social equality, in view of an intercultural dialogue [7].

Thus, there is a demand to develop new competencies in universities, and especially, to develop an ability to establish partnerships and cooperation [8] cites various reasons leading higher education institutions to seek internationalization, including political, economic, sociocultural and academic factors. Institutions promote educational environments in which students can appreciate and use global complexity to develop skills, collaborate with peers, expand research networks and collaborate on projects [5].

Backes *et al.*, [9] notes that one of the effects of internationalization is “to value diversity, learn characteristics of identity traits, face various and complex contexts, elevate cultural and social capital, aggregate value to professional education, increase autonomy and resilience, as well as contribute to the professional and cultural development of all those directly or indirectly involved in the process”.

The nursing undergraduate program linked to the Federal University of Santa Catarina was created by Resolution 02/69-CUn/UFSC on January 24th, 1969 and was recognized by opinion report No. 3.480, Federal Council of Education, renewed by Resolution No. 315/MEC, February 2nd, 2011 and opinion report No. 868/68, Federal Council of Education [10-12].

The selection process is through a widespread Brazilian competitive examination (Vestibular exam). The program provides a generalist nursing education in the morning and evening periods and has a workload of 4,980 class hours, 1,264 hours of supervised training, 120 hours of complementary activities, and 72 hours of optional courses. The program lasts 10 semesters and the maximum time that may be taken to complete the course is 14 semesters.

The program follows the National Nursing Curriculum Guidelines [13]. The profile of alumni is a nurse, professional working in the field of health, with a generalist education and critical, reflexive and creative skills. This professional is able to practice nursing in care delivery, management, education and research dimensions, based on ethical principles, specific and interdisciplinary knowledge. This professional is also able to intervene in the process of living, becoming sick and being healthy, is responsible and engaged with social transformation, citizenship and the promotion of health. The Nursing Program has strategies to establish an ongoing dialogue with its faculty members and has a teaching assistance network to assess, plan and improve the profile of its students to critically incorporate new demands from the market job, technological

innovations, and new practices emerging in the field of knowledge.

The Nursing School of Coimbra (ESENFC) has affirmed, in the last decade, an understanding that internationalization is strategic to its development and quality of its educational mission and is an important component of an institution that seeks to be socially responsible. The conception of a research-driven school mandates that the ESENFC take part in a broad network of knowledge, encouraged by professors, researchers, and national and international students involved in joint teaching-learning and research. The establishment and participation of these research and teaching networks enables scientific-teaching development and benefits the entire educational community. International mobility programs, among them including Dual Diploma programs, have the potential to improve the quality of programs and excellence in research, and reinforce academic and cultural internationalization.

The ministers responsible for higher education in Europe have acknowledged the importance of international mobility and defined the mobility of students and professors as the seventh priority in the sphere of higher education for the 2010-2020 decade (Communication of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Louvain-La-Neuve, April 2009) [14]. These ministers advocated for the international mobility of professors and students to be the hallmark of higher education in Europe and a way to ensure quality. In this sense, they have challenged all the universities in European countries to promote the international mobility of students, professors and researchers; to improve the organization of mobility; and to diversify internationalization projects. The goal established for 2020 is to have at least 20% of undergraduate and graduate students who attend a European institution of higher education to have the opportunity to undergo part of their studies in a university located in a foreign country.

European nursing undergraduate programs are regulated in such a way that they ensure professional qualification and reduce constraints on the free mobility of people (Law No. 26/1017 from May 30th that transposes the Directive 2013/55/UE, European Parliament and Council from November 20th, 2013, which alters Directive 2005/36/CE that concerns recognition of professional qualifications and Regulation (EU) No. 1024/2012, related to administrative cooperation through the Internal Market Information System. These legal diplomas ensure that anyone holding a degree in Nursing obtained from a European higher education institution is automatically recognized and is able to work in any country within the European Union. This means a set of rules is imposed on undergraduate nursing programs training generalist nurses [15].

