# INITIAL UNDERGRADUATE TRAINING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF THE GRADUATE

# FORMAÇÃO INICIAL UNIVERSITÁRIA EM EDUCAÇÃO FÍSICA: PERCEPÇÕES DOS EGRESSOS

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#### ABSTRACT

At the end of an undergraduate course, the graduates take feelings, experiences, beliefs and values that reflect in their professional involvement. This perception in relation to their training thus becomes an important evaluation tool of the offered higher education training. The objective of this study was to analyze the graduates' perception of the initial training of the bachelor's and licentiate degrees in Physical Education from a public university in the state of Santa Catarina, considering the positive and negative aspects of the undergraduate degree along with suggestions to improve the course. The study included 94 graduates, 47 with a bachelor's degree and 47 with a licentiate degree. For data collection, an online questionnaire was applied and analyzed through the content analysis technique. The most positive and negative points of the initial training included: professors; opportunities and experiences; supervised curricular internships; laboratories and scientific initiation; curriculum; infrastructure, location and time; activities and extension scholarships; friends and classes; personal issues. The graduates provided important suggestions to improve the initial training process, especially with regard to the course curriculum, infrastructure, class schedule and professors' pedagogical intervention.

Keywords: Universities. Higher Education. Students. Physical Education.

#### RESUMO

Ao concluir o curso de graduação, o egresso leva consigo uma bagagem de sentimentos, experiências, crenças e valores que refletem em sua intervenção profissional. A percepção desse em relação à sua formação se torna, assim, um importante instrumento de avaliação da formação ofertada no Ensino Superior. Este estudo objetivou analisar a percepção da formação inicial de egressos dos cursos de Bacharelado e Licenciatura em Educação Física, de uma universidade pública do estado de Santa Catarina, considerando os aspectos positivos e negativos do curso de graduação e as sugestões para melhorias deste. Participaram do estudo 94 egressos, 47 do curso de Bacharelado e 47 do curso de Licenciatura. Na coleta de dados, utilizou-se um questionário *on*-line, analisado por meio da técnica de análise de conteúdo. Os principais pontos positivos e negativos da formação inicial corresponderam a: professores; oportunidades e experiências; Estágios Curriculares Supervisionados; laboratórios e iniciação científica; currículo; infraestrutura, localização e horário; atividades e bolsas de extensão; amigos e turma; e questões pessoais. Os egressos forneceram importantes sugestões para a melhoria do processo de formação inicial, sobretudo, no que tange ao currículo, à infraestrutura do curso, ao horário das aulas e à intervenção pedagógica dos professores. **Palavras-chave**: Universidades. Educação Superior. Estudantes. Educação Física.

# Introduction

Initial training is a period of acquiring competencies and skills that are essential for all professions, at which time the student seeks the necessary qualification for their professional involvement performance. University courses comprise the time in which the specific skills of a profession are acquired, from the acquisition of knowledge and the diversified experiences in the disciplines as well as the extra disciplinary activities offered to students<sup>1</sup>.

In the Brazilian Physical Education scenario, the initial training is demarcated by the training of licensed professionals and / or bachelors, presenting resolutions as the regulatory frameworks  $01/2002^2$  (licentiate) and  $07/2004^3$  (bachelor's). Resolutions 01/2015 and 06 / 20184,5 are currently being implemented, which guide the licentiate and bachelor's courses, respectively, tending to a highly qualified training for the insertion of the graduate in the job

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market. It should be noted that the Physical Education Licentiate Degree course enables teachers to work in primary (elementary school) and secondary (middle and high school) education, while the Physical Education Bachelor's Degree course enables other spaces for Physical Education professionals to be involved outside the school environment.

Situations experienced throughout a career should be fostered in undergraduate courses. Thus, curricular proposals must consider training elements that expand their reach beyond the technical aspects of the profession, considering an individual who can meet social demands and act competently in the job market<sup>6</sup>. With regard to the adaptation of the curriculum to social demands, Salles, Farias and Nascimento<sup>7</sup> indicate the information graduates obtain from Physical Education courses as important allies in this process, making it possible to identify the curriculum's challenges and difficulties and to foster proposals that minimize the detected weaknesses.

