The Cost of Opportunity? Higher Education in the Rio de Janeiro Lowlands

27 January to 26 February: Bass Connections Application Process

12 June to 3 July 2016: Initial Round of Field Work in the Baixada Fluminense in collaboration with undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty at our collaborating Institution.

Summer and AY 2015-16 Opportunities: data analysis, transcription, preparation of deliverables, grant-writing, participation in project conference with our Brazilian counterparts (March 2017)

Brazil in the early 21st century faces challenges of great magnitude and the expanded system of federal universities is expected to play a fundamental role in confronting them. The hopeful vision of a better future, with development and social justice, draws sustenance from a successful process of democratization since 1985, important economic advances, and the positive impact of redistributive public policies. Yet existing pessimism and frustrations are more than justified by the persistence of profound social and racial inequalities, inefficient administration, and concerns about environmental sustainability. Moreover, Brazil is passing through an accelerated demographic transition and the last great wave of adolescents are, at this moment, going through a truly mass high school education on the road, hopefully, to entering university. The future of the country, to a great extent, depends on the degree of access and quality of that education.

The potential and obstacles ahead are particularly acute in the region of the state of Rio de Janeiro known as the “Baixada Fluminense,” or Rio lowlands, on the outskirts of the city (see background below). With four million inhabitants, the region known as the Baixada (by-shada) has one of the highest concentrations of young people in Brazil. These creative and hard charging young people are the labor force for the local and urban Rio economy and express themselves through social and cultural movements of great vitality. Unfortunately, only a small number have access to the university environment which would offer the opportunity to achieve personal and collective satisfaction through self-discovery that would increase their capacity to play a more active role as protagonists in achieving new heights.

We are focusing on higher education from several dimensions: the central question of social mobility and its impact on consciousness—not stratification per se—in the Baixada (understanding who these first generation college students are, where they come from, how they understand and grapple with current challenges and hopes for the future). Secondly, we are exploring the possibility of developing a cooperative project to enhance support for teacher training, an area of study at IM/UFRRJ (and employment for its graduate), in terms of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture which has been mandated, without sufficient support, since 2003 for inclusion in the mandatory national curriculum of all K-12 schools in Brazil, private and public. Finally, we are interested in whether and how connections are made between community...
cultural organizations—such as capoeira groups, hip hop collectives, and social movements—are linked to the sphere of higher education and art and museum practice.

We believe that students and faculty at Duke University should seize this opportunity to be active in this unique urban laboratory to learn about the depth of challenges facing other peoples, societies, and policies. Drawing on our own experience of living with inherited and newly emerging inequalities of Durham, we can certainly agree that there are costs to offering opportunity, especially if badly administered, but the cost of not opening up opportunities are far higher.

We are confident that this carefully prepared plunge into the world of the Baixada-- guided by our Brazilian collaborators and counterparts (some of whom will return to Duke next year)—speaks to the central objectives of Bass Connections: fostering vertical integration and collaboration through team –based interdisciplinary research into a relevant societal issue that is global in scope.

**Is this for you?** There will be multiple opportunities for participation, whether undertaking field work in Brazil, crunching numbers, or helping process our data and helping to write reports, prepare grants, and produce deliverables (including video). While there is a preference for Portuguese for those doing field work, there are roles for those who only beginning the language and a strong interest in recruiting freshman and sophomores, undergraduate thesis writers, and masters students.

**How do you know it’s for you?** Are you interested in questions of social mobility, affirmative action, and transitions from high school to college for first generation college students? Are you interested in public policy debates about whether higher education is the right priority in a region where a million or more youth have not graduated from high school? Does the framing of concrete policies to combat social and racial inequality interest you? Or are you fascinated by social and cultural movements and their role in making social change? Are you interested in Brazilian expressive culture—especially African and Afro-Brazilian—and how its teaching is or is not integrated into urban schools? And there might even be room for you if you have a particular and compelling interest in environmental or health issues that could be explored using this urban laboratory.