The undergraduate nursing curriculum that is currently in force at the Nursing School of Coimbra (ESEnFC) was published in the *Diário da República* No. 158, 2nd series from August 17th, 2017, through order No. 7196/2017, which includes the program's curricular structure with a duration of 4 years, 8 semesters, 6,480 hours[16]. The specific objectives of the nursing program is that, at the end of the program, students will be able to plan, perform and assess general nursing care provided to healthy or sick individuals throughout the life cycle, to families, groups and community at the three levels of prevention; to participate as active members of multidisciplinary teams in the planning and assessing of activities that contribute to the wellbeing of persons, families and communities in order to prevent, alleviate or solve health problems; develop research in the nursing field, and especially in the health field in general; actively intervene in the qualification of nurses and other professionals; and participate in the management of health services.

The International Dual Diploma Program at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) is intended to allow its undergraduates and those coming from foreign schools to obtain a dual diploma that is recognized by the UFSC and by another higher education institution, with which an agreement is established according to Normative Resolution No.037/UFSC/2013 [17].

Dual Diploma Programs in the Nursing School of Coimbra are governed by law that is applicable to programs enabling students to obtain an academic degree in Portugal.

Dual Diploma Programs allow students to have contact with other social, economic and political contexts that determine the acquisition of other competencies to deal with situations in their country of

origin. This means that the exercise of leadership in the nursing and health field is enhanced. It also enables students to achieve or have their ability to communicate in other languages and face cross-cultural diversity improved. Having a dual diploma expands opportunities in the global job market and strengthens clinical competencies, which when applied in the Brazilian context, may lead to technological innovation.

This study's objective is to report the experience of developing and implementing an International Dual Diploma Program that was established between the Federal University of Santa Catarina and the School Nursing of Coimbra.

Method

This is an experience report. The process of establishing this agreement included the involvement of faculty members through the REPENSUL Institute, which has historically facilitated and collaborated with international scientific research of excellence in the nursing field by establishing Collaborative Networks. First, we verified the possibility of establishing an agreement between ESEnFC and UFSC and then, a cooperative agreement was developed between the nursing programs. Face-to-face meetings were held between representatives of the ESEnFC and UFSC to establish a project to ensure the curriculum matrices were equivalent and met legal requirements, such as: content; minimum workload required to complete the curriculum of each university; and equivalent academic grading system. These meetings resulted in the proposal of an International Dual Diploma Program between the two institutions. This proposal was discussed in both institutions according to the political administrative organization of each. The process that took place in the UFSC is presented as follows.