The graduates' view of their training course constitutes a significant evaluation mechanism, composing the data as a legacy for the training of those entering or intending to enter higher education courses. Investigations centered on the analysis of Physical Education graduates have pointed out the relationship between the training proposal and the insertion of the graduate in the labor market<sup>8</sup>, along with the perspectives of initial and continuing education<sup>7-9</sup>, as essential elements for the positive evaluation of courses in this knowledge area. When students conclude their undergraduate course, they take feelings, experiences, beliefs and values that are reflected in the professional involvement context, generating the need for training evaluation, with regard to the acquired skills, the pedagogical knowledge of the content as well as the factors that deliberated the constitution of their identities as professionals in the area of Physical Education.

Investigations with graduates from other knowledge areas mark, as the main evaluative elements of initial training, the outcome of the course in terms of multi-employment<sup>10</sup>, satisfaction with the undergraduate course<sup>10-12</sup>, the insertion process in the labor market<sup>10</sup>, graduates abandoning the profession or the need to change their trajectory to stay in the training area<sup>13</sup>. Since graduates are those who experience the conflict between what was taught and its application in the job market, it becomes relevant to consider their perceptions with regard to the contributions of initial training in this transition between graduation and carrying out the profession. In this sense, the study aims to analyze the perception of the initial training of graduates from the bachelor's and licentiate courses in Physical Education, from a public university in the state of Santa Catarina, considering the positive and negative aspects of the undergraduate course and suggestions for its improvements.

# Methods

## *Participants*

Graduates from the Physical Education undergraduate courses at a public university in the state of Santa Catarina (Brazil) participated in this research. The criteria for inclusion of graduates in the study corresponded to those who hold a bachelor's or licentiate degree in Physical Education at the investigated institution, with admission from 2008/2 and completion from 2012/1.

Of the 180 graduates (86 bachelors and 94 licentiates) from the investigated university, 138 were contacted by telephone and agreed to receive more information about the research via email. Of the 138 graduates who received the invitation email, 94 agreed to participate in the study and answered the data collection instrument. Thus, the sample consisted of 94 graduates, 47 with a bachelor's degree and 47 with a licentiate degree, 52 women and 42 men, with an average age of 25 years ( $\pm$  9.52 years).

## Data collection procedures

The empirical, cross-sectional, and descriptive investigation<sup>14</sup> is part of a larger research project, entitled "Contributions of initial university education in Physical Education to the professional performance of graduates from the University of the State of Santa Catarina", approved by the Research Ethics Committee with Human Beings of the University of the State of Santa Catarina, under the opinion 2.008.761 / 2017.

The data collection was carried out from July 2018 to April 2019. An online questionnaire, adapted from Salles, Farias and Nascimento<sup>7</sup> and Salles et al.<sup>15</sup>, composed of 32 questions, organized in four main sections, was applied as an instrument. Section 1 investigated the socio-demographic and professional data, the main barriers, and the facilitators of the labor market insertion process. Section 2 found the process of adherence to the initial training course in Physical Education, while section 3 identified the evaluation of graduates regarding the initial training course in Physical Education. Section 4 consulted the perspectives of continuing education in Physical Education. In the present study, the three open-ended questions in section 3 were analyzed: What was the most positive point of your course? What was the most negative point of your course? What are your suggestions for improvements in the Physical Education course at this institution?

In the process of collecting the information, the graduates were initially contacted by phone, and follow-up emails were sent later with the presentation of the study and a participation guide for those who showed interest in contributing to the investigation. The research objectives and procedures were explained by phone and sent by e-mail, together with the digitized Informed Consent Form (ICF), in a format compatible with the Microsoft Word® program. Such procedures were conducted by two researchers, both with no ties to the research participants.

After reading the ICF, the graduates had the possibility to accept or decline involvement in the research. For the professionals who agreed to participate in the investigation, the data collection instrument was sent via the Google Docs platform, and the responses were automatically sent to the research email and an Excel software spreadsheet. After the telephone contact, up to four attempts were made to collect data by e-mail with each graduate, and for each attempt, there was a waiting period of 15 days before the next contact, totaling, at most, 60 days of collection attempts with each graduate. Emails not answered within 60 days were considered to be uninterested in participating in the study.

## Data Analysis

The graduates' answers were organized in the Microsoft Excel® and Microsoft Word® programs, and subsequently subjected to the content analysis technique, proposed by Bardin<sup>16</sup>, which is characterized by the realization of three stages: pre-analysis (initial systematization of information); exploration (identification of registration units and context units); and data treatment / interpretation (definition of the analysis categories along with their critical reflection).

