




Original article

## Educational communication actions to develop the University Extension process

**Acciones de comunicación educativa para desarrollar el proceso de Extensión Universitaria**

**Ações de comunicação educacional para desenvolver o processo de Extensão Universitária**

Yudisney Brito Mayea<sup>1</sup>   
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3987-1335>

Caridad Cancio López<sup>1</sup>   
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1948-1313>

Estefany Sofía Solano Brito<sup>1</sup>   
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9896-0523>

<sup>1</sup>University of Sancti Spíritus "José Martí Pérez".

Sancti Spíritus, Cuba.   
[yudisney@uniss.edu.cu](mailto:yudisney@uniss.edu.cu); [caridad@uniss.edu.cu](mailto:caridad@uniss.edu.cu);  
[esolano@uniss.edu.cu](mailto:esolano@uniss.edu.cu)

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### ABSTRACT

The extension process dynamizes the cultivation of values in a society. However, the way it is conceived should not always be from the university, but also from social problems. Communication should be planned in such a way that it allows the bilateral nature of the process. Messages must be characterized by being motivating, comprehensive and original, where the intention of reinforcing values that promote the development and transformation of the human being prevails. This article aims to socialize actions from educational communication, to facilitate the articulation of the extension process with other university processes, and with society in general. Theoretical and empirical methods were used, which allowed the collection and processing of information in a selected sample of students and teachers from the University of Sancti Spíritus "José Martí Pérez" (UNISS), as well as managers and workers from other institutions in the territory. As a result, educational communication actions were provided that facilitate the articulation of the extension process with other processes, and with society in general. The proposal can contribute, strategically and methodologically, to developing the process of university extension within and outside Higher Education institutions.

**Keywords:** educational communication; higher education; university extension.

### RESUMEN

El proceso extensionista dinamiza el cultivo de valores en una sociedad. Sin embargo, el modo de concebirse no debe ser siempre desde la universidad, sino también a partir de las problemáticas sociales. La comunicación debe estar planificada, de tal modo que permita la bilateralidad del proceso. Los mensajes deben caracterizarse por ser motivadores, integrales y originales, donde prevalezca la intención de reforzar valores que promuevan el desarrollo y transformación del ser humano. Este artículo

tiene como objetivo socializar acciones desde la comunicación educativa, para facilitar la articulación del proceso extensionista con los demás procesos universitarios, y con la sociedad en general. Se utilizaron métodos teóricos y empíricos, los que permitieron la recogida y el procesamiento de la información en una muestra seleccionada de estudiantes y profesores de la Universidad de Sancti Spíritus "José Martí Pérez" (UNISS), así como directivos y trabajadores de otras instituciones del territorio. Como resultado, se aportaron acciones de comunicación educativa que facilitan la articulación del proceso extensionista con los demás procesos, y con la sociedad en general. La propuesta puede contribuir, estratégica y metodológicamente, a desarrollar el proceso de extensión universitaria a lo interno y a lo externo de las instituciones de Educación Superior.

**Palabras clave:** comunicación educativa; educación superior; extensión universitaria.

## RESUMO

O processo de extensão é um processo dinâmico para o cultivo de valores na sociedade. Entretanto, nem sempre deve ser concebido do ponto de vista da universidade, mas também do ponto de vista dos problemas sociais. A comunicação deve ser planejada de forma a permitir um processo de mão dupla. As mensagens devem se caracterizar por serem motivadoras, integrais e originais, nas quais prevaleça a intenção de reforçar valores que promovam o desenvolvimento e a transformação do ser humano. O objetivo deste artigo é socializar as ações da comunicação educativa para facilitar a articulação do processo de extensão com outros processos universitários e com a sociedade em geral. Foram utilizados métodos teóricos e empíricos que permitiram a coleta e o processamento de informações de uma amostra selecionada de alunos e professores da Universidade de Sancti Spiritus "José Martí Pérez" (UNISS), bem como de gestores e trabalhadores de outras instituições do território. Como resultado, foram

proporcionadas ações de comunicação educativa que facilitam a articulação do processo de extensão com outros processos e com a sociedade em geral. A proposta pode contribuir, estratégica e metodologicamente, para o desenvolvimento do processo de extensão universitária dentro e fora das instituições de ensino superior.

**Palavras-chave:** comunicação educativa; ensino superior; extensão universitária.

## INTRODUCTION

Society and the university maintain a direct, bilateral and indissoluble relationship linked to the historical, social, political, economic and cultural development of nations. The university promotes the ethical and moral values of society, defends national culture and identity, and is committed to training competent professionals, both from an academic point of view and in its universal humanistic conception.

