

Impacts of the integration between academic mentoring and university extension on community health: an experience report

Abstract

This article reports on the experience of academic mentoring in the discipline of Integration, Teaching, Service, and Community Practices, part of the Medicine program at the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG), using a qualitative and descriptive experience-report approach. The mentoring methodology comprised weekly meetings between mentors and students to address difficulties related to course content, together with the organization of community extension events led by scholarship-holding mentors, while a volunteer mentor accompanied students during practical classes at local health units. The experience suggests that mentoring supported clarification of course content, scheduling, and assessments, while extension activities created opportunities for community-oriented learning and practical skill development. Because standardized outcome measures were not applied, these findings should be interpreted as descriptive observations of the reported experience.

Keywords: mentoring, extension, health practice, universities, professional training

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Introduction

Under Articles 205 to 214 of Chapter III of the Federal Constitution of Brazil, promulgated in 1988,¹ education is established as a crucial issue, recognized not only as an essential right for all citizens but also as a shared responsibility of the State and the family. These articles set forth the basic principles governing education in the country, foremost among them the principle of equal opportunity for access to and continuation in school, ensuring that all individuals have fair conditions to fully develop their educational potential. The freedom to learn, teach, research, and share knowledge, art, and ideas is also emphasized, underscoring the importance of diversity of thought and knowledge within the educational sphere. Furthermore, the Federal Constitution guarantees the pursuit of quality standards in education, reaffirming the State's commitment to providing excellent education to all inhabitants of the country. These principles not only guide Brazilian educational policy but also reflect the democratic and inclusive values that underpin the nation's education system.

A direct connection can thus be observed between the Brazilian Constitution and the regulation of the curricularization of extension activities in higher education institutions. Once education is established as a right of society and a duty of the State, the constitutional principles provide and reinforce the legal foundation for educational policies that promote the integration of university extension into the academic curriculum.

An important measure to meet the need for university training more attuned to the aspirations of the academic community is directly linked to the implementation of government policies aimed at including extension activities in the academic curriculum. In this regard, the National Education Plan (PNE) 2014–2024² marks a significant milestone that led to Resolution No. 7/2018, which establishes guidelines for incorporating extension into higher education in Brazil, effectively transforming it into a curricular activity that must be integrated with research and teaching, as an interdisciplinary process that fosters interaction between higher

education institutions and society. Fontenele³ further notes that, in line with the PNE (2014–2024), by planning and organizing the integration of extension activities into students' curricula, these guidelines seek to foster greater integration among teaching, research, and extension in universities, contributing to professional training and social commitment in areas of high demand.

The tripod of higher education present in universities is composed of three fundamental elements: teaching, research, and extension. In Paula's study,⁴ it is observed that extension activities, despite being the most recent of the university's functions, face significant challenges regarding their understanding and implementation. Being interdisciplinary in nature, extension was long regarded as an extracurricular activity, though this concept has changed over time. Separated from academic subjects — precisely because it takes place outside the classroom — extension challenges the university to engage in social transformation, given the expectations of various groups seeking to manage the additional responsibilities alongside rigid criteria and processes to be followed.

Considering Law No. 13,005, enacted in June 2014, whose Target 12.7 of the National Education Plan explicitly states the need to “ensure that at least 10% of the total curricular credits required for undergraduate degrees are allocated to university extension programs and projects, prioritizing action in areas of high social relevance,”⁵ Reis et al.⁶ argue that, by curricularizing extension, universities move closer to the social landscape (profession versus field of work). By integrating extension activities into existing courses as part of the academic workload, universities create opportunities for hands-on experience and internships, giving rise to research projects that benefit both the community and the university.

According to Lucas et al.,⁷ regarding the integration between teaching and extension, adopting a multidisciplinary approach focused on social issues enables both mentors and mentees to develop educational, research, and extension strategies, thereby building, in an integrated manner, a dialogical interaction between investigation, collective action, and learning.

Given the important changes that have recently occurred in society, universities play a crucial role in preparing students to face present and future challenges. Beyond transmitting academic knowledge, higher education institutions are also dedicated to developing practical skills and fundamental values, enabling students to adapt and contribute meaningfully to a society in constant transformation.

Extension renews the connection between higher education institutions and the population, particularly at the local or regional level, in full accordance with the Federal Constitution and the PNE. Frantz⁸ notes that, when associated with research, extension can be regarded as a reflection-action process that contributes to the advancement of the community. Expansion initiatives, directed toward social demands and translated into effective practices, reinforce the role of higher education institutions in promoting progress in specific local or regional areas. He further argues that, in practice, such expansion plays a crucial role in this process of advancement.

