

Global Encounter: Brazil: Themes

The Acting Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies shaped the categories established for smaller interest group discussion around nodes of faculty interest apparent before the Global Encounter Brazil. He desired to define broad, inclusive categories that were still coherent. The categories are in no way intended to exclude discussion of other areas of research interest and participants may naturally find themselves drawn to more than one category. Faculty with related research interests will be encouraged to meet after the Global Encounter Brazil meeting in the manner they find most compelling to further their research and program building interests. The Institutional Planning and Support group is designed for faculty, staff, and students with special interests, experience and expertise in the MSU, Brazilian, and community stakeholder groups.

Bio-economy and Development: This broad category developed out of discussions with Professor Steven Pueppke who is responsible for coordinating faculty across campus with research interests in the area of bio-economy. Under this broad umbrella, the most promising potential partnerships with Brazilian institutions center on bio-fuels, an area where Brazil is a world leader. As a result of innovative investments by both the private and public sectors, Brazil became fossil fuel independent in 2006. This success largely stems from technological innovations related to the production of bio-fuels. The logical partners for this research are in USP's ESALQ, Brazil's top agricultural university in Piracicaba, São Paulo. Piracicaba is also a center of bio-fuel production in Brazil. This partnership might be combined with developing relationships with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro where many of Petrobras' engineers, researchers, and executives are trained.

Cultural Hybridizations: Most Brazilians conceive of the core of their national identity as a hybrid one that combines European, African, and Indigenous peoples and cultural practices. Unlike the United States, Brazil's national myths embrace racial mixture as an essence central to its national distinctiveness. Even so, racial prejudice is a reality in Brazil which boasts the largest population of African descent in the world except for Nigeria, and Brazil's racial and ethnic hybridity has only grown more diverse in the twentieth century. For example, few know that Brazil is home to the largest population of Japanese descent outside of Japan. The complexity of Brazil's racial and ethnic composition have struck foreign visitors to Brazil since its inception and this in

turn has shaped the way Brazilians understand themselves and their position in the international political, economic, and artistic order. MSU faculty members that focus on cultural identity and its ramifications for a variety of public policies, cultural practices, and economic realities are concentrated in the social sciences and humanities.

Environment, Technology, and People: MSU has niche strengths in environmental sciences that combine the use of the latest technology with field research that concerns itself with the decisions ordinary actors make about how to use natural resources. For example, a number of our Brazil experts use satellite technology to study issues of land use and deforestation, and they already have numerous research partners in Brazil that we hope to build on. The plan is to build nodes of research interests that combine our strengths in social science, agriculture, natural sciences, and other areas of expertise. Many similar techniques and technologies might be applied to study environmental problems in urban settings.

Health, Education, and Other Social Disparities: According to adjusted 2004 measures of GDP, Brazil's economy ranked ninth largest in the world ahead of Russia and Canada and slightly behind Italy. Despite its relative prosperity, Brazil's considerable wealth is very unequally distributed, and survey after survey ranks Brazil among the most unequal nation's in the world in terms of income distribution. Despite these historic inequities, Brazil has some marvelous recent success stories that are being emulated by other developing countries. Government orchestrated efforts to combat HIV/AIDS and distribute affordable anti-viral drugs to affected citizens have been extremely effective in curbing the impact of this deadly disease on Brazil's population, and in pressuring multi-national pharmaceutical companies to price their medications more cheaply. President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva's "bolsa família" (family scholarship) program has significantly raised the incomes and improved the lives of an estimated 44 million of Brazil's poor who are given monthly stipends if children attend school and get basic medical care such as vaccinations. Numerous private and public experiments with affirmative action policies in education have sprung up in Brazil in the past decade to address the low numbers of Brazilians of African and Indigenous descent represented in positions of leadership in government and business. Despite the successes in some areas, overarching problems of corruption, crime, human rights violations, environmental degradation, inadequate health clinics, and a faltering public school system disproportionately erode the quality and dignity of the lives of Brazil's poor. MSU faculty in the School of Education, James Madison College, the School of Medicine, and College of Social Science have expertise in many of these areas, but they have yet to be expressed as part of a strategic research partnership with Brazilian institutions.

Institutional Planning and Support: This session will focus on issues related to working with alumni in Brazil, improving the on-campus experience for Brazilian students and scholars, opportunities for MSU students in Brazil to study and travel, and cultural exchange and understanding in the MSU and area community.

Political Economy, Commerce, and Global Relations: A number of our faculty members in James Madison College, the School of Business, and the College of Social Science have interest and expertise in the areas of global politics and economics. Faculty members from each of these units are currently exploring collaborative relationships with institutions in Brazil that seek to develop these interests with the University of São Paulo, SP; The Getúlio Vargas Foundation, SP; and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Interests in these areas vary from the use of quantitative methods and theory to analyze the effectiveness of public institutions and monetary policies to international relations and affirmative action policies.

This material was generated from Global Encounter-Brazil <<http://www.isp.msu.edu/globalencounter/brazil>>, held at Michigan State University on November 7, 2006. This interactive and participatory event was designed to obtain input and to elaborate in a country-specific forum on relevant themes, opportunities, issues, and opportunities affecting MSU's current and future engagement in Brazil (and to some degree Lusophone countries).