In the university environment, dynamic processes are developed that are gradually built by the actors involved, through their interactions in different situations. In the activities of each process, communication acts as a mediator and is mediated according to the personal and institutional resources available to promote teamwork.

University Extension is recognized as a key process today, due to its importance in local, territorial and national development. This process facilitates the link between the university and the state, working together to meet the demands of the population and meet the development objectives of the 2030 Agenda. In addition, extension is perceived as the most effective way to creatively integrate the university with society, which makes it an essential axis of university social commitment (Castilla *et al.*, 2021).

For the university to have a real impact on society, it is essential that University Extension is integrated into the management and projection of professors, students, workers and members of the community. From their areas of action, these actors must generate the necessary changes to meet social needs (González Fernández *et al.*, 2021).

The actors involved in the university process must manage their actions in an interconnected and articulated manner, always oriented towards efficiency. In this sense, it is necessary to plan communication, which must have an educational focus.

The relationships between extension actors must be a conscious and intentional process, based mainly on the integration of content and the method of cultural promotion. This process is developed in specific stages and establishes clear roles between the actors (professors, students, workers and actors in the territory), seeking to train both members of the university community and those of the extra-university community (Rovira *et al.*, 2024).

The communication process in community spaces, both within and outside the university, must be characterized by being educational and transformative, where all participants are active and learn from each other. This dialogic communication, between academic and popular knowledge, must generate horizontal processes in which there is not one sender who simply transfers knowledge to a passive receiver, but rather everyone is the protagonist of a truly transformative exchange of messages.

This is a continuous process of action-reflection-action that is carried out from the social practice of the individual, in collaboration with others. The educator also participates in this process, not to teach or direct, but to accompany and stimulate analysis and reflection, promoting mutual learning that allows the construction of more comprehensive practices.

Each teacher, as a facilitator or guide of communication, can participate in the various types, levels and educational modalities, contributing their knowledge and experience to fulfill the substantive functions of the institution. At the same time, students can actively participate in their comprehensive education. In this process, aspects such as verbal, extraverbal, visual and audiovisual communication must be considered, where all of them are interrelated to form universes of meaning.

Montero Esteva and Montero Cabrera (2017) and Saladrigas (2023) have established guidelines for communication planning in this process, although there is still a lack of articulation with other substantive processes and with society.

The media, both traditional and digital, must play a more active role in facilitating information from university institutions. In turn, these institutions must promote actions that involve local media to expand their social reach.

Several authors highlight the unifying role of traditional media in the local context. One example is the Argentine researcher Navarro Nicoletti (2023), who demonstrates how community radio contributes to strengthening dynamics and links within the community.

To better understand the communication that must be established within and outside the university, especially within the extension process, it is relevant to consider the following elements described by Curiel Peón, Ojalvo Mitrany and Cortizas Enríquez (2018), who highlight the bidirectional nature of educational communication. In this approach, not only academic content is transmitted, but personal issues and students' interests are also addressed. Affective aspects such as empathy and individualized treatment are emphasized, recognizing the characteristics and capabilities of each student. In addition, the stimulation of achievements is valued over deficiencies and the educational nature of the actions is underlined, which are mediated by various cultural, contextual and circumstantial factors.

Sardiñas González *et al.* (2020) argue that educational communication is closely related to the teacher's work, involving different forms of interaction, exchange of information and joint creation of meanings among participants, which constitutes an essential characteristic of the teaching process.

This approach is not limited to the use of communication technologies or to interactions within the school space, but rather recognizes the community as an active subject of this communicative process, through which the articulation between society and knowledge is concretized. This process must foster horizontal and participatory relationships, which leads to greater democracy. In addition, it implies a recognition of all social spaces as emerging and potentially communicative and educational (Cruz Pérez *et al.*, 2021).

Although in other parts of the world the extension process has various names, such as social interaction, connection with society or social projection, in Cuba it has always been called University Extension. However, it is observed that this extension is not always designed jointly with the social actors involved, which generates a unidirectional process, from the university to society. This approach limits the possibility of simultaneously enriching academic actors, who could benefit from the cultural wealth accumulated in the communities, which would contribute both to the comprehensive training of students and to the improvement of the living conditions of the communities.

In the context of Sancti Spiritus, there are still contradictions between what should be and reality, since this bidirectional approach must be planned between both institutions, so that in the design of the messages, aspects such as originality, relevance, the use of common codes, interesting for each type of public, and motivational, with an adequate emotional charge, are considered. This favors real interaction between society and the university, producing mutual enrichment.

It is crucial to conceive comprehensive communication actions that facilitate the purpose of the extension process, taking into account the social context, the individuals involved, the participating university community and the strengthening and development of all the participating actors.

