

# Emerging Giant

BY ALAN DESSOFF





**Brazil, a rising world economic power, is finding new ways to foster student exchange with key partners like the United States and Canada.**

## **AS THE TWO LARGEST ECONOMIES AND DEMOCRACIES**

in the Western Hemisphere, the United States and Brazil share one of the most important trade and economic relationships in the world, and it is growing, with an expanded emphasis on higher education partnerships that are taking shape through a broad range of programs, many of them new.

For much of the U.S. higher education community, “Brazil is hot right now,” as characterized by Kristine Lalley, director of international engineering initiatives in the Swanson School of Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 18 U.S. colleges and universities selected so far to receive Brazilian students in the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program, formerly known as the Science Without Borders Undergraduate Scholarship Program, one of the most significant of the new initiatives.

“Brazil is exciting because it’s on the move. They have a lot of younger people who want to study but they can’t all do it there, and we can offer them something here,” adds Dean Peck, vice provost for global strategies at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York, another of the institutions that is taking students in the program. “I really knew very little about Brazil before, but I knew it was a country we should look at as a potential partner,” Peck says.



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**A group of New York University (NYU) graduate students with Erich Dietrich, NYU assistant dean for global and academic affairs, visit the Universidade Estadual de Campinas in Brazil.**

## Longstanding Ties Between the United States and Brazil

As U.S. government documents make clear, the two countries have traditionally enjoyed friendly, active relations encompassing a broad political and economic agenda that was foreshadowed when the United States became the first country to recognize Brazil’s independence in 1822. Since then, deepening U.S.-Brazil engagement and cooperation have been reflected in high-level contacts between the two governments, most recently, and at the highest levels, when President Barack Obama hosted Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff at the White House in April 2012 for meetings on the growing partnership between the two countries on a wide range of issues. Earlier, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton attended Rousseff’s inauguration in Brazil on January 1, 2011, and Obama visited Brazil two months later, highlighting six other cabinet-level and cabinet-rank visits in the first part of 2011 alone.

The presidential visits underscored the commitment Obama and Rousseff share to what the U.S. State Department summarized as “an innovative U.S.-Brazil education partnership that addresses the needs of a twenty-first century workforce.” Established through Memoranda of Understanding in 1997 and 2007 and reaffirmed in a joint statement the two countries issued in March 2010, the U.S.-Brazil Partnership for

Education reflects the belief of both presidents that the prosperity of their countries is intrinsically linked to the education of their people and enriched by shared academic experiences in other countries.

Accordingly, both leaders have set complementary goals for international education. Obama’s “Strong in the Americas” goals aim to increase the number of students from Latin America and the Caribbean studying in the United States, and the number of U.S. students studying in those regions, to 100,000 by 2020. The Brazil Scientific Mobility Program aims to build and expand Brazil’s role as a global leader by sending 100,000 of the best Brazilian undergraduate students to study abroad at the world’s best universities, with at least half coming to the United States. It will provide scholarships to the students for one year of study at U.S. colleges and universities, primarily in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. Following their year in the United States, the students will return to Brazil to complete their degrees.

In addition to the student exchanges, the two national governments, through the U.S.-Fulbright Commission, are expanding teaching and research exchange opportunities in science and technology through new Fulbright-Science Without Borders Scholar and Distinguished Chair Awards for mid-career researchers and senior faculty in the United States. Similarly, U.S. scholars will be affiliated with top Bra-



ANTONINHO MARMO FERREI



**Marcelo Knobel**  
*Universidade Estadual  
de Campinas*

zilian universities and research centers in their areas of specialization, fostering increased cooperation and institutional collaboration between applied researchers in science, technology, and other fields of innovation.

Further, as part of a joint effort to expand Fulbright exchange opportunities in a variety of academic disciplines, the U.S. and Brazilian governments are doubling the number of Fulbright Scholar Awards for Brazilians and introducing a new Fulbright Post-Doctoral Award for U.S. and Brazilian researchers.

Meanwhile, the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program got underway in 2012 with high aspirations in both countries, although with some concerns about both process and outcomes among Brazilian educators. Administered by the Institute of International Education (IIE), it is sponsored principally by two Brazilian government agencies. One, CAPES, is the department within the Brazilian Ministry of Education devoted to the evaluation and expansion of higher education in the country. Many of the projects it finances provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to gain hands-on experience in programs ranging from studies in the Amazon to nanotechnology development. The other sponsor, CNPq, within the Brazilian Department of Science and Technology, operates many programs that focus on national environmental issues, like transnational research projects in the genetics and biotechnology fields.

Together, the CAPES/CNPq goals are promotion of scientific research, investment and funding for education resources both within and outside Brazil, increased international cooperation in science and technology,

and engagement of students in a global dialogue within the parameters of international education.

