

## **Learning Down in Rio—and Several Other Places in Brazil Through a Unique University Partnership**

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*Flying down to Rio where there's rhythm and rhyme.  
Hey feller, twirl that old propeller,  
Got to get to Rio and we've got to make time.*

—From the song, “Flying Down to Rio,” sung by Fred Astaire in the 1933 movie of the same name. Lyrics by Gus Kahn and Edward Eliscu, with music by Burton Lane. Astaire and Ginger Rogers made their debut in the film.

TTUISD. Unfortunately, many in our community are baffled by the reference. But, our colleagues in the University College know it well as the acronym for the Texas Tech University Independent School District. It's a program that supports K-12 education throughout Texas and other parts of the United States—and in nineteen countries around the world.

This paper is about recent developments of the TTUISD high school program in one of the world's most successfully emerging economies—Brazil. The TTUISD-Brazil program has expanded dramatically during the past few years and my recent visit to two cooperating campuses offered insights that merit sharing with the TTU community.

### **Background**

TTUISD is part of long historical legacy in higher education. Many research universities of today (e.g., Universities of Arkansas, University of Iowa) developed and supported K-12 schools—in some cases more than 100 years ago. The university-affiliated K-12 schools served several purposes, including offering educational opportunities for faculty and staff children in communities that were often remote from urban centers. Additionally, these K-12 efforts would serve as precursors to so-called “lab schools,” which were used literally as “laboratories” for teacher training, curriculum experimentation and eventually centers for the education and training of family and human development professionals. Arguably, the most famous



set of “lab schools” (elementary and secondary) were developed in 1896 at the University of Chicago under the leadership of educational philosopher John Dewey along with education specialist Francis Wayland Parker and the first president of the University of Chicago William Rainey Harper.

In the early history of some higher education institutions, university-affiliated high schools were also used as a means of providing high school education to young people who wished to pursue a college degree but came from rural communities where there were no high schools. Such was the case at the University of Arkansas and in the State of Arkansas at the time of the founding of the University in 1871.

For TTUISD, it’s heritage and mission today include access to high school course work for students in rural schools that may not be able to hire teachers in select subject areas (*e.g.*, physics) for reasons of budget limitations or teacher availability. Furthermore, parents who are home schooling daughters or sons but feel uncomfortable providing education in certain topics (*e.g.*, calculus) are increasingly turning to TTUISD for help.

In addition to individualized course offerings, TTUISD offers English language instruction and a high school diploma program accredited by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as certified through the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) and the relatively new State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) End Of Course (EOC) examinations. TTUISD diploma students can be found throughout Texas and in thirty-three other states and eight other countries around the world. However, the TTUISD diploma program is by far most prominent in Brazil where it served 1,106 students during the fall of 2011, and is projected to have an enrollment exceeding 1,500 during spring 2012. The Brazil students will be pursuing their diplomas in twenty-four schools in nineteen Brazilian cities from Florianopolis (on the Southeast coast) to São Luis (on the Northeast coast), and from Salvador (on the East Coast) to Manaus (in the Amazon region)—including multiple locations in Rio de Janeiro (pop. 6.3 million) and São Paulo (pop. 11.3 million).

### **The Brazilian Partnership**

While any parent in the world may enroll a son or daughter in the TTUISD web-based high school diploma program, the program available in Brazil has a unique structure and characteristics, supported by a consortium that began in 2000 with a single school (Leonardo da Vinci) in Vitoria, Brazil (on the coast and 320 miles northeast of Rio de Janeiro). The



TTUISD-Brazil program in 2012 is administered as a consortium through twenty-five schools that employ teachers who are native English speakers, typically from the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. Students matriculated in the program are simultaneously enrolled in a Portuguese-based Brazilian curriculum and those who successfully complete the programs receive two separate diplomas.

Students enrolled in the dual diploma programs attend school from 7:00 AM to 5:00 PM five days a week and receive instruction in the humanities and social sciences (including communications courses) through TTUISD curricular materials that are supplemented by glossaries prepared by local faculties for words with unfamiliar translated equivalents. Instruction is face-to-face and stresses oral and written communication skills in all offerings. During my visits to the Leonardo da Vinci (Vitoria) and Dante Alighieri (São Paulo) schools, I observed the rigor of the program through attendance in several classes in history and speech. In general, I found the Brazilian TTUISD students to be bright, mature, poised and engaged seriously in their studies. Additionally, their English proficiency skills were excellent.