The objective of this article is to disseminate actions from educational communication to facilitate the articulation of the extension process with other processes and with society in general. Although this study is carried out in one of the universities of Sancti Spiritus, its results can serve as a reference for other universities in Cuba.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis unit was made up of the different audiences of the University of Sancti Spiritus "José Martí Pérez", with emphasis on three of its faculties (Humanities, Pedagogical Sciences and Technical and Economic Sciences), as well as on the workers of institutions of culture and social communication of the territory and the community of Sancti Spiritus in general.

The sample consisted of 15 teachers (five managers), 45 students from the Course by Meetings and 15 from the daytime course, five workers from the cultural sector, three from the media and 10 residents of the surrounding areas.

Workers from Municipal Culture, the Provincial Book and Literature Company, the Escambray newspaper and the Radio Sancti Spiritus radio station were selected.

A non-probabilistic intentional sampling was carried out, with a careful and controlled selection of the subjects, who had characteristics that provided relevant information for the research.

For a better interpretation of the data and the use of a holistic approach in its analysis, the qualitative perspective was used, with a non-experimental and descriptive design.

During the research, the following theoretical methods were used: historical-logical, analytical-synthetic and inductive-deductive. These methods allowed for a critical analysis and the adoption of theoretical positions that contributed to improving the extension process through educational communication.

As methods and techniques at the empirical level, documentary analysis, participant observation, interviews and questionnaire surveys were used.

- Document analysis: This was carried out with the aim of assessing the existing documentation in relation to communication in the extension process, both at the national and university level. Documents such as the Strategic Project of the Ministry of Higher Education (MES) of 2020, the Strategic Planning 2017-2021 of the MES, the Strategic Planning of the University 2022-2026, the National University Extension Program and its adaptation in UNISS, as well as other documents derived from meetings related to the extension process were analyzed.
- Participant observation: allowed us to describe the behavior of different audiences in response to information issued related to the university extension process, taking into account the criteria expressed in this regard. In addition, the number of participants in extension activities was assessed, as well as the presence and quality of murals, graphic propaganda and signage.
- Interview with university directors and other cultural institutions: this was carried out with the aim of finding out the criteria regarding the outreach activities carried out by the faculties and the university in general. It was carried out based on a group of questions or topics

that were considered relevant and that arose throughout the informants' speeches.

- Survey in the form of a questionnaire: it was used to enrich, complete and corroborate the information obtained through participant observation, interviews and documentary analysis.

## RESULTS

In the interview with the Director of University Extension, it is confirmed that UNISS has a central structure in charge of leading this process, which is subordinate to the vice-rector responsible for training activities. Likewise, other processes are triggered at lower levels, which manage this activity from each of the faculties and Municipal University Centers; the above reaffirms the role it plays, both in the comprehensive training of students and in consolidating the relevant character of the university.

On the other hand, the in-depth interview also shows that the national program is oriented in a general way and does not specify, which is evident, since this type of document establishes guidelines for all higher education institutions in the country. It is not possible for the strategic design to produce concrete actions that promote the development of the process, both within and outside the university walls. This is complex due to the nature of the expected result, which makes it difficult to evaluate the achievements at each stage. The evaluation focuses on the quantitative and, in very few cases, on the qualitative.

The analysis of the documents shows that, in the design of the educational strategies for each academic year, the actions and tasks to be developed are not personalized, so that university extension is valued in the same way as other variables that are considered indicators, which constitute both inputs and outputs in the training process. This should take into account

all the subjects in the curriculum and the particularities of the professional profile of each degree.

The university extension process is different in each of the faculties. The Faculty of Humanities has a greater impact on the surrounding communities, due to the profile of the specialties studied, with an emphasis on the artistic and cultural. For its part, the Faculty of Technical and Economic Sciences expands its impact through joint work between research projects, honorary chairs, work practices for undergraduate students and extension projects.

The Faculty of Pedagogical Sciences carries out various activities that are also linked to the educational centers of the province, where students are placed. However, in none of the cases are the desired levels reached in terms of the transformative impact of the scenarios, where the components of the teaching process are integrated in a natural way, whether it is work, research or extension, regardless of which of them is highlighted at each moment of the activity. A communication system is not foreseen that would facilitate all the work of this process and that would also contribute to the transformations that are expected.

By reviewing and analyzing the existing documentation related to the Strategic Project of the Ministry of Higher Education (2020), as well as the 2017-2021 strategic planning and comparing it with the UNISS strategic planning for the period 2022-2026, it is observed that nine processes have been declared since 2021: three of a strategic nature (Interinstitutionalization, Communication and Computerization), four mission-related (Undergraduate Training; Postgraduate Training; Science, Technology and Innovation; and University Extension) and two support processes (Material and Financial Assurance and Human Resources).