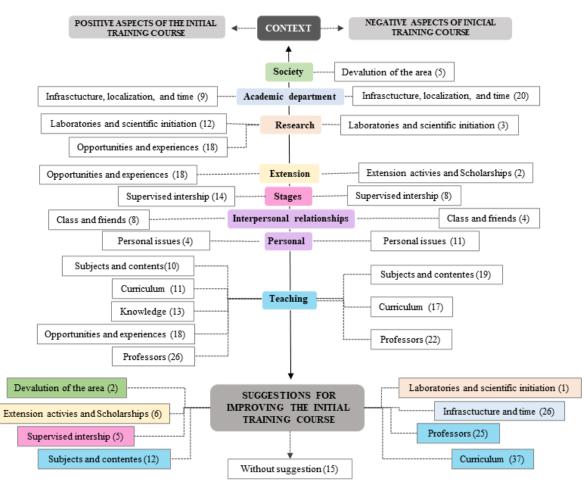
During the pre-analysis, the answers were organized in the Microsoft Excel® program, where the graduates were numbered so that their identities were preserved. Then, with the help of the Microsoft Word® program, the excerpts with approaching content were systematized and organized in tables to facilitate their visualization and analysis, taking care not to remove them from the context in which they were mentioned. In the content exploration phase, a more refined process of grouping the terms, phrases or words that started was repeated, defining the units of record and context. Finally, when considering the problem that this research set out to address, the analysis categories were established, which grouped the responses by content affinity (record and context). After defining the registration units related to the context units, the sum of the times that each unit was mentioned in the responses of the graduates participating

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in the study was calculated.

# Results

For the three questions selected for this study, the information obtained in the answers of the graduates allowed the establishment of record and context units, around the central themes of the research: 'positive aspects of the initial training course'; 'negative aspects of the initial training course'; and 'suggestions for improving the initial training course' (Figure 1). Most of the registration units envisioned in the investigation were interrelated with the same context units and the three topics covered.



**Figure 1.** Perception of initial training in Physical Education **Source:** The authors

The context of society was negatively marked by the perception of a devaluation of the area (07 mentions) during the undergraduate course (poor remuneration, devaluation in the labor market and in the health area). The graduates presented suggestions aimed at a closer look at the professionals in the area and the unification of the courses (qualifications).

In the context of the academic department, the records regarding infrastructure, location and time (55 mentions) were evaluated more negatively than positively by the graduates. The positive aspects were related to the physical and material infrastructure and the easy access to the location where the courses take place, while the negative aspects corresponded to the limitation of the physical space, course changes, class schedule, lack of support for academics

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in some sectors and the fact that the academic department does not have its own secure parking lot. The primary suggestions made by the graduates were to improve the infrastructure made available for undergraduate courses, both regarding spaces for theoretical and practical classes and other environments, in addition to the course changes and class schedule.

The curriculum (54 mentions) highlighted the teaching context. The students favorably emphasized the initial training course curriculum of the investigated public university. Some considered the distribution of the workload and the location of some subjects in the curriculum matrix to be flawed and cited the division of the curricula into bachelor's and licentiate degrees as a negative factor in their initial training. A higher workload was suggested for subjects in certain knowledge areas, inclusion of some subjects, an updated curriculum as well as presentation of greater interdisciplinarity between subjects. As for the separation of qualifications, the unification of the two courses was suggested.

In the context of teaching, the subjects and the content (41 mentions) were linked to the curriculum analysis. The graduates considered that the disciplines offered by the initial training courses presented a variety of content and balance between theory and practice. On the other hand, they indicated that some disciplines did not meet the expectations at the professional training level. Moreover, they felt there was an absence of interdisciplinarity between the content passed on by teachers from different disciplines with no link to the current and professional reality of the area, thus, not providing the expected learning nor job market preparation. As main suggestions, the graduates pointed out the need to deepen the disciplines' content, to bring theory and practice closer together, to have more theoretical or more practical classes, to expand integrative, extra-curricular activities, field studies and differentiated teaching strategies in practical classes between the licentiate and bachelor's classes.