**What do I do first?** Before filling out your Bass application, fill out the “Global Brazil Integrated Research Form” and send it to the Global Brazil Humanities Lab of the Franklin Humanities Institute at globalbrazil@duke.edu Staff for the project will be back in touch with you as we figure out how to fit people into project activities, including fieldwork, over the period from the summer of 2016 to the summer of 2017.
The Baixada Fluminense: Background and Project Rational

With a population of just under 4 million, the Baixada encompasses thirteen counties (municípios) in the state of Rio de Janeiro and generates 25% of the industrial GDP of the state of Rio. At the same time, the region has been marked by high indices of social and racial exclusion, marginality and violence, and crude clientelistic political practices combined with poor public administration. As an industrial and dormitory region, the Baixada has been consistently sensationalized by the national and international media highlighting human rights violations linked to the “extreme income concentration in the Baixada [which] has generated low human development indices in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment, and income,” (Alves & Evanston 2011: 14-15).

Routinely stigmatized socially and racially, the Baixada, as focused on in this project, will be a site for developing better tools to understand the enhanced social mobility made possible by the implantation of a unit of the expanding Federal University system in Nova Iguaçu in 2006. This was the first-ever investment by the central government to address the demand for tuition free higher education in the Baixada as part of the inclusionary policies of center-left presidential administrations since 2002. These years have seen significant advances in terms of economic growth with redistribution, a substantial decline in Brazil’s extraordinary high levels of inequality, and a vast increase in opportunity across racial and class divides. As has been observed for India, “Deep and abiding inequalities are associated with a slew of economic and social pathologies . . . [but] it may be politically and administratively infeasible to address growing inequality through large-scale redistribution of wealth. Promoting social mobility may be more practically rewarding” (Krishna 2013).

Innovative social policies combined with economic growth has grown the Brazilian middle class by 24 million people, the rate of poverty has been nearly halved, and the country has now begun to boldly address its racial inequalities with the establishment of a comprehensive system of quotas in its higher education system for the racially disadvantaged, unanimously judged constitutional in 2012 by a Brazilian Supreme Court headed at the time by a black Chief Justice, a first for Brazil. Central government support for higher education has also soared with the doubling of the number of federal universities, often in poor areas. The Ministry of Education’s 2011 University Census showed a growth in the percentage of persons between age 18 and 24 enrolled in universities or who had already completed their university degree from 7.2% in 1997 to 17.8% in 2011. Enrollment in higher education in Brazil has tripled in the last decade; three quarters of this growth has taken place in tuition-charging private institutions as opposed to tuition-free public universities, historically the best, whose racial and class composition was unrepresentative of the country.

After eight years, the IM/UFRRJ occupies three new buildings, has recently an energetic faculty, and enrolls 3500 students in ten areas of study (cursos): Education, Geography, History, Economics, Mathematica, Literature, Computer Science, Administration, Tourism, and Law. The demand for higher education—and the scope of the challenges in delivering it—can be seen in in looking at the census estimates for the seven municípios (counties) closest to the IM/UFRRJ with 353,653 young people between the ages of 18 and 25, a number likely to rise given 164,747 young people between the ages of 15 and 17. Given the 2016 objectives established by the National Plan of Education, 116,705 of these young people should have access to a university education, with 40% of the slots to be generated at the new public universities like the IM/UFFRJ which at present, however, reaches only 1% of the local population of the age group defined as the primary target for university education.

Who are We? Wesolowski and French are full time Brazil specialists and will be in the field leading the team this summer as it works with faculty and students from the Multidisciplinary Institute/UFRRJ. The third project director, Marcos Rangel, is a Brazilian applied micro-economist who studies the accumulation of human capital with particular attention to the intra-family decision process (parents and children) and the impact of policies to foment education and health and to lessen racial differential.

Co-sponsored by the Global Brazil Humanities Lab http://sites.fhi.duke.edu/globalbrazil/ and the Duke Brazil Initiative http://latinamericancaribbean.duke.edu/brazil-studies
JOIN THE BASS-GLOBAL BRAZIL TEAM!

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Stephanie Reist (Public Policy-Romance Studies)  
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Graduate students Reist and Kidd will be with the team in the field this summer. Like French and Wesolowski, Reist already has experience in the Baixada.

Antonio Arce (CLACS)  
Kaley Deal (Lab Staff)

As we aim for external funding, we will be assisted by the Co-Director of Duke Brazil Initiative Antonio Arce (CLACS) who is working with the Duke staff involved with corporate development, foundation, and alumni support. Duke graduate Kaley Deal, on the lab staff, is already familiar with the Baixada having done research on youth movements in 2013 with support from the Duke Brazil Initiative.