



PRINTeL – Promoting Innovative Teaching and Learning — Rectorate of U. Porto – 14 June 2018

“Raising awareness, developing strategies, seeking the student’s success: the case of the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro”





Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

Short history and institutional context:

The beginnings of the history of the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro (UTAD) were on **6 June 1973**, when a group of people committed to extending higher education to the inland met in Porto.

From its very inception, the IPVR has played an important role as a driving force for regional development. On **March 22, 1986**, it became University of Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro (UTAD).

One of the highlights of the last few years was the signature, on 9 January 2015, at Palácio de Mateus, of the **Consortium Agreement of Northern Universities (UNorte.pt)**, involving UTAD and the Universities Minho and Porto..

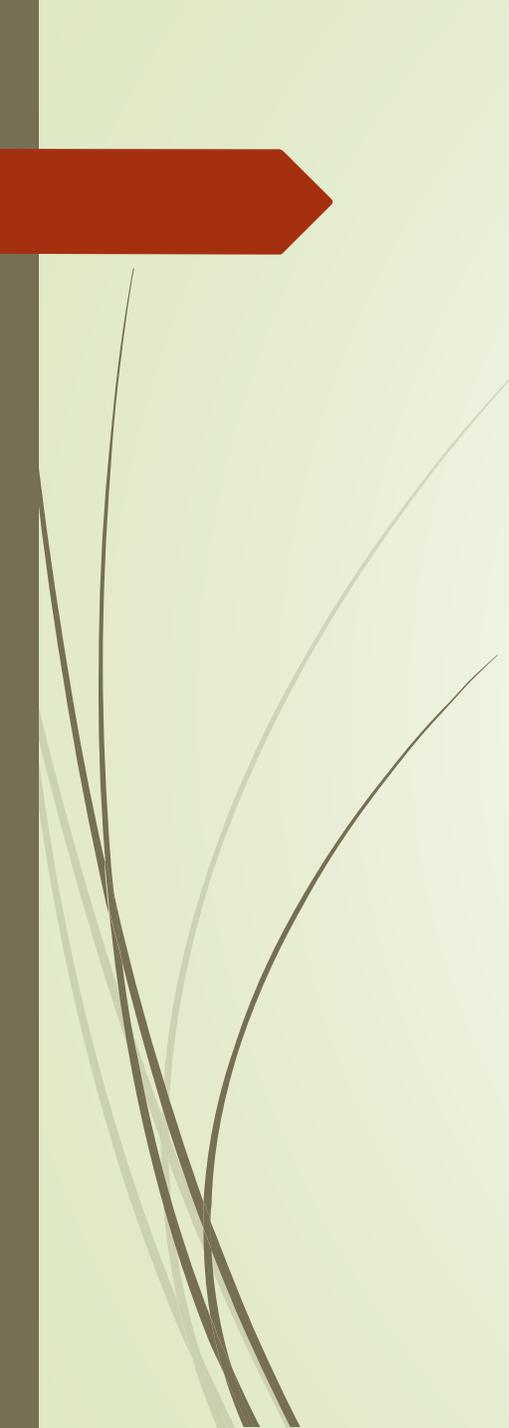
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- ▶ Although UTAD is still one of the youngest universities in the country, it has already won national and international recognition for being an academic centre of innovation and quality, with a strategic vision for the future that also contemplates the development of the region of which it is a part. **Concern about regional development** has particularly focused on the transfer of knowledge that has an effect on the competitiveness and attractiveness of the area,
 - ▶ In its strategic plan its ambition was clearly to renew itself, **reaffirming its role as a reference institution and agent of territorial cohesion**, but also emerging as an Eco-University, i.e. a university as an ecosystem of integrated units operating on an eco-campus with exemplary environmental management.
 - ▶ UTAD is located in one of the largest botanical gardens in Europe, where species from all corners of the world can be seen.



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- ▶ UTAD's educational project is based on the quality of education and the quality of life of its students, by **promoting the development of attitudes and competences** that help bring about technological and social change, innovation, creative and entrepreneurial abilities, and the emergence of thoughtful and responsible independence, guided by high ethical values.
 - ▶ UTAD comprises five organisational Teaching and Research units — **School of Agrarian and Veterinary Sciences, Human and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, and Life and Environmental Sciences, and the Polytechnic School of Nursing.**

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- ▶ **“Raising awareness, developing strategies, seeking the student’s success: the case of the University of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro”** — the title of this presentation means
 - ▶ to highlight what in the last 3, 4 years are to be seen as the actions taken by the university in order to deliver better teaching, mainly involving the academic staff to improve their capabilities in the teaching area, and the creation of a specialized support structure for internal quality assurance. In some of these areas, we have benefited from the experience of the Universities of Minho and Porto since the U Norte Consortium, signed in 2015
 - ▶ The strategic profile of the university maintains, namely, **that students must be at the University’s epicentre**, which means refocus the academic community towards teaching with a vocation for the development of attitudes and skills to promote technological and social change, continuous learning, innovation, creative capacity and entrepreneurship, the establishment of reflective and responsible autonomy, informed by high ethical values.

