
Collaboration in Teaching Extends all the Way to Brazil

Michele Zebich-Knos, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor of Political Science

Interdisciplinary Aspects Stressed

When I first learned that the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE) was offering a faculty development seminar on the "Environment and Public Policy" at the University of São Paulo (USP) Brazil, I felt that it presented the right opportunity to pursue my interdisciplinary interest in environmental issues of developing areas. My interests extend to conducting environmental research on Latin America from a social science perspective and to bringing this accumulated body of knowledge to the classroom. With passport and visa in hand, I traveled to one of South America's most well known and respected universities.

As a teacher of international affairs, my courses include Politics of Developing Areas and Politics of Latin America. I knew that information gathered in Brazil during this summer program would be of great use in the classroom, especially for these courses. This assumption proved correct and I will indeed be able to integrate a great deal of Brazilian material into my courses.

For example, we were informed of the impact that various United Nations' programs have on Brazil's environmental policies. While the United Nations Environmental Program urges that 10 percent of Brazil's territory be designated as "protected areas," only 3 percent was actually designated by the Brazilian government. Such a small percentage of protected land is insufficient in the struggle against Brazil's major deforestation problem especially in the Amazon.

We were also told that United States' techniques such as the environmental impact analysis have recently begun to have an influence in Brazil. This U.S. style instrument was formally adopted by Brazil's federal government in 1986 and is monitored by the National Council of the Environment. Ironically, some of the most damaging infrastructure projects such as dams and power plants are state owned and

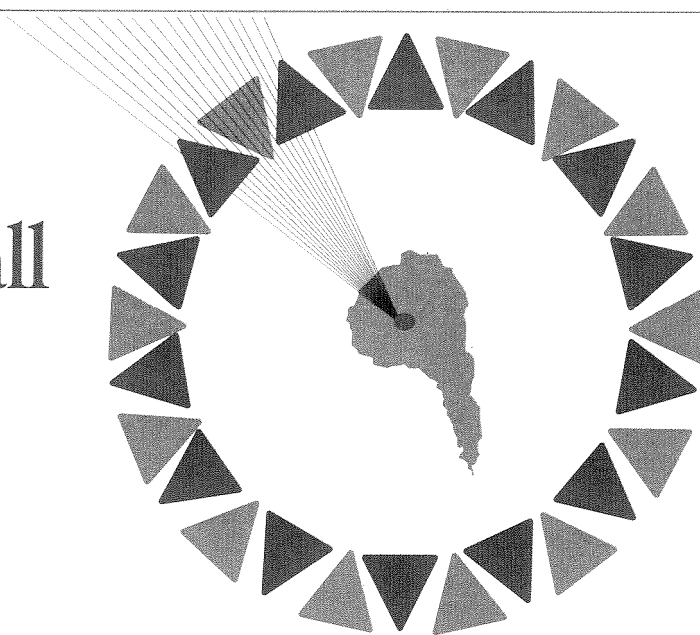
are exempt from such impact analysis! This is but one glaring contradiction found in this rapidly developing country of both great wealth and extreme poverty. While São Paulo, for example, is home to Latin America's largest Volkswagen plant, it is also host to miles of *favelas*, or spontaneous slums, that compete with the city's skyscrapers to make this megalopolis of 17 million inhabitants the largest in South America.

