

Social Support and Equity in Higher Education: The Role of the Social Assistance Office at the University of Murcia

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Abstract

This work analyzes the trajectory and future projection of the Social Assistance Office (OAS) at the University of Murcia within the framework of its 2024-2025 action plan. The OAS has experienced significant growth in assisting students in vulnerable situations, with a 236% increase in appointment requests in 2023. During the 2022/23 academic year, financial aid totaling €9,122.56 was granted, a figure nearly matched within the first two months of the 2023/24 academic year. Additionally, the OAS plays a key role in assessing and managing scholarships, collaborating with various university departments to ensure equal access to education.

From a financial perspective, the OAS managed a budget of €26,000, with a 99% execution rate, in addition to overseeing a scholarship fund with an initial balance of €141,077.75. A total of 86 grants amounting to €15,847.50 have been awarded. The office has also developed awareness and outreach strategies, including participation in academic conferences, employment support programs, and university-wide promotional initiatives.

Looking ahead, the OAS aligns with the new Organic Law of the University System (LOSU), reinforcing its role in promoting social cohesion and educational equity. Its strategic objectives include improving coordination with other university departments, increasing awareness of student vulnerability, and optimizing the scholarship granting process.

This study highlights the crucial role of the OAS as an essential service within the University of Murcia, actively contributing to reducing inequalities and enhancing academic opportunities for students in vulnerable situations.

Keywords: Educational accessibility; Higher education equity; Social inclusion; Student financial aid; University social responsibility.