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PERCEPTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY REGARDING ADMISSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH MEDALS IN SCIENTIFIC OLYMPIADS

Percepção da comunidade universitária sobre o ingresso no Ensino superior por meio
de medalhas em olimpíadas científicas

Percepción de la comunidad universitaria acerca de la admisión a la educación
superior mediante medallas de olimpiadas científicas

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Abstract: This study focuses on the Scientific Olympiad admission program at the University of Campinas (Unicamp), Brazil, which offers access to higher education through awards obtained in academic competitions. The article explores the perceptions of incoming students, professors, and program coordinators regarding this admission pathway. To this end, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews, analyzed through the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD) method. The findings indicate a favorable evaluation of both the program and its participants, suggesting promising prospects in this direction. The originality of this study lies in the contemporaneity of the investigated facts, which is what makes the results relevant for planning institutional actions.

Keywords: affirmative action; diversity; giftedness.

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Resumo: O objeto deste estudo é o programa Vagas Olímpicas da Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Brasil, que consiste no acesso ao ensino superior por premiações em competições de conhecimento. Este artigo explora as percepções dos ingressantes, professores e coordenadores sobre esse programa. Para tanto, foi delineada uma pesquisa qualitativa exploratória com entrevistas semiestruturadas, as quais foram analisadas pelo Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo. Os resultados apontam para uma avaliação favorável às Vagas Olímpicas e a seus ingressantes, o que perspectivas promissoras nessa direção. A originalidade deste estudo está na atualidade dos fatos investigados, o que torna os resultados relevantes para o planejamento de ações institucionais.

Palavras-chave: ação afirmativa; diversidade; superdotação.

Resumen: El objeto de este estudio es el programa Vacantes Olímpicas de la Universidad Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), Brasil, que facilita el acceso a la educación superior mediante premios en concursos de conocimientos. Este artículo explora las percepciones de participantes, profesores y coordinadores sobre el programa. Para ello, se llevó a cabo un estudio cualitativo exploratorio con entrevistas semiestruturadas, analizadas por el Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo. Los principales resultados fueron unánimemente favorables a las Vacantes Olímpicas y a sus entrantes, lo que implica perspectivas prometedoras en esa dirección. La originalidad de este estudio está en la actualidad de los hechos investigados, lo que hace relevantes los resultados para la planificación de acciones institucionales.

Palabras-clave: acción afirmativa; diversidad; superdotación.

1 INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of students, professors, and academic coordinators regarding the Scientific Olympiad Admission program at the University of Campinas (Unicamp), which constitutes a pathway to admission into public higher education through scores obtained in Scientific Olympiads.

Scientific Olympiads are knowledge-based competitions composed of theoretical and practical exams aimed at students in basic and higher education. These events are held worldwide and may occur at regional, state, national, and international levels. Their main objectives include promoting ethical and healthy competition, identifying talent, encouraging entry into scientific and technological careers, and fostering social inclusion through access to knowledge. In Brazil, Scientific Olympiads gained prominence in the 1990, with the purpose of making a contribution to the country's educational development (Silva, 2016; Coelho, 2017).

In addition to stimulating scientific and intellectual skills, these competitions engage various competencies and help develop persistence, motivation, and curiosity, factors that are essential for students' academic and personal growth (Marega Junior, 2016). Aranha (2019) and Marques (2013) describe behaviors commonly observed in medalists that are highly valued by both academia and industry: a strong interest in science and challenges; self-directed learning; wide ranging intellectual curiosity; rigorous study routines; collaboration in mentoring other participants; involvement in exam development and event organization; and a genuine sense of satisfaction in others' success.

Awards received in scientific Olympiads have increasingly facilitated access to prestigious universities around the world, encouraging students to plan their academic futures abroad, not only because of academic challenges, but also due to financial incentives, such as scholarships offered in strong currencies (Costa, 2012; Marques, 2013). The lack of academic stimulation and challenges for high achieving students has drawn the attention of Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), prompting the creation of alternative admission pathways for medalists as a means to help mitigate this issue (Marques, 2013).

As an affirmative action policy aimed at reducing the emigration of medalists and attracting more high-performing students, public universities in the state of São Paulo, namely, the University of Campinas (Unicamp), the University of São Paulo (USP), and the São Paulo State University "Júlio de Mesquita Filho" (Unesp), introduced an undergraduate admission modality based on students' performance in scientific Olympiads as a classification criterion (Alves Fior, 2021, 2022; Marques; Queiroz, 2018). Since 2018, these institutions have published calls for applications that allocate specific spots to students awarded in academic competitions (Ribeiro, 2019).