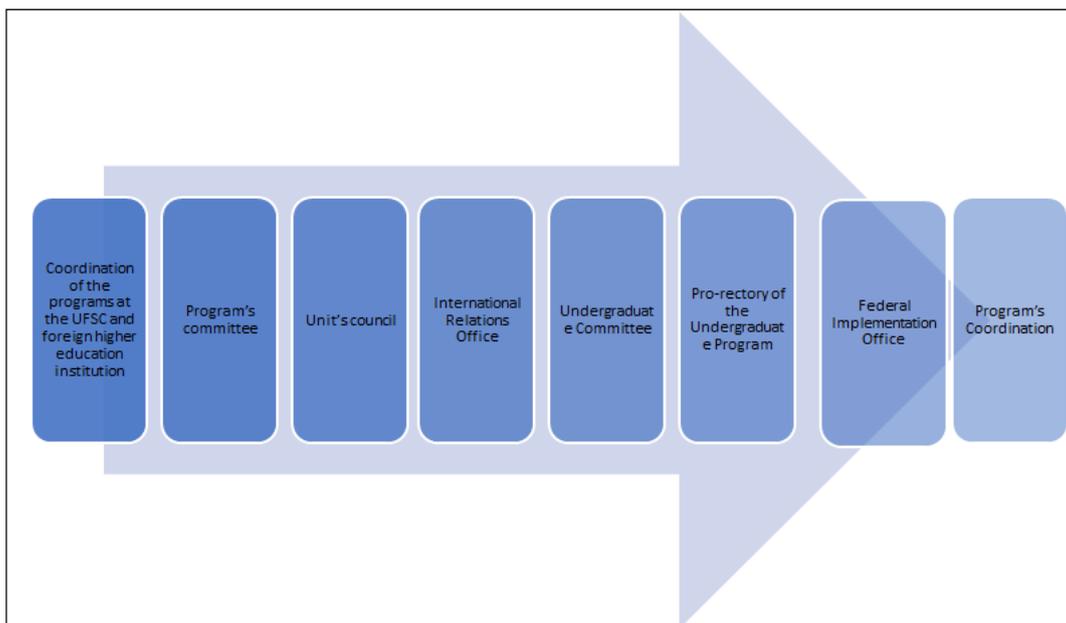


Fig-1: Processing of the International Dual Diploma Program at UFSC, 2018.

After the process run its course in both institutions, the program became legally official in

accordance with the agreement established between the institutions.

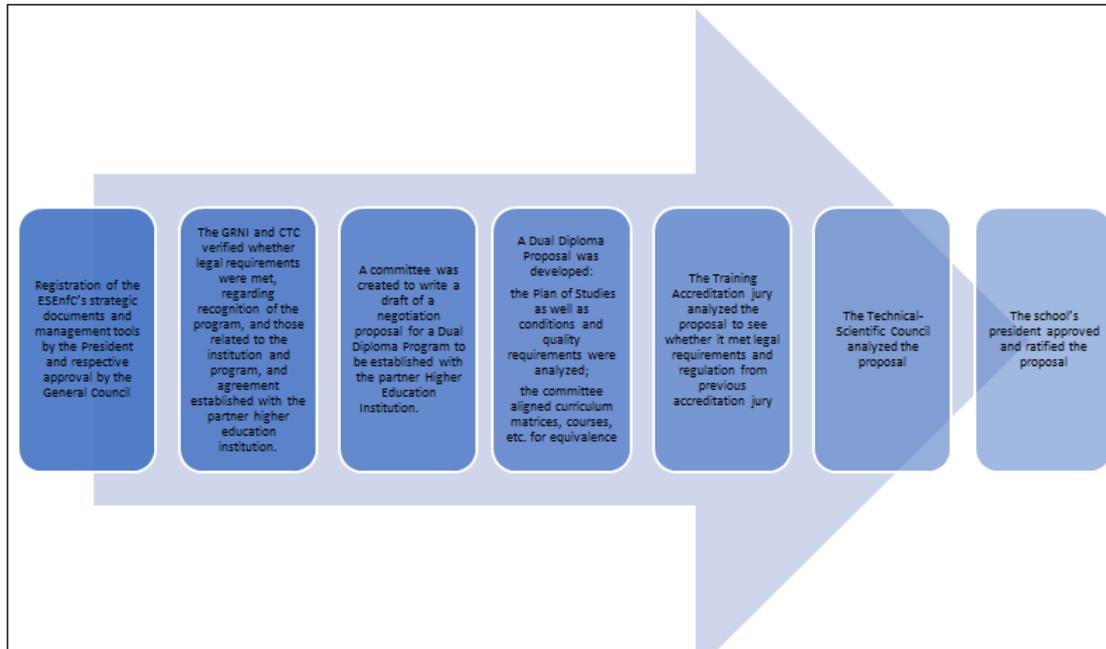


Fig-2: Processing of the International Dual Diploma Program in the ESEnFC, 2018

RESULTS

The International Dual Diploma Program involving the two Undergraduate Nursing Programs in the UFSC and ESEnFC is the first of its kind in Brazil. For a program of this nature to be approved, procedures need to be systematized in the technical-scientific, political, legal-administrative and teaching-evaluative dimensions.

The technical-scientific dimension includes the program's level of excellence and its trajectory and recognition at the national and international levels; the selection process for students to be accepted in the program; the institution's physical structure to provide brick-and-mortar classes; systems and agencies that approve and recognize the program; the impact of alumni in society; and faculty members who are qualified and recognized for their scientific production and teaching expertise.