The experience of extension integrated with academic mentoring has a fundamental impact on students' personal and academic lives. Simply putting into practice the theoretical knowledge acquired throughout their academic careers within these extension projects not only solidifies understanding but also enhances important skills such as leadership, communication, and teamwork. This should indeed be the main objective of higher education institutions, which not only transmit knowledge but also cultivate competencies that enable students to face everyday challenges and stand out in their professional careers.

In the health field, including extension activities in the curriculum may involve medical, nursing, and other related students undertaking internships in community clinics, providing basic health services in underserved areas, or carrying out disease-prevention initiatives in collaboration with local organizations.

The synergy generated by integrating academic mentoring with university extension is a powerful tool and represents a valuable educational strategy that transcends the boundaries of the classroom, providing students with an enriching and innovative educational experience. This partnership enriches university extension — whose objective is to promote social change and solve local problems — through the direct contribution of mentors, who facilitate the teaching and learning process. This integration not only reinforces theoretical concepts through practical application in real situations but also helps develop fundamental competencies such as leadership, communication, and teamwork. By interacting directly with the local community, students are able to understand the demands and challenges faced by the population, fostering genuine engagement with social service and civic ethics. By sharing their knowledge and skills, students not only contribute to concrete and impactful solutions but also become active members of society and responsible professionals, prepared to face the challenges of the labor market. In this way, including extension in the curriculum not only improves students' educational experience but also fosters a culture of social responsibility and civic participation, both fundamental to the development of a more equitable and sustainable society.

The main objective of this study was to describe the experience of integrating academic mentoring with curricular university extension in a first-semester Medicine course at UEMG, characterizing the activities implemented, their participation, perceived educational contributions, and the operational challenges encountered during one academic semester.

Material and methods

This study consists of an experience report by mentors of the Academic Mentoring Program in the discipline of Integration, Teaching, Service, and Community Practices at the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG), regarding the extension and teaching activities carried out throughout the semester. The work is qualitative and descriptive in nature, addressing the group's perceptions reported during the experience.

The eligible class comprised 41 students. Because no questionnaire, survey, or formal assessment instrument was administered, response and non-response rates were not applicable. Participation in the activities was documented descriptively based on attendance and direct observation during the mentoring and extension activities. Individual participation rates were not systematically recorded for all activities; therefore, percentages of participants could not be reliably calculated retrospectively.

The mentors were selected through the selection process established by Public Notice PEMA 01-2024. Two scholarship-holding mentors and one volunteer mentor were designated, with the objective of guiding medical students in organizing extension events and preparing assessment documents for the discipline, and of accompanying students during practical activities at health units, respectively. The mentoring activities were applied to the first-period class of the Medicine program at UEMG, comprising 41 students. The extension activities also involved other community members, in the fields of education and health, of varying age groups, from children to older adults.

Inclusion criteria comprised first-semester medical students formally enrolled in the curricular component during the study semester and mentors selected under PEMA Public Notice 01/2024 who participated in the reported activities. Students who were not enrolled in the curricular component, individuals who did not participate in the activities being described, and records without sufficient information for characterization of participation were excluded from the corresponding analyses.

Ethical considerations: This manuscript reports an educational and university extension experience conducted as part of regular curricular and academic activities at the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG). The activities were not originally designed as a research protocol and were therefore not submitted to a Research Ethics Committee. No identifiable individual data were collected or analyzed for research purposes, and the manuscript reports only descriptive observations arising from the educational and extension activities.

The activity schedule was developed through discussions between the mentors and the supervising professor, taking into account the students' academic calendar and the community's availability for the events. The topics for the mentoring sessions were defined according to the academic needs of the assisted students, resulting in the selection of "Preparation of the Assessment Portfolio" and "Vital Sign Measurement." The topics for the extension events, in turn, were chosen with the aim of raising public awareness of important yet often neglected health issues, namely "The Importance of Hand Hygiene in Preventing the Spread of Disease" and "Health Equity Promotion Policy for the LGBTQIAPN+ Population." The mentors accordingly gathered texts, articles, and materials to prepare the mentoring sessions, as well as to guide students in organizing the community events.

In addition, weekly meetings were held between the scholarship-holding mentors and the students to address questions related to the discipline, along with weekly monitoring, by the volunteer mentor, of the practical classes held at the health units under the supervision of the supervising professor.

No standardized scale, questionnaire, checklist, or other formal outcome assessment instrument was applied. The results reported in this experience report were based on descriptive observations made by the mentors and supervising professor during the mentoring sessions and extension activities. Therefore, the observations were used to characterize participants' engagement and the development of the activities, rather than to quantitatively measure their effectiveness or educational impact.