According to the São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp), this initiative is unprecedented in Brazil and serves as an incentive for students with this profile (Aranha, 2019; Marques; Queiroz, 2018). This admission pathway has the potential to

attract candidates who, despite achieving excellent results in knowledge-based Olympiads, do not perform well on traditional standardized exams. Known as *underachievers* (Ourofino; Fleith, 2011; Tentes; Fleith, 2014), these talented students may not excel in the conventional school system or in exams derived from it, but they can produce above-average results when truly motivated, such as during preparation for Olympiads or the competitions themselves.

Other undergraduate admission pathways at Unicamp include the traditional entrance examination, the National High School Exam (Enem) admission process, the São Paulo State Serial Entrance Exam (Provão Paulista), and the Indigenous Entrance Exam (Vestibular Indígena) (Comvest, 2025). Medal-winning candidates may apply through more than one modality, provided there are no conflicts between the rules of the respective programs.

An admission pathway exclusively designed for medalists may suggest that Unicamp is allocating a specific quota of seats for the most talented students. Unicamp began implementing its affirmative action policy in 2017, with the approval of racial quotas for black students. Since then, diversity has become a central pillar in its student retention policies, bringing attention to the knowledge and experiences of black, indigenous, and quilombola communities, as well as transgender individuals and people with disabilities, as subjects of institutional interest (Ribeiro, Mesquita, Lima, 2022). In that same year, Unicamp was a pioneer in approving the enhancement of the medal-based admission policy, which would be officially implemented starting in 2019 (Unicamp, 2017).

Brazilian HEIs possess administrative autonomy, guaranteed by the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), to establish and revise their statutes and regulations, as well as to design their own selection processes (Brazil, 1996). Based on the LDB and the provisions established in Unicamp's 2017 resolution, the university annually publishes the "Call for Applications for Admission to Undergraduate Programs through Knowledge Olympiads and Scientific Competitions," among other notices, outlining the specific criteria for this pathway (Unicamp, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Out of the 66 undergraduate programs offered at Unicamp in 2022, 19 (28.79%) provided seats through the Scientific Olympiad Admission program, a number that may vary from year to year. The maximum number of seats authorized for this admission pathway corresponds to 10% of the total seats in each program (Comvest, 2022). The entire selection process is conducted online, which increases accessibility for candidates from different regions of the country.

The number of applicants for the Scientific Olympiad Admission program has grown annually (Table 1), and although the number of available seats has also increased, the applicant-to-seat ratio continues to rise (Comvest, 2022).

Table 1 – Growth of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program

Year	Applicants			Seats			Applicant to seat ratio			
	Entrance exam	Scientific Olympiad Admission Seats	% of entrance exam	Entrance exam	Scientific Olympiad Admission Seats	% of entrance exam	Entrance exam	Annual variation	Scientific Olympiad Admission Seats	Annual variation
2022	63,297	852	1.35	2,540	122	4.80	24,90	0.90	7,00	2.97
2021	77,653	468	0.60	3,237	116	3.58	24,00	-4.30	4,03	0.43
2020	72,859	407	0.56	2,570	114	4.44	28,30	-1.20	3,60	0.50
2019	76,327	283	0.37	2,589	90	3.48	29,50	--	3,10	--

Source: prepared using data from Comvest (2022)

After the attraction and admission of medalists, no records were found of specific measures dedicated to the prevention of their attrition (Della Corte *et al.*, 2022; Mianehsaz *et al.*, 2022; Pacheco; Tete; Monsueto, 2024). Nevertheless, in 2022 the first cohort of students admitted through this pathway completed their degrees, and the question that motivated the present study was: "What is currently known about Unicamp's Scientific Olympiad Admission program"?

The data produced may prove valuable to high-school students who wish to obtain information about this route to higher education, to universities that intend to launch analogous programs, and to Unicamp itself. Although the sample was local, restricted to a single institution, the results display the potential for generalization and therefore possess scientific relevance.

This article derives from the first author's master's thesis, "Gifted or dedicated? A characterization of students who enter university through medals in scientific olympiads", approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) under opinion no.5.101.899 and deposited in the UNESP institutional repository. The data can be provided upon request to the first author, in accordance with Unicamp's Confidentiality and Non-Disclosure Agreement.