In the 50 years of its existence, the Undergraduate Nursing Program has been constantly evaluated both internally and externally by independent agencies.

External Assessment

- *Conceito Preliminar de Curso (CPC)* [Program's Preliminary Score] is a quality indicator, calculated by the MEC (Ministry of Education), which takes the ENADE (National Student Performance Exam) into account,

along with an external assessment; b) ENADE assesses the total performance of those graduating from undergraduate programs in terms of the programs' content, skills, and competencies that should be acquired during the program.

- IGC (General Index of Programs) of the UFSC is a quality indicator of Higher Education Institutions.
- Regional Accreditation of Undergraduate Programs of the Mercosul (ARCU-SUL) refers to an agreement established among the Ministries of Education in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bolivia and Chile, ratified by the MERCOSUL's Common Market Council and is an assessment process through which the academic quality of undergraduate programs is certified. The Undergraduate Nursing Program at the UFSC has been certified by ARCU-SUL since 2014.
- INEP (National Institute for Educational Studies and Research), a body of the Ministry of Education that assesses Higher Education Institutions and is one of the components of the SINAES (National Higher Education Assessment System), which has rated the UFSC's Undergraduate Nursing Program with the maximum score.

Internal Assessment

- Self-assessment – coordinated by the Assessment Committee of each institution. In the case of the UFSC, assessment is oriented by guidelines and an institutional self-assessment script provided by CONAES (National Committee of Higher Education Assessment).
- Mechanisms of the program itself are not considered assessment bodies *per se*, but allow constant and permanent analyses, reflections, and propositions, such as the Undergraduate Program's Committees, Structuring Teaching Center, Undergraduate Forum, and the Free Nursing Academic Center. These assessments have indicated an excellent level for the UFSC's Undergraduate Nursing Program.

The Nursing School of Coimbra is the heir of the oldest nursing education program in Portugal, as it taught its first program in 1881. As a higher education institution, it has the ability to establish, program, and execute strategic plans, activity plans, projects, provide services to the community, and implement the remaining scientific, teaching and cultural activities, enjoying scientific, teaching and cultural autonomy, as well as administrative, financial and patrimonial autonomy. The expanded autonomy granted to higher education in Portugal is based on a conviction that these institutions have a critical mass necessary for the performance of its functions. Higher education institutions are, however, complex organizations, living systems, which in addition to having clearly defined goals, need to develop self-regulating systems that allow them to implement adjustments necessary to correct deviations and fulfill its social responsibility. Thus, the ESEnFC, with its long tradition of self-assessment and peer review, has created an Internal Quality Assurance System, coordinated by the Quality and Assessment Council, which is responsible for promoting and controlling the quality and assessment system of the ESEnFC and its programs. In addition to internal assessment systems, the ESEnFC regularly undergoes external assessment, whether by international agencies (Institutional Evaluation Programme of the European University Association) or by the National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency, and has received maximum accreditation from the Internal System of Quality and Institutional Guarantee for all the programs it offers.

In Portugal, various criteria need to be met within a set of domains for programs to be accredited for the maximum period of time: the coordinator of the study cycle needs to have an academic and professional profile that is appropriate to the program's scientific field; the professional and academic profile of its faculty members, as well as their scientific and technological activities are supposed to be qualified and specialized in the field; the program should present a strong connection between teaching, research and

experimental development; develop high-level research of a professional nature or relevant scientific production; teaching workloads are to be balanced and compatible with the remaining functions faculty members develop; and most professors should maintain a stable relationship with the institution. There should exist within the institution an accredited research center, with its faculty members playing an active and relevant role in scientific investigation that is internationally recognized or oriented to research and high-level professional development. The institution is supposed to promote the academic qualification of faculty members who do not have sufficient or qualified personnel to ensure the functioning of its cycle of studies and promote continuous or specialized education. Indicators that refer to students include demand for the program and enrollment, as well as students' performance (academic success and employability). The program's level of internationalization is also assessed (mobility of students and faculty members, attendance by foreign students, and participation in international networks with relevance for the cycle of studies), having an internal system that ensures accredited quality, structures that are appropriate to strategic and operational coordination of procedures and mechanisms to assess the quality of the program, and assess faculty and non-faculty personnel.

