

## Editorial

There is an ongoing debate nowadays in Brazil about the need for wealthier students to pay tuition at public universities and colleges. I am not going to engage in this debate, but I would like to correct a misperception that is very widespread among the debaters.

Many of those who favor the charge are under the misconception that universities are solely teaching institutions, whose single product is the instruction given to their students. Therefore, this “product” is evaluated and the students who can afford it, will pay for it (either dearly or not, that is not the point).

Even though this argument is quite widespread, it is also wrong. The current universities are based on the Humboldt binomial of teaching and researching, and both are equally important. Hence, the “products” offered by a university include the results from all the research performed by undergraduate and graduate students and their professors.

This research may seem quite abstract, but in this issue, we have a very interesting article that shows us that this research is quite practical and may offer important results to the “real world” (as depicted by those that wrongly consider academia to be a rather ensconced fairy realm). These results may include pure scientific results or, as in the case of the paper that we proudly publish, software artifacts that may have a large impact on people’s lives.

The paper published here presents a software that mediates learning through conceptual maps. Besides the learning achieved by all the graduate students that participated in the research, the paper already shows us a quasi-mature software that will be instrumental to the learning process in many classrooms that are located far beyond the walls of the public university where it was developed (UFRGS).

Hence, when someone wishes to evaluate the “returns” offered by a public university, maybe he should also evaluate the real value (either monetary or intangible) of this software and the benefits that it imparted in our society.

I am not going to take sides on this dispute. It is politically charged, and I do not intend to disregard the nice arguments in both sides of the alley. Nevertheless, I think that both sides could benefit from knowing the research that we publish here in order to understand the impact on society that a public institution that focuses both on teaching and research can have.

Our universities are a force of good. All the papers published here are the results of a work of love and dedication of knowledgeable scientists, but this paper specifically shows us that academia is not an ivory tower, but a place that can create lots of important results that improve the life of all society members.

Hence, it matters not the side you are. I still invite you to read all the beautiful articles we publish and pay special attention to the Vydia Networks educational tool. You might realize that our public universities are even more important than you thought before.



Editor in chief