This study is aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), indirectly with SDG 3 "Good health and well-being" and SDG 10 "Reduced inequalities," and directly with SDG 4 "Quality education," as outlined in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015). This declaration establishes action frameworks for implementation through 2030, in order to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The next sections present the methodology, data analysis and discussion, and final considerations.

2 METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the objective of investigating the perceptions of students, professors, and course coordinators regarding Unicamp's Scientific Olympiad Admission program, a qualitative, exploratory, and descriptive field study was conducted. The research employed a multiple case study design and used semi-structured interviews for data collection.

Twenty individuals participated in the study: seven students, six professors, and seven course coordinators. Each of the seven students who agreed to be interviewed was asked to nominate one professor, and subsequently, the coordinators of their respective programs were invited to participate. One professor withdrew during the process, and their data were excluded. The original research design also included participation from the Student Support Service (SAE); however, no staff members agreed to be interviewed.

Between 2019 and 2022, a total of 205 students were admitted through the Scientific Olympiad Admission program. As of October 24, 2022, 45 of them had withdrawn their enrollment (Table 2), leaving 160 enrolled students. The seven interviewees therefore represent 4.37% of the total remaining population.

Table 2 – Distribution of Scientific Olympiad Admission program entrants by gender and enrollment status, Unicamp, as of October 24, 2022

Field	Year of admission	Gender		Status	
		Male	Female	Enrolled	Graduated
Biological	2021	1	0	0	1
Biological	2022	0	1	1	0
Exact sciences	2019	17	4	15	6
Exact sciences	2020	16	6	16	6
Exact sciences	2021	21	4	17	8
Exact sciences	2022	12	6	16	2
Humanities	2019	1	0	0	1
Humanities	2021	0	1	1	0
Humanities	2022	1	2	2	1
Biological	2019	10	4	11	3
Technological	2020	24	5	26	3
Technological	2021	29	3	20	12
Technological	2022	30	7	35	2
Total		162	43	160	45
%		79.02	20.98	78.05	21.95

Fonte: Unicamp (2022)

As of 2022, Unicamp had 1,728 faculty members distributed across 66 undergraduate programs. In the 19 programs that had adopted the Scientific Olympiad Admission pathway, there were 834 professors. The six professors interviewed represent 0.35% of the university's total faculty and 0.72% of the faculty in the units participated in the program. The seven interviewed coordinators represent 36.84% of the programs offering Scientific Olympiad Admission and 10.61% of all undergraduate programs at Unicamp.

All interviews were conducted online due to public health restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mendez; Mahler; Taquette, 2021). After transcription, the interviews were analyzed using the CSD method, which consists of procedures for organizing discourse data in order to highlight what is common among the individual testimonies (Lefèvre, F.; Lefèvre, A., 2014; Zermiani *et al.*, 2021). The final text is written in the first person singular and reflects a socially shared opinion voiced by a fictional composite speaker, so that the synthesized discourse may be attributed to any of the participants (De Moraes; Lefèvre; Gallo, 2020; Lefèvre, F.; Lefèvre, A., 2014).

3 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The perceptions of students, professors, and course coordinators regarding the Scientific Olympiad Admission program were investigated through three interview questions, and their responses are organized in Tables 3, 4, and 5. These responses provided data on the general context in which the students are situated and revealed that the perceptions of faculty and students are largely aligned, with the exception of unmet student needs, such as post-admission support and cognitive challenges (Table 5).

It was expected that coordinators would be more familiar with the program and that professors would have more specific information about the students. However, this expectation was not confirmed. The perceptions of coordinators and professors proved to be quite similar, a finding also observed in the study by Al-Naim, Abunaser, and Al-Naim (2023). The authors concluded that this similarity in perception results from the overlap between the roles and responsibilities of professors and coordinators.

Table 3 – Question 1: How did you learn about the admission pathway to Unicamp through medals in Scientific Olympiads, known as Scientific Olympiad Admission? Unicamp, 2022

CSD students (n = 7)	CSD professors (n = 6)	CSD coordinators (n = 7)
I learned about the Unicamp admission pathway through medals in Scientific Olympiads from my high school. There, in addition to preparing us for traditional entrance exams and the Enem*, they encouraged participation in Olympiads. Teachers and classmates frequently shared information on the topic and celebrated when a student was admitted to Unicamp through Scientific Olympiad Admission program. We also heard about it within the Olympiad community. The official information, calls for applications and program guidelines, is easy to find on the Comvest** website.	As a teacher, I knew that there were students at Unicamp who were medalists in Scientific Olympiads because of the PICME*** program, which is aimed at olympiad medalists. But I became aware of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program through different means: while working at IMECC, which initiated the project; through my role as course coordinator; by attending faculty meetings; by talking with students admitted through the program; and by being invited to participate in this research.	I became aware of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program mainly because I serve as Associate Coordinator of a degree program, representing my unit at Comvest. At Comvest, we discuss all forms of admission, including Scientific Olympiad Admission. I also learned about the program through my involvement in organizing olympiads and as a member of the Unit's Academic Board, where this topic is often addressed.