The mentoring schedule is presented below.

Mentoring schedule

Activities of the Mentoring Project began with the mentors' introduction to the Medicine class in which the discipline would be taught, on March 27. Questions were raised regarding assessment methods, assignment deadlines, extension projects, and the scheduling of mentoring sessions. Following this meeting with the students, the mentoring schedule was drawn up that same day.

From that date onward, the mentors began holding weekly question-and-answer sessions on course content via a Teams group, for interested students. Questions were recorded in the group chat and answered by the mentors through messages in the same chat. In addition, the mentors began accompanying medical students during practical classes at health units every Wednesday throughout the discipline.

On April 3, a meeting was held between students and mentors to clarify questions about preparing the discipline's portfolio, the assessment document to be submitted by students at the end of the term. In addition, important questions concerning the development of the seminars included in the discipline were addressed. During this session, the mentors explained how all required materials should be prepared, providing digital and printed examples.

On April 11, another in-person mentoring session was held to reinforce practice of the content taught by the discipline's professors. With guidance and materials provided by the mentors, students practiced measuring all vital signs — temperature, blood pressure, and respiratory and heart rate.

Following the schedule established for the mentoring program and the Extension Activities discipline, on April 13 the mentors organized and accompanied medical students in an extension activity at the public school Colégio Tiradentes, focused on raising awareness of and teaching hand hygiene to third-grade elementary students. The event took place during the day and consisted of a talk on the importance of proper hand hygiene at key moments and the various diseases that can result from neglecting this practice, followed by a hands-on activity in which children learned, through practice, the difference between correct and incorrect handwashing techniques. For this activity, the elementary students had their hands covered with tempera paint representing liquid soap, which they then had to fully remove through proper handwashing. At the end of the activity, it was possible to identify which children had performed correct hand hygiene, as those who had thoroughly cleaned their hands showed no remaining paint. In this playful and recreational way, the children were able to understand the importance of good hygiene habits for their own health and that of the entire community.

The following month, on May 2, another extension activity was organized and accompanied by the Mentoring Project at the Municipal Chamber of Alpinópolis, Minas Gerais, addressing the importance of promoting health equity for the LGBTQIAPN+ population. The mentors guided the medical students in developing an informative presentation on the topic for Primary Health Care staff in the municipality of Alpinópolis, together with a myths-and-facts activity concerning issues affecting the LGBTQIAPN+ population and their rights as citizens within the Unified Health System (SUS). The event proved extremely useful in clarifying doubts held by many staff members regarding appropriate care for this population, including nurses, community health workers, psychologists, physical therapists, nutritionists, and dentists from the health units.

On June 29, with the support of the mentoring program, medical students carried out an extension activity at the São Francisco Family Health Strategy (ESF) unit in Passos, Minas Gerais, addressing hypertension/diabetes management (Hiperdia) and sexual health/sexually transmitted infections (STIs) for the population served by this health unit and the surrounding region. Rapid tests for hepatitis C, hepatitis B, syphilis, and HIV were offered to the community, together with consultations with the unit's physician, preventive examinations, vital sign measurement, blood glucose testing, and informative talks on the prevention of STIs, arterial hypertension, and type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Results

This study consists of an experience report by mentors of the discipline of Integration, Teaching, Service, and Community Practices, regarding the curricularization of extension activities at the State University of Minas Gerais (UEMG), Passos campus. The project was carried out over the course of one semester and yielded positive results, along with valuable lessons that can guide future similar initiatives. These results and lessons learned provide important insights for understanding the impact and challenges involved in this process.

In this regard, it is important to highlight the positive impact generated on the academic training of the students involved. Participation in extension projects integrated with academic mentoring can provide students with greater development of practical and social skills. In addition, the curricularization of extension encourages student engagement with important social issues, fostering greater awareness and social responsibility.

First-period students of the UEMG Medicine program carried out three extension activities over the course of the semester. The first was held at the Colégio Tiradentes military police school in Passos, Minas Gerais, and consisted of a talk for third-grade elementary students on raising awareness of and teaching hand hygiene. The activity was designed and carried out on April 13, 2024, exclusively by the students, under the guidance and supervision of the mentors. The session began with a theoretical presentation using slides as supporting material, after which students were taken to the school auditorium to take part in a hands-on hand-hygiene activity. The activity involved painting the hands of all the children with tempera paint, after which they were accompanied by the students to the restroom to perform proper handwashing, following the steps previously taught in the classroom presentation.