The Political dimension refers to institutional connectedness, the decision-making process upon which the institution desires to implement the Program and that implies collaborative relationships. It represents the ability to discuss and make intra- and inter-institutional connections. The REPENSUL Institute, which is composed of the faculty members of the UFSC's Nursing department, collaborated in this case because working relationships had been already established through collaborative networks in knowledge areas, especially by the Undergraduate Nursing Department (Master's and Doctoral programs)[18]. A historical working relationship has been established between UFSC and ESEnFC. From the intra-institutional perspective, various meetings were held with committees, authorities, institutional representatives and the federal implementation office.

The ESEnFC considers the internationalization of the programs it offers a critical factor for its development and improved quality. The following strategic goal was included in its 2014-2018 strategic plan and Activities Plan, approved by the school's General Council: "to develop cooperative networks and projects that involve the schools of various continents, member states of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) and Ibero-American countries" and in this context, two of the operational goals indicated an increase in bilateral agreements with international counterparts, with consolidated joint work, in the training, research, innovation and development spheres, in order to grant joint academic degrees and

dual diploma programs. In order to achieve these goals, the UFSC was chosen as one of the partners to have such a privilege given its history of joint work developed with the faculty members of undergraduate and graduate nursing programs, but, mainly with the REPENSUL Institute and mutual recognition of the quality of both educational projects.

The Legal-Administrative dimension represents the institution's legal aspects. Thus, institutional regulations need to address this specific program. The UFSC has a Normative Resolution, No. 037, from November 5th, 2013 that regulates Dual Diploma in undergraduate programs [17]. This document emphasizes that the first step is to verify whether there exists a Term of Cooperation between institutions, because such an agreement includes Dual Diploma Programs.

Portugal has specific legislation addressing the recognition of education obtained in other countries and the establishment of bilateral agreements with foreign universities for the development of international mobility projects within undergraduate programs. Portugal requires that the partner institution, its programs and academic grading system comply with criteria provided in the Portuguese legislation so that academic grades and prior training will be recognized. This process was facilitated for the UFSC and its undergraduate program due to the existence of an Agreement for Academic and Scientific Exchange already established between the ESEnfC and UFSC.

The Teaching-Evaluative dimension indicates there needs to be an alignment and equivalence between curricula, disciplines, supervised training, the program's final paper for both institutions, and in regard to all the definitions contained in the projects for establishing equivalence between curriculum matrices. The number of slots available, deadlines for completing the program, and time scheduled for the activities have to be reconciled in both institutions, as well as the requirements students must meet to obtain the dual diploma, selection criteria and classification of candidates, and plan of studies for each student. A chronogram was established to assess and monitor students in both institutions. Faculty members of both institutions worked on these aspects.

Therefore, it was only possible to establish this Dual Diploma Program in Nursing because the wishes of all partners were reconciled. The ESEnfC had the goal, which was included in its strategic plan, to deepen its bilateral relationship with the UFSC. This goal was assumed by its Presidency and ensured by the ESEnfC's International Relations Office that both institutions would comply with all the requirements necessary for a bilateral agreement. A committee, composed of the coordinator of international relations, the president of the technical-scientific council, the president of the

previous accreditation jury, and the president of the school, was created to develop a draft of a working proposal to later negotiate the project and establish a Dual Diploma Program. The draft of this dual diploma proposal involved the analysis of the plan of studies of both institutions (framework, theoretical nursing and teaching references, criteria, conditions and quality requirements, analysis and proposal to align equivalence between curricula and curriculum units (content, workload, teaching-learning methodology, and assessment). After analysis, negotiation and final reformulation of this proposal with the coordinator of the undergraduate program and the UFSC team, it was evaluated by the ESEnfC's previous Training Accreditation Jury to verify whether all legal requirements and regulations, currently in force and necessary for accreditation and required by the Technical-Scientific Council were met, and finally ratified by the school's president.