In the context of teaching, knowledge (13 mentions) and professors (73 mentions) stood out as well. In terms of knowledge, the graduates emphasized the perception of acquired knowledge and the learning and training made possible in the initial training. The faculty was positively assessed for the guidance and encouragement they offered students, as well as their qualifications and professional commitment. Some professors were negatively (22 mentions) evaluated for being unprepared, disinterested, unmotivated or lacking commitment to teach their classes. Regarding the specificity of the licentiate degree course, it was considered that some professors maintained content and teaching strategies primarily focused on the context of the bachelor's course or did not possess the experience of working in the school environment to share with future teachers in the area. The graduates suggested that the university overcome these negative points by hiring new professors; prioritizing trained professors with scientific and professional experience; creating tools for continual professor evaluations. For professors, they suggested that: they be more interested in teaching their subjects; offer diversified teaching strategies; motivate students; present a more humanized service.

The opportunities and experiences (18 mentions) made available by the course were highlighted only as positive aspects and related to the contexts of teaching, research, and extension. Among them, monitoring, practical classes, varied activities carried out in different intervention spaces offered in the disciplines, contact with the community through extension, contact with research, sports, extra-curricular activities were mentioned. Furthermore, the exchanges were positively evaluated by the graduates, as they reflected on professional opportunities and the feeling of success in their professional career when they entered the job market.

In the specific research context, some graduates emphasized, in terms of laboratories and scientific initiation (22 mentions), the importance of insertion in these spaces and the knowledge acquired by experiencing them throughout the initial training in Physical Education. Whereas, other graduates felt a lack of research opportunities during their undergraduate studies as well as an absence of research aimed at the licentiate course. The professionals trained at the

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investigated public university recommended that the laboratories be more accessible to undergraduate students, in order to expand their lines of research. This way, there would be an increase in the number of scientific initiation scholarships and the research would demonstrate their importance for the investigated places, so that they would be seen only as a space for data collection.

In the specific extension context, the extension activities, and scholarships (15 mentions) stood out as being positive, considering the diversity of activities offered to the community and the opportunities to receive scholarships through programs and projects. Negatively, only the absence of projects to be developed with students in the school context and the possibility of participating in an extension project during the course, in a personal reality, were indicated. When looking at their initial training period, the Physical Education professionals suggested the inclusion of extension activities from the beginning of the course, as well as the expansion of activities and the number of scholarships offered.

The supervised curricular internships (27 mentions) also presented relevant perceptions regarding the positive and negative aspects of the initial training in Physical Education. Positively, the following aspects were pointed out: the importance of the variety of internships in the field; the teachers' orientation of the course in the locus of professional activity; the positive experiences obtained. Negatively, the graduates argued that the internships consumed too much time of the learning process throughout the course and that this time did not add to the initial training as expected. The absence of transport assistance for the internship development by the academic department was pointed out. To overcome the negative points mentioned, the graduates suggested revising the organization of the internships, with the possibility of paid internships, the creation of specific internship fields (application schools) for the licentiates and greater incentives for participation in non-mandatory internships.

Other positive and negative perceptions, with less analytical depth, were indicated by students of the licentiate and bachelor's in Physical Education courses, involving such aspects as class and friends - 12 mentions (interpersonal relationships: positive - friendships built, committed and mature class; negative: lack of class unity, participation and interest of colleagues) and personal issues - 15 mentions (personal context: positive - learning to deal with one's own body, developing critical thinking, awareness of personal interests; negative - personal schedule incompatible with the development of the course, fear, necessity to work to earn an income thus forfeiting some experiences that the course provided, demotivation, not participating in a student exchange program, not taking advantage of what the course provided).

## Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the graduates' perception of the initial training of the bachelor's and licentiate courses in Physical Education at a public university in the state of Santa Catarina, considering the positive and negative aspects of the undergraduate course and suggestions for its improvement. The graduates' perception in relation to the devaluation of the profession leads to the reflection that issues regarding professionalism should be incorporated into disciplines, projects (teaching, research and extension) and actions that impart knowledge about the profession, so that students are able to examine the real context of the profession when completing their undergraduate course<sup>17</sup>.

The attractiveness of the teacher's career is considered one of the intrinsic factors for entering a profession, while the factors related to the rejection of the profession are linked to financial issues, social valorization and workload<sup>18</sup>, as mentioned by the investigated graduates, especially those associated with the licentiate course. The valorization and the working conditions of the teacher permeate political actions as well as the society's working class. Consequently, it is recognized that contact with these aspects of the profession must go beyond

the pedagogical actions, considering the management, career construction, political factors and their constitutionality, which are relevant elements to be discussed in initial training courses<sup>19</sup>.