Rogério Abaurre, national coordinator for the TTUISD-Brazil Program, has been involved with the Leonardo da Vinci School since the TTUISD collaboration began in 2000. As Abaurre notes, students in the consortium program tend to come from families whose parents are health-care professionals, lawyers, and corporate or government officials. As an example, the President of Hyundai-Brazil has both daughter and son enrolled in the TTUISD diploma program at a high school in the TTUISD-Brazil Consortium.

The parents of Brazilian TTUISD students are keen on their sons and daughters being able to function effectively in the English-based worlds of commerce and law. Additionally, parents appreciate the robustness of the TTUISD curriculum especially in the development of international understanding and communication skills.

I visited Brazil from October 9 through 13, 2011. On October 11, I attended and served as the principal commencement speaker (a paper based on the speech and illustrations used appears separately in this issue of *All Things Texas Tech*) at a Leonardo da Vinci graduation exercise. That evening, 151 students received Portuguese diplomas including 51 who also were awarded the TTUISD diploma. Beside the graduates, there were more

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than 800 attendees at the event. Other speakers included the Leonardo da Vinci school founder, long-time and respected educator José Antonio Pignaton, and U.S. Consul for Political and Economic Affairs Maida Furnia, who travelled for the occasion from the U.S. Consulate in Rio de Janeiro where she is based. As an aside, Ms. Furnia, a recent Masters of Public Administration graduate from North Carolina State University with proficiency in Spanish, joined the U.S. Consulate in Rio just a year prior to the da Vinci Commencement event having no skills in the national language but was able this past October to extend her remarks expertly in Portuguese.

### **Looking Ahead**

Perhaps you are now wondering what the future may hold for the TTUISD-Brazil program. Well first, we see it expanding into other cities and schools in Brazil, a country of more than 180 million residents. Also, there are possibilities of the program being replicated in other South American Countries, particularly in Argentina and Chile. If such extensions come to pass, we may someday be able to claim the largest and most effective English language high school program in South America. And, in a parallel set of developments our Vice Provost for International Affairs, Ambassador Tibor Nagy, is exploring the possible adoption of similarly patterned programs in other parts of the world especially for daughters and sons of U.S. Diplomats and their colleagues.

There is one area where the TTUISD-Brazil Program has not performed well in the past. That is, in recruiting TTUID-Brazil graduates to TTU baccalaureate programs in Lubbock. We hope to begin remedying that situation next summer with a two-week learning seminar for up to 200 Brazilian high school students enrolled in the TTUISD-Brazil program. We will have more to say about this venture in a future issue of *All Things Texas Tech*.

### **Some Additional Reflections**

Two vivid memories stand out in my mind following the recent trip to the Dante and da Vinci schools in São Paulo and Vitoria, respectively. The first was in seeing one of the 34 Dante School (touted as the best of the 3,000 schools in São Paulo) buses, painted in the school colors of blue and gold, but bearing the official seal of Texas Tech University. The second experience was participating in two history classes at the da Vinci School in Vitoria where the topic of discussion was the Vietnam War! These experiences are emblematic of two features of the TTUISD Program in Brazil: 1) the visibility of TTU in this important country and part of the





world; 2) the cross-national understanding developing among future leaders of our neighbors to the South. Thus, we can think of the benefits of the TTUIDS-Brazil program proudly—including its spread of TTU teaching excellence into the Southern Hemisphere and the effects of our faculty and staff on democracy building in the Americas. These are no small accomplishments.

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### **Personal Epilogue**

My father Robert Arthur Smith (1915-1966) served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. As a part of his service he was stationed in several cities in Brazil, including São Paulo, Recife, and Fortaleza. During my recent and first trip to Brazil I had several chances to think about my father in special ways. My mother Marie Marlene Smith (1915-2001) would have been proud.

11/29/11