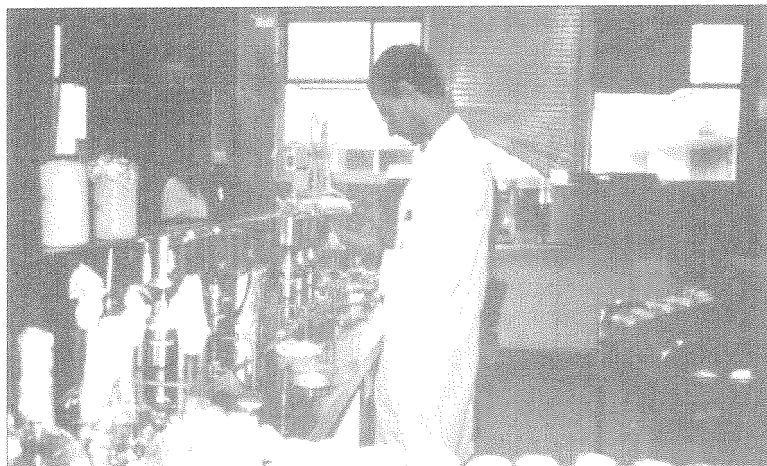


São Paulo has both great wealth and extreme poverty

A True Lesson In Collaboration

Beyond the actual material garnered on Brazil's environmental problems, this seminar presented a lesson in true collaboration between faculty, not only from diverse disciplines, but from different countries. We were 14 CIEE faculty participants from various United States institutions. One member was from the University of the (US) Virgin





Interdisciplinary Course in Brazil Attracts Over 400 Students

At the university level, USP political scientist Dr. Antonio Carlos Diegues informed us that there is great interest in confronting the interrelationship between environmental preservation and meeting social demands of the Brazilian populace. In fact, he noted that the course Economic Development Versus Environmental Preservation typically has 400 students vying for limited space in the class.

Achieving a better understanding of the connection between scientific and social policy aspects of Brazilian environmentalism was a primary goal of my trip. This connection can also be applied to the Kennesaw State campus. The design and implementation of a

Kennesaw State collaborative course, perhaps cross-listed in biology and political science, could benefit from information acquired during this faculty development seminar. Such a course could be entitled Environmental Policy in Developing Areas, and might also be able to provide graduate credits for the new master's in public administration as well as regular undergraduate credits.

My experience in Latin America and North Africa could be complemented by other Kennesaw State colleagues such as Dr. Robert Paul (biology) whose environmental expertise ranges from Belize to China. This is the essence of true interdisciplinary collaboration and is not new to our campus. For example, in Spring 1993, a cross-listed special topics course War and Peace in the Nuclear Age was offered under history and physics. Solutions to world problems can benefit greatly from bringing disparate disciplines such as biology and political science together to "make things happen." I find this to be understood by colleagues at both the University of São Paulo and Kennesaw State College. ●

Dr. Zebich-Knos was awarded a 1993 Faculty Development Grant for participation in the University of São Paulo seminar this past summer.

Islands and another, a Spelman College professor, hailed from Nigeria. Participants from the U.S. represented schools from as far away as Washington State University and as close as Dekalb College. Disciplines represented included biology, history, political science and communications. Our research interests ranged from ecology and bioremediation to political economy and public policy. It is safe to say that environmental issues covered by seminar lecturers were interpreted in a variety of ways depending on one's discipline. The same held true for questions asked of lecturers. Our varied group then had the task of connecting with the University of São Paulo speakers as well as representatives from the private and public sectors in Brazil. Our Brazilian coordinator, Dr. Sylvia Campiglia, is currently director of Environmental Programs at the USP's Bioscience Institute. Dr. Campiglia reflected the efficiency for which "Paulistas" are known in Brazil and put together a balanced program which brought together Brazilian biologists, economists, policy experts and members of the corporate sector. Of great interest to the group was our visit to ALCOA's Brazilian headquarters where we were given a presentation on that multinational corporation's effort to clean up its mining operations, which have long been a source of environmental degradation.

While all of the speakers and contacts are too numerous to mention here, I was especially impressed with Dr. Paulo Nogueira Neto, former Minister of the Environment and currently professor at the University of São Paulo. Dr. Nogueira Neto's approach to Brazil's problems was "solution-oriented" and reflected not only his policy experience in government, but his respect for indigenous ecosystems from the Amazon rain forest to the Patanal wetlands. His coverage of the Alternative Agriculture Pilot Program, for example, illustrated how the Brazilian government is cognizant of the fact that in 80 to 90 years man could completely destroy the Amazon if current rates of deforestation continue.