Some problems related to the infrastructure in different undergraduate courses, from a university in southern Brazil, pointed out situations already observed in the university scenario, such as the university restaurant, classrooms, library, technology, reprography services, subcontracted services and a welcoming environment<sup>20</sup>. Of these factors, the university restaurant was the one that obtained the highest level of satisfaction, the rest mostly presented dissatisfaction rates<sup>20</sup>, as seen in this study with graduates of Physical Education courses.

The infrastructure and the teaching / learning spaces were also characteristics that presented lower levels of satisfaction in the investigation of Surdez-Perez, Sandoval-Caraveo and Lamoyi-Bocanegra<sup>21</sup>, with students from Engineering, Architecture and Administrative Economic Sciences, from a Mexican university. However, at the investigated university, welcoming the student is one of the points considered negative by the graduates, a fact that requires attention from the management team for the satisfaction of the graduate. It should be noted that, in addition to the role to be exercised by university management, professor representation actions for peer orientations must be institutionalized.

As mentioned by the respondents, the suggestions for enhancing the infrastructure involve issues beyond the administrative organization of the department of the investigated course, as such demands depend on the deliberation of the Teaching Center Council. Nevertheless, the studies that portrayed these aspects<sup>20-23</sup> also revealed the lack of infrastructure to enrich the quality of university life.

In addition to the infrastructure, pedagogical issues related to teaching were dimensioned, showing dilemmas that are widely discussed in the literature, but cause discomfort in the academic community. The graduates reported the curriculum as a positive point but understood that the allocation of the disciplines constitutes a complicating factor in the learning process. Therefore, looking at the course changes that attend different sectors, the way in which professors are hired and the physical space are dynamics that interfere with the students' manifestation of these concerns.

The relationship between theory and practice is particularly deliberated in the training of professionals from different knowledge areas, promoting a greater reach of undergraduate courses for the students' immersion in the labor market, that is, the establishment of effective bonds of professional practice with the intervention in the professional space. The guidelines for undergraduate courses in Physical Education, both for the bachelor's and licentiate degrees, in general, <sup>3,5</sup> and for the licentiate degrees, in specifically<sup>2,4</sup> established Practices as a Curricular Component (PCC), are fundamental for the articulation of initial training with the reality of professional involvement. This promotes a correlation between the labor market and professional training, expanding the relationship between theory and practice. The connections in the courses, through the development of pedagogical practices between the university, schools<sup>24</sup> and other intervention contexts, can be mediated. This guarantees a balance in the relationship between theory and practice, increasing the courses' attractiveness and minimizing the detected weaknesses in the initial training.

In addition to the PCC, undergraduate courses could provide instruction focused on the the subject knowledge, that is, the knowledge that generates effective learning for professional involvement. Studies concentrated on the theme of pedagogical content knowledge, in Physical Education<sup>24-27</sup> highlight the relevance of knowledge about the context in student life, for the transposition of acquired knowledge to the professional reality, recognizing the particularities of the profession. However, as addressed, professors treat professional learning in the microcontext (classroom), mesocontext (school) and macrocontext (community), in order to stimulate reflection, criticality and planning of the pedagogical practices of future teachers<sup>27</sup>. When referring to the expansion of integrative, extra-curricular and field study activities, it is

understood that the mobilization of teachers becomes fundamental in the proposal of the development of their pedagogical practice, from the PCCs within the disciplines, which would minimize these grievances pointed out by the students.

The labor market, which is constantly transforming, requires professionals with their own content knowledge. Thus, the university must propose measures that reduce the impact of entering the job market and expand the qualities and skills of the future professional. At the investigated university, there are resources and support (financial and pedagogical) from the prorectors and directors of each department, which provide enriched experiences in the training of students, as well as educational policies that are consistent with the initiative of a quality university in constant development and expansion.

The knowledge sources of students through different learning experiences in initial training, such as monitoring, enhance the students' curriculum and measure the quality of initial training<sup>28,29</sup>, a fact that can be articulated with extension and research<sup>30</sup>. The opportunities that the university offers to the courses, and consequently, to the students mobilize training experiences, constituting the professional framework.