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- ▶ **Focusing on the student** requires organizational changes, changes in the methods and practices that involve them more in collaborative work and equip them with multidisciplinary skills promoting a culture of responsibility, civility and citizenship.
 - ▶ The main focus is on adjusting educational provision, upgrading infrastructures, increasing the number of students and trainees, reinforcing social action policies and mechanisms, investing in quality services and establishing a new dimension of the University by enhancing the practices and conditions of health and well-being, accessibility, as well as innovative formats of intellectual and artistic improvement, so that culture emerges as an element of cohesion between the academic community and the region.

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- ▶ Although UTAD aims to refocus the academic community towards teaching with a vocation for the development of attitudes and skills to promote technological and social change, continuous learning, innovation, creative capacity and entrepreneurship, UTAD **contemporary pedagogical environment can be described as follows:**
 - ▶ “Effective teaching begins with faculty members, who maintain significant autonomy over their practices. Most care deeply about teaching, in addition to their strong interest in research. However, they rarely obtain informative feedback about their students' learning and often are unfamiliar with improved teaching practices. Moreover, they lack the resources and support to devote a significant proportion of their time to change their current practices.” *Nature*, <https://www.nature.com/news/university-learning-improve-undergraduate-science-education-1.17954>



Also, contemporary education research indicates that several ‘twenty-first-century skills’, which include creativity, persistence and motivation, can and should be taught and fostered through well-designed courses. Focusing on these skills enhances students’ abilities to master and retain knowledge, and many hope that it will help to restrain the alarming rate at which students abandon higher education. *Nature, Building the 21st Century Scientist*
<https://www.nature.com/news/stem-1.17959>

Thus, and seeking students’ success, UTAD provides —

Permanent Observatory of School Dropout and Promotion of Academic Success

Tutorial programs

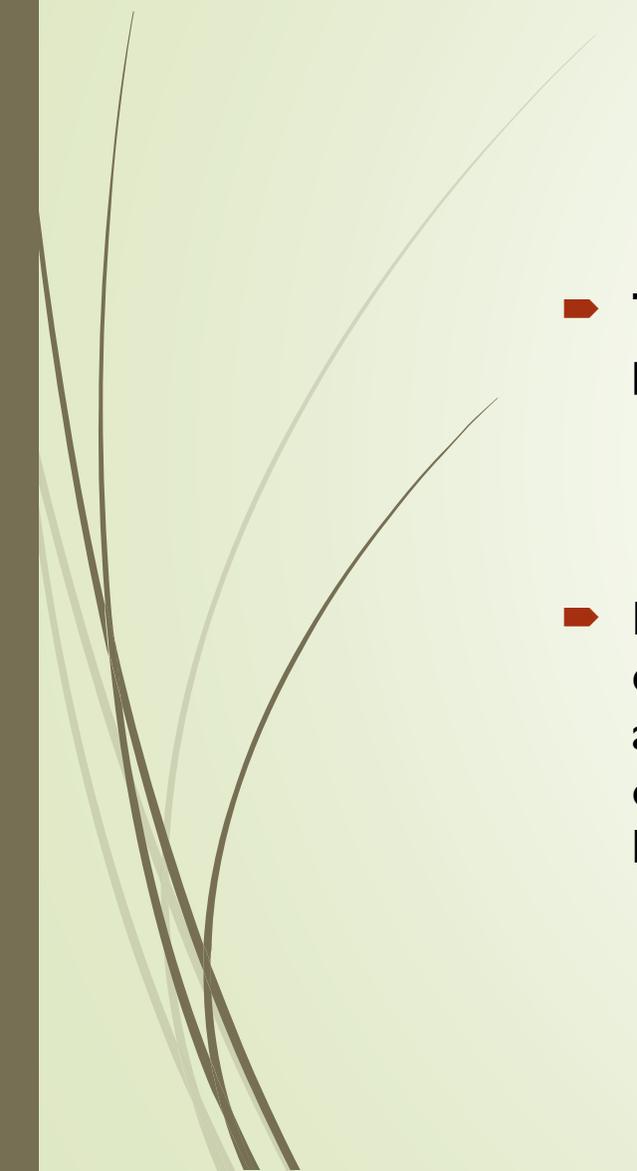
Soft Skills programs

The Student Provider

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- ▶ In 2015, UTAD created the **Permanent Observatory of School Dropout and Promotion of Academic Success**, whose aim is to be aware of and follow the students' academic career and investigate students leaving UTAD without completing their study cycle.
 - ▶ In addition to this monitoring work, it is the Observatory's responsibility to discover the motivations of the students who decide to dropout of the institution and also the higher education system. The aim is to build up knowledge, through the production of annual reports on the phenomenon of dropout from UTAD, that will enable specific support measures, both within the institutional environment, and amongst the political bodies, to foster academic success.