Legend: *Enem = National High School Exam; **Comvest = Permanent Commission for University Entrance Examinations; ***PICME = Scientific Initiation and Master's Program

Source: Data collected through field research

New entrants were informed about the Scientific Olympiad Admission program in their high schools and within the olympiad community; however, it cannot be confirmed whether this outreach reached the other students.

Faculty members became aware of the program when they served as undergraduate course coordinators; attended meetings within their academic units; represented their units at Comvest; sat on the academic board; or worked in olympiad activities. Those who did not participate in these roles discovered the program through conversations with students who disclosed having been admitted via this pathway and, in the last instance, when they were invited to participate in this study. It is still unclear whether the rest of the faculty members had access to any information about the program. Therefore, it can be inferred that, up to the date of the interviews, no institution-wide communication had been implemented to inform the entire university community about the program. This finding suggests either barriers to the internal flow of information or, at a deeper level, the need for an effective intramural dissemination strategy that engages all stakeholders.

In Table 4, the professors' answers generated a dual CSD, as two collective voices emerged: one that knew little about the program and another that knew it very well.

Table 4 – Question 2: What do you know about the Scientific Olympiad Admission program? Unicamp, 2022

CSD students (n = 7)	CSD professors (n = 6)	CSD coordinators (n = 7)
I know that the Scientific Olympiad Admission program began in 2018, during rector Marcelo Knobel's tenure, and that Unicamp was the first university to adopt this admission pathway. Later, other institutions such as USP* and Unesp** also offered it. I find it interesting because it allows medalists to enter Unicamp without taking the regular entrance exam, focusing on the subjects they enjoy most. The entire process is online, which makes it accessible to candidates from different regions. Selection is based on the medals submitted, with scores assigned according to each program's criteria. The best part is that these seats are extra, so they do not take places from entrance-exam applicants. For me, it is an excellent way to attract talent and further encourage participation in olympiads.	I know little about the Scientific Olympiad Admission program; most of what I have heard is anecdotal. I understand that Unicamp offers this pathway to students who excelled in olympiads, letting them bypass the standard entrance exam. It seems a good initiative to reward strong high-school performance with a chance at higher education. I also know that the number of seats is limited, each institute has its own rules, and not every olympiad is accepted, so it is important to consult official channels. I know everything about the program because I took part in the meetings that shaped it when I was a course coordinator at IMECC, where the idea originated. The proposal started at Unicamp and was later adopted by other public universities in São Paulo. If a talented student achieves a strong olympiad result, they can enter without sitting the entrance exam. In my institute, these students have performed excellently, just as we expected, so we would like to expand the number of seats.	I do not know many details, but I am aware the rules are on the Comvest website, and I believe the program needs wider dissemination. It targets students who excel in scientific olympiads and provides seats reserved for medalists, which benefits both the university, by attracting strong candidates, and the students, by avoiding fierce competition. Each program decides whether to participate, which Olympiads and medals count, and assigns a score accordingly. Candidates are ranked by their score. In my institute, we do not always fill all seats and would like more applicants; we aim precisely for these students. The idea is to reward their sustained effort, an olympiad requires continuous dedication, unlike the one-shot entrance exam. Registration is free, the process is entirely online, and candidates can apply to other selection processes at the same time. Importantly, they do not need to be "the best of the best" to secure a seat, the medal itself proves their competence.

Legenda: *USP = University of São Paulo; **Unesp = São Paulo State University Júlio de Mesquita Filho

Source: Field research data

In Table 4, the CSD of the students indicates that the program, in addition to attracting talented individuals to Unicamp, encourages student participation in olympiads. The professors' CSD reports that knowledge of the program emerged indirectly, through information "picked up in the air", although official details are available through institutional channels. The coordinators' CSD points to limited dissemination of the program but defends selection based on Olympiad achievements rather than traditional entrance exams and expresses the desire for increased participation by medalists, as not all seats are filled.