The UFSC's Coordinator of the Undergraduate Program had the desire to establish an International Dual Diploma Program, also historically a goal of the faculty members of the Nursing Department and enabled by the REPENSUL Institute, which was concretized in 2018. Faced with the opportunity, the Program's Coordination carried out studies about Brazilian legislation and the experience of other programs within and outside the UFSC. A planning meeting was held with the Undergraduate Rectorate (PROGRAD), Department of School Administration (DAE), Department of International Relations (SINTER), a professor of Electrical Engineering due to his experience with Dual Diploma, the head of the Nursing Department, Structuring Teaching Center, and stakeholders (professors and students). The route and procedures to be followed were established in this meeting.

Face-to-face meetings were held in the UFSC's headquarters with the president of the ESEnfC, president of the ESEnfC's Technical-Scientific Center, the UFSC's coordination of the Nursing Program, representatives of the Structuring Teaching Center, Program's Education Committees, head of the department, stakeholders (professors) and the president of the REPENSUL. A work plan was developed to support the agreement, including the processing necessary in both institutions.

The objective established by the Cooperation Agreement was the international dual diploma, along with criteria for the selection of students; eligibility criteria; pre-requirements were established for students of both institutions; the structure of the International Dual Diploma Program; Plan of Studies; coordination of the program in each institution; and financial responsibility of each of the actors involved, as well as the students' rights and obligations; relationships between the parties; validity; extension; and forum.

In the UFSC, the proposal was presented to the Nursing Department's Committees because this is the department that provides the courses ESEnfC's students will attend and present the final paper.

A proposal was established after these meetings to reconcile three semesters in one school year, considering the asynchrony of the school years in both countries. After this definition, the document followed the procedure proposed by domestic legislation, according to Figure-3.

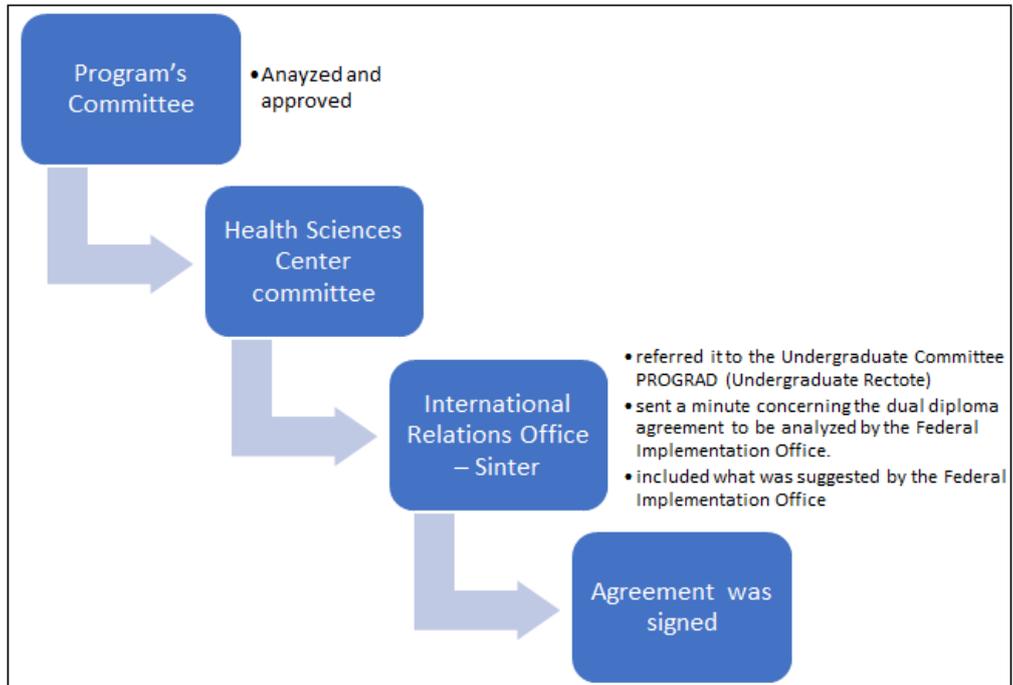


Fig-3: Flow for the analysis and approval of the International Dual Diploma Program. UFSC, 2018

The process of the Agreement for the International Dual Diploma Program was finalized in a meeting with the Program's Committees in June 2018.