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- ▶ In order to improve academic success, UTAD has created a **Tutoring Program** (PT-UTAD), implemented in the academic year 2015/2016. The aim of PT-UTAD is to promote the integration and academic success of its students. Its objective is also **to support** the transition between secondary and university education, to monitor students during their studies at UTAD, especially in the first and second years of the first cycle **to identify** potential academic failure at an early stage, **to guide** the academic potential of students, **to contribute** to the improvement of the quality of teaching at UTAD. In the academic year 2015/2016, 8 courses joined the programme and 301 first year students were covered. About 44 tutors and 65 mentors were involved.
 - ▶ This year, and for the first time, the tutoring program will embrace all the existing courses at UTAD.

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- Based on the capacity and potential of the individual, UTAD supports the development of personal skills. During their studies at UTAD students should not only be trained academically, but at the same time develop their ethical and social competences. This demands focus on individual attitudes and societal skills as well as the academic qualifications.
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 - UTAD **Soft-Skills** program provides students with opportunities to acquire skills complementing their education throughout their course. Through this initiative, and in addition to academic education, UTAD provides tools for greater and more balanced personal and professional development, according to the demands of the labour market.

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- ▶ **The Student Provider** - an independent body of UTAD whose role is to defend and promote the rights and interests of the students within the University.
 - ▶ In addition, Utad works closely with industry and public sector to contribute with real life challenges for our students. And as an international institution we also promote students as well as staff to go abroad. Utad is also trying to increase the focus **on online courses** or course components, thus opening up for new groups of students and new ways of learning.



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- Thus, **bridges** are not only real (the dialogue between our universities has in fact been easier since several roads and bridges were built) but also academically important. Based on shared experiences, our aim is to create a center devoted to the development of Teaching and Learning, but, right now, our goal is to serve as a vehicle so that teachers can meet and exchange ideas with other more experienced teachers (some colleagues are from Oporto and Minho Universities, other are from UTAD).

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- ▶ In 2018 took place the **second edition of Pedagogical Training Sessions** dedicated to enhancing and sharing teaching and learning skills in order to better engage and motivate our students. Over the last two years, more than 200 teachers have attended those sessions..
 - ▶ This is one of the main collaborative actions between the UNorte Consortium.
 - ▶ Sharing pedagogical experiences with other universities have also contributed to establishing a new vision that, right now, and among other aspects, aims to raise awareness about the relevance of teaching — the focus not so much on **what** topics to teach but on **what outcomes** students have achieved; one cannot forget that, and according to George Steiner,
 - ▶ *“the calling of the teacher [is] to awaken in another human being powers, dreams beyond one’s own; to induce in others a love for that which one loves; to make of one’s inward present their future; that is a threefold adventure like no other.” Lessons of the Masters*

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- ▶ So our aim is to continue the process of raising awareness because we recognize that our mission is to promote a widespread academic and civic context in which both teachers and students feel mutual responsibility. Therefore, in the past years Utad has been creating strategies seeking the student's academic and personal success. Some of the **educational strategies have been achieved by sharing experiences and promoting bridges** as the title of this session implies.
 - ▶ Generally, UTAD aims to transform its campus into a richer, more entrepreneurial and vibrant space, as **a centre of culture and well-being**, with a new dynamic linking aesthetic, artistic, sporting, landscape and environmental dimensions. It aims to promote the creativity of the whole university and critical thinking among staff and students.

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- ▶ Just as we need students to be actively engaged in their studies, and teachers actively seeking ways of motivating the students to engage in learning in the classroom as well as outside, we also need, as institution, partners who actively share experiences and help us building educational bridges.
 - ▶ Just as we promote the skills of interaction and collaboration for our students, we should also embrace them in our dialogue with other institutions. **The Unorte Consortium** is a Project that intends to connect universities, people and visions as a way of facing the complexities of present-day educational challenges. A Project, we hope, will continue. Our next stop will be at Faculty of Psychology at the University of Porto to reflect on mentoring, in June, and then at U Minho, to participate in CNaPPES (National Congress for Pedagogical Practices in Higher Education), in July.