As a basis for initial training, the higher education institution is strengthened by consolidating the pillars of the university (teaching, research, extension), which must be developed with equity. However, it is observed that research in the university laboratories is generally demarcated by those who are inserted in postgraduate programs. In the study by Costa and Miranda<sup>31</sup>, when highlighting the opinion of nursing students about the knowledge acquisition through research for professional practice, the satisfaction index was also unexpected, meeting the data of this study. Undergraduate research must be a foundation for graduates to implement the knowledge of their developing involvement, generating new concepts and products.

Experiences have been rethought, in the Brazilian initial training context, with the insertion of extension actions in the curricular disciplines, which should make up 10% of the workload of the initial training courses, providing knowledge, insertion into the community and within the disciplines, and professional knowledge articulation<sup>6</sup>. Graduates of Physical Education undergraduate courses can expand the range of actions programmed for involvement, given that the experience in university extension will not be linked only to projects and extension programs, increasing the possibility of experiences with the community itself and the development of disciplines.

Regarding the evaluation of supervised curricular internships, it is highlighted that those in the Physical Education licentiate course of the investigated university are developed in five subjects that allow the contact of future teachers with Early Childhood Education, the early years of teaching Elementary School, Middle School, High School and Special Education. Similarly, in the bachelor's degree, internships are developed in the contexts of Sports Management, Recreation and Leisure, Exercise and Health, Adapted Physical Activity and Sports. This variety of spaces for professional involvement seems to be relevant for the initial training in Physical Education, demonstrating the course management concern with enabling the student to learn different areas of performance.

Although there is an effort by directors to propose highly qualified training, situations, such as remuneration for internships or financial aid from the university for the development of the internship, still cause discomfort in students. The literature has shown what was indicated by the graduates, with regard to the internships, which allow the teaching of Physical Education content in the school context<sup>32</sup>, through the verification of professional skills, as a competence to be acquired at the time of initial training, strategies of the internship disciplines<sup>33</sup>, the construction of the teaching identity<sup>34</sup> and learning with the actors involved in this scenario<sup>35</sup>. In addition, studies on internships linked to the licentiate course allow an understanding of the actions that are highlighted in this training period. However, this statement is not associated

with investigations in bachelor's courses, as there are few studies that report the positive and negative aspects of internships in these courses.

The information obtained provides reflection on the importance of carrying out investigations on the initial training process that took place in Brazilian universities, from the perspective of graduates from different knowledge areas, especially Physical Education. It is believed that the presented information postulates a diagnosis of the provided training, which can contribute to higher education institutions, both in the evaluation and the reorganization of the courses offered. Thus, they will be able to contribute to the improvement of the current conditions of the courses and the training of professionals inserted in the labor market<sup>36</sup>. In addition, it is expected to conduct an evaluation based on monitoring professionals, in relation to the adequacy of the content and curricular structure for the professional involvement aspects and training proposal for the professional reality, as it is fundamental for the qualification of these courses<sup>15</sup>.

Despite the limitations experienced in the research development, such as the noninclusion of all graduates who met the eligibility criteria in the research via telephone and email contacts, the obtained information made important contributions to understanding the training process in Physical Education. From the suggestions provided by the graduates of the Physical Education undergraduate courses at a public university of Santa Catarina, important practical applications can be scored, both for the investigated university and other universities interested in their own graduates' perspectives for the expansion, improvement or revision of the courses offered in the area of Physical Education: special attention to professionals in the area; improvement of the physical infrastructure and increased number of scholarships for teaching development, research and extension activities; class schedules compatible with professional establishments' hours of operation; review of the disciplines' organization in terms of interdisciplinarity, content offered, workload and link to professional reality; development of periodic professor evaluations; diversified teaching strategies offered; creation of internship spaces closer to the university.

The information obtained, regarding the positive and negative aspects of initial training in Physical Education, stimulates suggestions for expanding the investigation, seeking the development of longitudinal studies that accompany the evaluation of undergraduate students in the initial, intermediate and final phases of the course and after entering the job market, noting the changes that occurred in the evaluation of initial training throughout the course and after insertion in professional practice.

## Conclusions

The main points, both positive and negative of the initial training, were associated with: the course professors; opportunities and experiences made available throughout the training; supervised curricular internships; laboratories and scientific initiation; course curriculum; infrastructure, location and schedule; class and friends; university extension activities and scholarships; personal issues. In particular, the perception of the negative points of the undergraduate course led the graduates to provide suggestions to improve the initial training process, especially related to the course curriculum, infrastructure, class schedule and professors.

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