The interviews made it possible to capture how the Scientific Olympiad Admission program has been evaluated by faculty, and the optimism present in the accounts imparted a positive tone to the discourse, which was unanimously favorable to this admission pathway. Nonetheless, the coordinators' CSD, presented in Table 5, reveals concern that students admitted through Olympiads may lack the broad and diversified academic background of those admitted via entrance examinations. The professors' CSD included the criticism that the Scientific Olympiad Admission program might be perceived as either a privilege or a quota system for medalists.

While quotas are intended to promote social equity and redress by offering access to public higher education for those who might otherwise be excluded (Ribeiro; Mesquita; Lima, 2022), Scientific Olympiad Admission can be viewed as an opportunity for students whose performance in one or more knowledge areas exceeds that of their peers, yet who may not succeed in standardized exams such as ENEM or traditional entrance processes, as is often the case for underachievers.

Table 5 – Question 3: What is your opinion about the Scientific Olympiad Admission program? Unicamp, 2022

CSD students (n = 7)	CSD professors (n = 6)	CSD coordinators (n = 7)
I believe the Scientific Olympiad Admission program is an excellent initiative. It gave me another opportunity to enter the program I wanted and attracts students with great potential. I think the program should be expanded, with more seats, more participating universities, and more accepted medals. The act of earning a medal already demonstrates dedication and competence, so it serves as a way to assess students. Olympiads offer a different way of showcasing knowledge, which benefits those who do not adapt well to traditional entrance exams. In public schools, olympiads were not highly valued, but now they are gaining more attention since they can open doors to higher education. Instead of preparing for entrance exams, students can focus on olympiads aligned with their interests. Still, I think post-admission support is lacking. I felt somewhat lost at the beginning because I was already familiar with part of the content and expected more challenges. We need to better discuss how this type of admission can truly democratize university access, because currently, about 80% of medalists still come from private schools, which sustains a certain level of elitism. Many of these students eventually pursue opportunities abroad and leave Unicamp.	I am fully supportive of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program. I believe any initiative that encourages young people to study is valid and welcome. Although some say it is a privilege or a type of quota, I understand that becoming a medalist in olympiads requires years of dedication. It is not a simple achievement or limited to a specific talent. That is why I believe alternative admission routes are essential to recognize and select students with distinct academic paths. These alternative pathways bring diversity and valuable experiences to the university. Being a medalist is a clear sign that the student fits the profile sought by Unicamp. Even if it does not guarantee future success, it demonstrates interest and effort. In my view, this program has no downside, and I hope the number of seats will be increased.	In my view, the Scientific Olympiad Admission program has been a very positive experience. We have never had issues with students admitted through this route, and I consider it excellent for expanding access to the university and recognizing students' efforts starting in high school. I would like to offer more seats, since medalists clearly demonstrate their capabilities and, for that reason, I see no need for them to take the entrance exam. They tend to stand out in their first year, and many participate in the PICME program, showing strong performance. Over time, they usually reach the same level as their peers. Nevertheless, I do have some concerns. Some of these students may have a less comprehensive academic background than those who entered through the entrance exam. Additionally, the program is still small and underpublicized. I believe it should be better promoted to attract more talented students. I also feel there is a need for improved follow-up and data collection on these students' academic paths, as we have yet to accurately assess the real impact of the program. This is essential to determine whether it is truly achieving its objectives.

Source: Field research data

In Table 5, the professors' CSD notes that while the interest of medalists in Olympiads may have secured their admission to Unicamp, it does not necessarily guarantee future academic success. This concern is echoed in the coordinators' CSD, which reports that medalist students tend to stand out during their first year, but by the end of the program, their performance tends to converge with that of their peers. This phenomenon warrants further investigation to determine whether the academic outcomes of medalists decline over time, or if the performance of non-medalist students improves, and why.

If there are medalist underachievers, university level education, as it is currently structured, may not offer the same motivational elements that once led these olympiad champions to excel. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of school failure among gifted students is, therefore, essential for designing educational policies that foster more effective interventions and support systems (Raoof *et al.*, 2024).

Regarding the type of school attended, the students' CSD estimates that 80% of admitted medalists come from private schools, suggesting that the program may be elitist. This perception is supported by Menezes, Pereira, and Theodoro (2021), who conducted a study involving 48 medalists from the Brazilian Olympiad in Informatics (OBI) and found that 83.30% were from private institutions, despite the fact that, nationwide, 80.90% of students are enrolled in public schools. The same CSD observes that some public schools are beginning to prioritize participation in olympiads. As a result, instead of preparing for entrance exams, students can dedicate themselves to studying for the olympiads that align with their interests.