During the legal-administrative process, the Coordinator of the UFSC's Undergraduate Nursing Program made a technical visit *in loco*, at the ESEnfC to come to know the physical structure, learning about its teaching processes, assessment methods, extension and research projects and also participated in meetings with professors, researchers and students at the ESEnfC. This visit was necessary because that president of the ESEnfC, Professor Maria da Conceição Saraiva da Silva Costa Bento, and other professors and researchers of the ESEnfC had already visited the UFSC's facilities when they participated in activities with the UFSC's graduate nursing program (PEN/UFSC) and the REPENSUL Institute.

A public notice (No. nº 08/2018/PROGRAD/UFSC) was published in mid-July 2018 to select candidates to attend the Dual Diploma Program of the Undergraduate Nursing Program.

It was established that a maximum of two students would be selected per academic year for the International Dual Diploma Program of the Undergraduate Nursing Program.

The requirements to be admitted into the International Dual Diploma Program were: being regularly enrolled in the institution; having concluded eight semesters of the Undergraduate Nursing Program; and being approved in all the courses from the first to the eighth phase of the program, considered to be equivalent to the conclusion of 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) at ESEnfC.

The eight phases of the program completed in the UFSC will be used for accreditation of the program at the ESEnfC. The training necessary to complete the remaining 60 ECTS, necessary to complete the 240 ECTS required to obtain a nursing diploma, must be taken at the ESEnfC. The selection criteria are in agreement with Normative Resolution No. 017/CUn/1997, which establishes that students with the highest index of academic achievement are selected. A cumulative index is calculated every semester. It is represented by the quotient between the total points and the courses the student was enrolled in the semester. In case of a tie between candidates, the Registration Rate (RR) is the tiebreaker criterion adopted, according to Article 43 of Normative Resolution No. 017/CUn/1997 [19].

A meeting was held with the candidates to provide clarification of the process, resolve potential doubts and explain consular requirements: documents to

obtain a visa, passport, health insurance, immunization, residency, and acceptance letter provided by the International Relations Sector at the ESEnFC. With all the documents in hand, the students were enrolled at the ESEnFC, received a residency document, and obtained a visa from the Portuguese Consulate and are currently studying at ESEnFC. The students are Geovana Pflieger and Mayara da Ventura Barbosa, the first Brazilian students from the UFSC's Undergraduate Nursing Program to attend ESEnFC during 2018/2019.

CONCLUSION

The International Dual Diploma Program in the Undergraduate Nursing Programs at the UFSC and ESEnFC is a resource, which in addition to inter-institutional collaboration, represents a possibility of exercising international citizenship. It marks an ethical-cultural relationship for students to perform their professional practice with greater security by familiarizing with a global routine of life.

The interest of the UFSC's Undergraduate Nursing Program in the Dual Diploma Program is to promote intellectual expansion and improvement, exchange knowledge, and enable students to think globally and act locally. This program enables students to experience scientific paradigms necessary to their practice.

Additionally, it enables a collaborative relationship to be established between professors and researchers to develop multicenter research and also support the programs' course completion papers. Thus, it represents an institutional gain in terms of multicenter research and expansion of the creative process of care technologies and techniques, both in terms of education and research.

The internationalization of undergraduate teaching is a milestone for the achievement of academic and professional excellence, for both undergraduate nursing students and faculty members. The nursing programs at the UFSC and ESEnFC have, from their inception, been based on a search for excellence, and for this reason, seek partnerships with differentiated training.

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