Descriptively, the first activity was characterized by active participation during the presentation and handwashing exercise. The children asked questions, interacted with the team, and practiced the hand-hygiene steps taught during the session. As no standardized

outcome instrument or pre/post assessment was reported, these observations should not be interpreted as evidence of measured learning gains or effectiveness.

The second extension activity was held on May 2, 2024, at the Municipal Chamber of Alpinópolis, Minas Gerais. The students gave a presentation on the importance of promoting health equity for the LGBTQIAPN+ population, aimed at informing and training the target audience, composed of the municipality's health professionals. The students prepared digital material containing myths and facts about the health of the LGBTQIAPN+ population and, based on this, clarified several highly relevant points, dispelling various stigmas associated with this population. The audience present included community health workers, nurses, nursing technicians, physical therapists, and nutritionists who work together at the municipality's health units. The activity involved the direct participation of all attendees, who responded to whether the statements presented were myths or facts and raised questions about the topics discussed.

The second activity generated discussion about health equity for the LGBTQIAPN+ population and enabled participating health professionals to raise questions and engage with the myths-and-facts exercise. The booklet provided an additional educational resource. However, without a standardized pre/post measure or follow-up assessment, the activity supports a descriptive account of engagement rather than a quantified effect on knowledge, attitudes, or quality of care.

To conclude the semester, the last extension activity was held on June 29, 2024, at the São Francisco Family Health Strategy (ESF) unit. In this activity, students prepared educational materials on hypertension, diabetes, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), in addition to assisting third-period classmates who were also present in measuring blood pressure, capillary glucose, and administering rapid tests. Patients from the ESF unit and community members, who were recruited by the students from the neighborhood streets, attended the activity. Health unit professionals guided the execution of all activities to preserve student autonomy, which was highly valuable for their learning.

During the final activity, students had opportunities to practice communication, clinical procedures, and community interaction under professional supervision. These experiences are educationally relevant, but the absence of standardized outcome measures and longitudinal follow-up limits conclusions about the magnitude or persistence of changes in competence, confidence, or community health outcomes.

Discussion

According to Public Notice 01/2024 of the Academic Mentoring Teaching Program (PEMA/UEMG), the program's objectives are to offer students active and dynamic participation in teaching projects under the guidance of the professors responsible for the curricular components, and to support undergraduate students' training process. The program aims to help students facing difficulties in specific disciplines and to foster interaction between students and professors in teaching activities. It also seeks to develop innovative pedagogical practices, new teaching methodologies, and supporting materials to enhance the educational process.

The mentoring experience provides the mentor student with a more dynamic approach to the teaching-learning process, bringing additional pedagogical benefits. One of the main objectives of mentoring is to foster a critical outlook in the mentor student, allowing them to experience teaching practice firsthand and broaden

their understanding through experiences shared with the supervising professor. Mentoring thus emerges as an educational strategy that promotes a transformative and facilitating relationship within the learning process.

It is important to emphasize that mentoring does not seek to single out the student or suggest that they possess superior abilities, but rather to create an environment of free expression of ideas and communication, enhancing learning and facilitating the acquisition of knowledge. The mentor, having experienced the role of student in the same discipline, is able not only to identify possible difficulties with the content or the discipline as a whole but also to show greater sensitivity to the problems and feelings that students may face.⁹

The process of curricularizing extension aims to intensify student participation in the institution's curricular activities. Integrating extension into academic curricula means that, at some point in their academic trajectory, students must engage in extension activities related to their curricular components. It is therefore essential for universities committed to extension to engage students in this process, emphasizing the importance of extension as an integral part of course curricula rather than merely an optional or complementary activity.¹⁰

One of the main results achieved is the strengthening of the relationship between the university and society. Integrating extension into academic curricula fosters closer engagement between students and the community's real needs, contributing to more civic-minded training committed to social development.¹¹ Moreover, curricularizing extension encourages collaboration between the university and various sectors of society, fostering greater interaction based on the exchange of knowledge.¹²

In this sense, the combination of academic mentoring and extension can provide students with a more complete educational experience. Mentoring allows students to deepen their knowledge and skills in a specific discipline, while extension engages them in practical activities that address real community problems. This combination helps students apply theory to practice, develop essential skills such as communication, empathy, and problem-solving, and gain a deeper understanding of the social impact of their work.

For the university, integrating mentoring and extension can improve the quality of the projects and activities developed. Collaboration between mentors and students in extension activities brings an enriched academic perspective, while the practical experience gained through extension contributes to a more applied and effective understanding of curricular content. This synergy can result in projects of greater impact and relevance to the community. Moreover, by involving students in activities that benefit the community, the university reinforces its role as an agent of social transformation.

