

## **MSU at Work in Brazil-2008**

Michigan State University's Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) has worked to amplify and better coordinate our institution's historic engagement with Brazilian institutions of higher learning and research. The research interests of our faculty and students have been the main drivers of MSU's efforts in Brazil. MSU has some 23 professors with extensive research experience in Brazil in a variety of disciplines, and this is likely the largest concentration of Brazilianist scholars in any single university outside of Brazil. Since this concentration of expertise came about mostly serendipitously, faculty organized some five years ago to form MSU's Brazil Initiative to better coordinate and call attention to this unique strength. Another factor favoring these efforts is that Brazil numbers among the most important emerging nations in the world, yet it is poorly represented in US academia due to two main factors. First, Brazil has been a strategic ally of the United States for over a century which has not generated government investment in what might be termed "know-your-rival" centers such as those created to study the Soviet Union (Russia), Cuba, and China. Second, until recently there have been relatively small streams of migration from Brazil to the United States which means there have been few Brazilian-American constituents pushing for more Brazilian studies centers in US universities when compared to more numerous and historic groups such as Irish-, German-, Slavic-, Jewish-, Japanese-, and Mexican-Americans. The Brazil Initiative also builds on the efforts of a previous generation of MSU professors, led by former CLACS Director John Hunter, who helped to found university programs in Brazil and train Brazilian graduate students to run them in the 1960s and 1970s. The Brazil Initiative seeks to maximize existing faculty and alumni strengths and to make the most of the unique opportunities MSU has to stand out from its peer institutions as the international leader in research, scholarly production, education, and outreach related to Brazil and the broader Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) world in Europe, Africa, and Asia. The primary objectives of the initiative are to (1) build and strengthen partnerships with Brazilian scientists and educators in research areas necessary to address pressing social, economic, and

environmental changes of our time, and (2) create dual degree programs between MSU and Brazilian partner institutions (<<http://www.isp.msu.edu/bric/Brazil>>).

### **Strategic Research Partnerships**

MSU's Brazilianist faculty are engaged in research and teaching in every major region of Brazil on a wide variety of themes, from the relatively thinly populated and environmentally diverse Amazon region to the densely populated industrial and financial center of São Paulo. MSU's Brazilianist faculty engage in work related to bio-fuels, deforestation and the environment, political economy, race relations, human rights, gender, linguistics, literature, history, and philosophy. The themes highlighted here do not capture the full scope and diversity of MSU faculty engagement, but they do note topics that have attracted clusters of faculty. Other possible partnerships are being explored by faculty who maintain active research agendas in Brazil.

### **Political Economy, Governance and Security**

Perhaps our most intensive historic engagement with Brazilian Universities has been with the Fundação Getúlio Vargas (FGV, Getúlio Vargas Foundation) in São Paulo where MSU faculty helped to establish their graduate program in Business Administration in the 1960s and 1970s. Faculty from the Departments of Political Science and Economics, and the College of Communication Arts and Sciences utilized CLACS strategic partnership funds to host a workshop in April 2007 at MSU (<http://www.pegs.msu.edu>) that brought five professors from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) to present research and discuss future collaborations. On this occasion a formal agreement was signed by the ISP Dean Riedinger and the Dean of FGV to develop a dual degree program in economics and political science. FGV hosted a similar workshop in December 2007 in São Paulo with external funding from FAPESP (São Paulo Research Institute). MSU faculty members traveled to Brazil to present new research and collaborative research coauthored by MSU and FGV professors. Some of the MSU faculty members have been engaged in research on Brazil. Most are new to Brazil but see potential to extend their research agenda there. Participants included faculty

members from MSU (Political Science, Economics, Telecommunications and Journalism), FGV (Political Science, Economics, and Political Economy), the Director of Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and Dean Riedinger as well as MSU alumni who are currently FGV faculty. Participants further encouraged collaboration among faculty from both institutions in joint applications for external funds, publications, and curricula development.

In addition, an agreement was signed between FAPESP (the state of São Paulo's institution to fund and support cutting edge research) for long-term cooperation to promote research of mutual interest across a wide range of subjects including economics, politics, business, agro-economics, and environment.

### **Agriculture, Megaprojects, and the Environment in the Brazilian Amazon**

A group of scholars in geography, sociology, and biology in cooperation with MSU's new Environmental Science and Policy program are seeking to develop strategic partnerships with the Escola Superior de Agricultura Luiz de Queiroz (ESALQ), one of seven universities in the Universidade de São Paulo state system. The same group is also pursuing relationships that support MSU faculty research and student interest in the Amazon region by establishing new agreements with the Federal University of Rondônia and the Federal University of Pará. This group of faculty hosted a conference in September 2007 which brought five Brazilian professors from these partner institutions to participate in a research workshop at MSU. Participants not only shared their latest research, but they also discussed possibilities to apply for external funds to support future research, student and professor exchange, and applications for external funding.

### **Bio-Fuels and the Bio-Economy:**

Brazil is the world leader in bio-fuel production and MSU's faculty engagement in bio-fuel research promises to make this a productive area of collaborative bi-national research. Several of MSU's bio-fuels group met with representatives from the University of São Paulo's Escola Superior de Agricultura Luiz Queiroz in Piracicaba

(ESALQ), São Paulo and FGV in March 2008. At that time, they planned a workshop to be held on ESALQ's campus in which eight MSU faculty involved in bio-fuels research have expressed a keen interest in participating.

### **Portuguese Language Instruction and**

CLACS, International Studies and Programs (ISP), the College of Arts and Letters, and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese partnered over the last two years to make investments to build the Portuguese language program. With more than 218 million speakers, Portuguese is the seventh most spoken language in the world, but its significance as a world language is not reflected in the US university offerings. To address this gap, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese recently hired two new tenure stream professors of Portuguese who are currently developing new curricula which will include a minor in Portuguese language and a new Spanish/Portuguese major. These new programs of study will attract more students to pursue advanced Portuguese language training beyond the second year requirements of many majors and will work to stabilize Portuguese enrollments at both the introductory and advanced levels. The availability of more advanced Portuguese language courses will also support graduate students who seek to conduct research on Brazil or other parts of the Lusophone world. Competitiveness for external funds for dissertation research often hinges on demonstrating Portuguese language competency which advanced course work at MSU facilitates. Finally, advanced Portuguese will also serve faculty who decide to develop their research interest in Brazil by learning the language.

### **Study Abroad in Brazil**

The new, more comprehensive Portuguese language instruction available to our students at the graduate and undergraduate level will allow our students to take advantage of new programs we are building in a variety of areas. For example, a new Portuguese language summer study abroad has been developed by Portuguese Professor Saulo Gouveia in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina in partnership with the Federal University of Santa Catarina. In addition, the 2007 summer study abroad program offered by

Geography Professor Antoinette Winkler-Prins in Santarém, Pará further extends the options our students will have to learn first hand about the Portuguese language and Brazil's society and environment.

### **To Keep Up to Date**

For future updates on MSU's activities in Brazil and other Lusophone countries, contact Cynthia S. Simmons, Director-Brazil Initiative at [simmo108@msu.edu](mailto:simmo108@msu.edu) or see <<http://www.isp.msu.edu/bric/Brazil>>.

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).