Given that scientific olympiads are open to the entire population but currently concentrate a greater number of medalists from private schools, one way to pursue equity at its root cause would be to expand the participation of public school students. This is a complex phenomenon involving multiple factors and may require various forms of intervention. At the same time, the very existence of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program may act as a disruptive force within the current landscape, potentially mobilizing students from public schools.

Spontaneously, the students' CSD (Table 5) brought forward suggestions for improving the program, such as expanding the number of universities that offer this pathway, increasing the number of available seats, and broadening the range of accepted medals. Students also called for post admission support and noted that many of those admitted already have mastery of content covered in early undergraduate courses. Additionally, they warned that many accepted medalists aim to study at universities abroad. According to Aranha (2019) and Marques (2013), preventing the academic migration of medalists was one of the motivations that led Brazilian HEIs to create programs like Scientific Olympiad Admission.

The study by Pacheco, Tete, and Monsueto (2024) confirms that maintaining student motivation and satisfaction is a common concern among all HEIs. In the Brazilian universities examined, 43 different retention actions were identified; however, none were specifically designed for students with high abilities or giftedness. Given

that support needs are individual and may change over time, mentoring programs, where each medalist is paired with a mentor, may yield surprising results, as reported by Della Corte *et al.* (2022) and Mianehsaz *et al.* (2022).

In the analysis of responses about the program, as presented in Tables 4 and 5, the three participant groups described characteristics of admitted students that align with Renzulli (2004), model of Giftedness or High Abilities (G/HA), above average ability, task commitment, and creativity. These traits suggest identification of G/HA through provision (Alves Fior, 2021, 2022; Renzulli; Reis, 2022; Vieira, 2014), since both the preparation for olympiad exams and participation in the competitions themselves require such behaviors.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was driven by the need to gather qualitative data on the Scientific Olympiad Admission program at Unicamp and aimed to explore the perceptions of incoming students, professors, and program coordinators regarding the initiative.

The findings suggest that the program has been successful and has sparked the interest of new applicants. Students express enthusiasm about having earned a place at Unicamp and feel recognized for their dedication to learning and their participation in olympiads. Faculty members report being impressed by the academic performance of these students and express positive expectations for the future of the program.

However, although the current scenario appears favorable for attracting medalist students to higher education, institutional policies and strategies specifically designed to promote academic inclusion and retention of these students through graduation are not yet well established. For instance, there is a lack of targeted mentoring or tutoring programs that would allow for systematic monitoring of these students and the development of a knowledge base regarding their academic trajectories.

Unanimously favorable perceptions of the Scientific Olympiad Admission program may reflect enthusiasm bias, which could obscure important issues related to meeting the educational needs of medalist students in higher education. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond first impressions.

Medalists have always been admitted to Unicamp through conventional selection processes, but when identified as individuals with G/HA, they may access Special Education services under the framework of Inclusive Education. If medals are considered indicators of G/HA, providing immediate support to these students becomes feasible; however, this does not ensure that all G/HA students will be recognized. As a result, inequality persists, as some G/HA students may remain invisible throughout the course of their studies if a comprehensive policy for identifying this population is not in place.

Among the limitations of this study, the period of Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during the COVID-19 pandemic affected human interactions and, consequently, the interviewees' perceptions of people. A methodological limitation was also observed in the use of the CSD method, which may have disregarded individual specificities in favor of the collective narrative. Furthermore, the SAE was selected to represent administrative staff, but none of its members agreed to participate. Although considered a limitation, this refusal is itself a valid response.

Given the result that the majority of medalists come from private schools, further investigation is needed to understand this phenomenon and to propose actions aimed at increasing the participation of public schools. Longitudinal studies may provide valuable data on trends, associations, and relationships between variables. Future research is recommended to identify the reasons why students admitted through the Scientific Olympiad Admission program tend to stand out at the beginning of their courses but are later perceived to perform similarly to their peers. Further studies should also explore additional indicators of G/HA within this population.

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Adriana Vazzoler-Mendonça – conceptualization, planning, design, execution, writing.

Carina Alexandra Rondini – data analysis and interpretation, supervision, revision.

Cristina Costa-Lobo – critical evaluation, discussion, revision.

Conflict of interest statement

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Data availability

The contents are available. The following URL provides access to the data underlying the article's text: <https://repositorio.unesp.br/entities/publication/342e0d45-3de2-4b39-a4f6-d5197d60c42f>

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