In this sense, it is clear that university extension is valued for the reasons stated above; however, the indicators planned for its evaluation are ten

and focus more on the quantitative than on the qualitative. The complexity involved in the variety of nomenclatures presented independently, such as the so-called Community Projects, Extension Projects, University Chairs and Honorary Chairs, is striking. This aspect can generate confusion in the planning, development and results of the process from the communication point of view, if its aims and objectives are not clearly defined in each context. This should be a premise in the diagnosis of the institution and in the interactions that are generated.

It is worth noting that there is still a persistent dissatisfaction regarding the university's limited presence in the local media. Two of the three directors believe that this presence could be greater and more deliberate. All the directors state that they are aware of the inter-institutional agreements, but they believe that the links should be strengthened. The three interviewees are motivated to plan new radio, television and print media spaces in which the university students are the protagonists.

The survey applied to the inhabitants of the communities where the interaction takes place provided significant assessments regarding the educational needs of the different audiences, showing that there is an insufficient characterization of the different scenarios. This limits the identification of strengths and weaknesses, as well as knowledge about environmental resources and indigenous cultural values, which affects the orientation of students in the research and sociocultural activities they carry out (100%).

Based on the results of the diagnosis and the deficiencies detected empirically by the authors of the research, integrated, motivating and interesting actions were developed, with communication as a driving force, which will contribute to the improvement of the university extension process at UNISS. For the success of these actions, the following elements must be taken into account:

1. Establishment of a communication system that promotes intra- and extra-university participation.
2. Increase in communication channels for the development of the extension process, both in traditional and digital media.
3. Strengthening the training of human resources, with emphasis on the importance of educational communication to address extension work.
4. Creation of new spaces for sociocultural promotion, both within the university and in the community.
5. Consolidation of the integration and articulation of university processes.
6. Renewal of the university's image, taking into account its Identity Manual.

## DISCUSSION

Educational communication favors the interweaving of the four university mission processes, based on the joint planning of activities from the Research Projects, the Educational Projects and the Extension Projects, as well as the Honorary Chairs that operate in each university. It is important that each activity is based on the personal motivations of each student and the potential offered by each of the subjects studied in the different courses.

University Extension has become an essential articulating process for social development, since it is the fundamental link between the intra- and extra-university community. The communication that develops around it must be strategically planned, so that it functions as a central axis between the university itself and society.

As regards research and postgraduate studies, the development of research projects in each degree program also contributes to carrying out activities with greater objectivity, capable of involving a greater number of diverse audiences.

However, not all degrees have these projects. Research projects, together with the so-called extension projects, demonstrate their capacity to articulate actions with symbolic communication content that express more complete and higher quality messages where the informative, affective and regulatory functions of communication are presented (transmission of information such as ideas, concepts or knowledge, interests, moods, feelings, attitudes and the influence that one exerts on another in the social interaction of cooperation) and the educational and political-ideological role of the extension process.

The close link between all the community agents makes it possible to transform the real state into the desired state, aimed at solving problems from the profile of each professional, individually and collectively, with a futuristic foresight.

The design and implementation of a communication strategy to develop the extension process must consider two fundamental aspects: the articulation of the four processes and the real participation of all the actors involved and beneficiaries of its development.

In this sense, educational communication must be taken into account as a fundamental concept, since said communication maintains a close relationship with the concept of culture (that which resides in the participating subjects), languages, codes, senses and rhythms, with the aim of interpreting one's own sensibilities and those of "others". Educational communication invites the possibility of transcending the traditional rationality of communication and education as basic concepts of the term to focus on them from the culture, seen as a system of signifiers and meanings through which one communicates, reproduces, experiences and investigates in order to transform reality.

In planning each activity or task, a diagnosis must be taken into account that provides information on human and physical potential, and that brings us closer to the characteristics of

each scenario. It is also important to have a participatory purpose, so that the recipients are the protagonists of the strategy and not its object; to coordinate the purposes of the organization, institution or group with the needs, interests and points of view of the co-protagonists. The strategy is not achieved all at once, but rather from successive approximations.

To the extent that the diversity of forms and codes of educational communication is used strategically, the participation and interrelation of different audiences will be facilitated, generating a more significant impact on the community, from extension actions.

The design of actions of this nature favors positive results in a shorter period of time and improves the understanding of the messages that are encoded and decoded in the development of the extension process.

Messages must be characterized by their motivational nature, their originality, and the use of common codes of communicative conduct, where the intention of reinforcing values that promote the development and transformation of human beings prevails, and at the same time the social responsibility of universities as cultural institutions at the center of the community is recognized and validated.

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The authors declare not to have any interest conflicts.

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The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.

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