Thus, integrating academic mentoring and extension offers a range of benefits, from improving students' academic training to strengthening the university's social impact. This integrated approach promotes more practical and engaging learning, develops valuable professional skills, improves the quality of academic projects, and reinforces the university's role as an active agent of social change. Finally, the combination of teaching, practice, and community engagement can lead to the development of new teaching methodologies and pedagogical practices that can be adopted in other areas of the curriculum, fostering a more dynamic educational environment adapted to contemporary needs.

However, implementing this integration is not without challenges. One of the main obstacles is the need to develop institutional policies that encourage and support this practice, ensuring that all disciplines

incorporate extension in a meaningful and coherent manner. In addition, alignment between the objectives of mentoring and extension is essential so that both practices can complement one another and enhance the expected outcomes in student training.

Institutional support and stable funding are central to the continuity of community-engaged education. Service-learning initiatives are labor-intensive and may depend on protected faculty time, coordination structures, training, logistical resources, and sustained internal funding; when these elements are fragile, activities may remain episodic rather than becoming embedded in the curriculum.^{13,14} In the present experience, these dimensions should be considered when interpreting feasibility and planning future cycles, particularly because reliance on temporary scholarships, volunteer work, or short-term resources can constrain continuity.

Another challenge is the need to train mentors and professors to act effectively in both the mentoring and extension contexts. This training should include the development of new teaching methodologies and the creation of educational materials that can be used both in mentoring activities and in extension actions, fostering a more innovative learning environment adapted to student demands.

Academic workload is another relevant issue. Curricular extension adds planning, travel, preparation, reflection, and coordination demands to students and faculty, and excessive study demands without sufficient resources may contribute to exhaustion and reduced engagement.¹⁵ Repeated calls for participation can also produce engagement or citizenship fatigue when activities are perceived as additional obligations rather than meaningful, reciprocal learning. Scheduling, workload distribution, protected time, and recognition of extension activities should therefore be considered in program design. The relationship between university and community also requires explicit negotiation of expectations. Students, faculty, health services, community organizations, and participants may define priorities and desirable outcomes differently; mismatched expectations can weaken reciprocity and reduce perceived relevance.^{13,16} Cultural disconnects and structural inequities—including differences in institutional power, access to resources, social position, and representation in decision-making—may further shape participation and whose knowledge is prioritized. Community partners should therefore be involved in co-defining objectives, activities, and evaluation criteria, with attention to power balance, local relevance, and cultural humility.¹⁶

Structural limitations also affect evaluation and sustainability. This report did not originally describe a standardized outcome measure, which restricts comparison across activities and prevents robust estimation of educational or community effects. Recent work in community-engaged medical education illustrates the value of structured multisource assessment across domains such as cultural humility, communication, teamwork, social responsibility, and professionalism.¹⁷ Future cycles should incorporate standardized or explicitly developed measures, predefined indicators, response-rate reporting, and longitudinal follow-up. Sustainability also requires continuity beyond a single semester and mechanisms to preserve partnerships and activities after student turnover or graduation, rather than depending on individual cohorts or mentors.^{13,14}

The results therefore underscore the importance of integrating teaching, research, and extension for student training, aiming to promote more integrated academic education committed to society's demands. In this sense, the integration of academic mentoring and extension can be a powerful tool for improving higher education,

providing more complete training committed to social development. However, for this integration to be effective, educational institutions must make a continuous effort to develop policies that promote this synergy, ensuring that students can experience an education that is at once theoretical and practical, academic and social.

The main limitations of this experience report include its single-institution and single-semester scope, the absence of standardized outcome measures, the lack of systematically recorded participation rates, and reliance on direct descriptive observation by the mentors and supervising professor. No formal pre- and post-intervention assessment was performed. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as a description of the experience and participants' observed engagement rather than as evidence of the effectiveness or measurable impact of the activities.

Conclusion

The integration of academic mentoring with curricular university extension provided a structured opportunity for first-semester medical students to connect classroom learning with supervised community and health-service activities. The experience also highlighted that meaningful and sustainable integration depends on institutional support, adequate funding and protected time, alignment of stakeholder expectations, culturally responsive partnerships, and attention to structural inequities. Because standardized outcome measures, complete participation indicators, and longitudinal follow-up were not available in the original report, conclusions about effectiveness should remain descriptive. Future implementations should incorporate predefined outcome measures, response-rate reporting, longitudinal evaluation, and strategies that ensure continuity beyond individual student cohorts.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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