As the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program sends its first students to the United States, placed by IIE with institutions that applied to be their U.S. hosts and are eager to welcome them, some educators in Brazil are skeptical about how the program will work. “There are many problems because we have no experience in sending undergraduates abroad. There is a tradition

of many years of sending graduate students but sending 100,000 undergraduates has never been done before, so it is very complicated.

It’s not clear what kind of impact this could have,” says Simon Schwartzman, president of the Instituto de Estudos do Trabalho e Sociedade in Rio de Janeiro. He suggests that launching the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program was a “rushed” decision of Rousseff. “People said ‘let’s do it’ so she agreed,” he declares.

“Everyone agrees that to learn in a university, it’s an important part of the process to live abroad and see a different culture. There’s no problem with that. My main concern is that this program is too ambitious, too big. We lose track of our students as soon as they get involved in it. We don’t know who is taking care of them, who their tutors are, and sometimes we don’t even know which college or university they are attending,” adds Marcelo Knobel, dean of undergraduate programs at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas in Sao Paulo. “I believe the whole idea is interesting. It certainly will help develop our future students and workforce,” he continues. “But it’s too unilateral. For example, none of the humanities is in the program. And while we are sending students away, we don’t have any program to receive more students here, which should be an important part of it. But that would create further problems with the bureaucracy to find places for them to live. Everything here is more complicated to foreigners.”

### **Language Can Be A Barrier**

One issue that threatens to complicate experiences for U.S. students and educators is that Brazil’s native language is Portuguese, not widely taught or spoken at U.S. institutions. To address that, the State Department, in partnership with the Brazilian government, is expanding the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant Program to promote the study of Portuguese language and culture in the United States and encourage more U.S. students to study in Brazil. Brazilian educators serve as native Portuguese language resources in the classroom and in cultural activities as



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they pursue their own nondegree studies in pedagogy, curriculum development, and English language at accredited postsecondary U.S. institutions.

Knobel cites the problems of teaching in Portuguese in Brazil in calling for “some adjustments” to make the Scientific Mobility Program “more effective” for students, faculty, and administrators. “We should adapt a little to provide at least some classes in English in order to welcome more international students,” Knobel says.

### Interest in Brazil Rises

Meanwhile, IIE and the 18 universities it has selected to receive Brazilian students are getting started and some are completing their initial experiences. At Washington State University (WSU), five Brazilian undergraduates who arrived on the Pullman, Washington, campus last January [2012] returned to Brazil at the end of the year and another group took their place.

About 10 years ago, WSU had an active faculty-staff Latin America interest group, but Prema Arasu, vice provost and associate vice president of international

As WSU resurrected the Latin America group, Arasu found a number of faculty from different WSU colleges who had been in other countries in the region and had interests and connections with Brazil. So linking with Brazil’s Scientific Mobility Program seemed like “a great way to activate one arm of that interest,” she says.

In a quick flurry of intensive communication and other administrative activity within WSU, involving collaboration between the admissions and registrar’s offices, and with IIE, the university prepared to be one of the first U.S. institutions to welcome the Brazilian students. “We usually don’t get a high number of international students in the spring term and I got staff dedicated to making sure this was going to be a good experience for them,” Arasu says.

When the Brazilian students arrived, “they were just a breath of fresh air,” Arasu exclaims. “Their Latin American culture came through very strongly. As new students on campus, rising juniors and seniors, they engaged socially to meet the other new students. They definitely were academically prepared and language was no problem. All were very competent in English; some spoke it almost with American accents. It was really great to see them adjust and assimilate very quickly.”

One Brazilian engineering student provided sufficient validation of his background that WSU allowed him to take some graduate level courses. Another, who was interested in pharmacy, also was a talented violinist. “It’s a big deal to be able to get into the WSU symphony orchestra and he was able to do that. That said a lot,” Arasu reports.

The students were invited to meet with the revived Latin America interest group so they could “broaden their awareness” of WSU’s connections with their country and others in the region. “It was a two-way exchange. We felt they could help us understand from their perspective what kinds of things we could be doing to encourage more interactions,” Arasu says.

As the students prepared to wind up their year on campus, WSU agreed to take more, with about the same number of undergraduates expected to arrive early in 2013. Meanwhile, recognizing the increasing importance of a global learning and research environment for students and faculty, the university is engaging in other strategic international partnerships, including one it signed in April with Brazil’s Agency for Graduate Education. Arasu says two of the Brazilian undergraduates were on hand for the signing and attended the Brazil-U.S. Partnership for the 21st Century Forum at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, D.C. The forum was convened as part



**Prema Arasu**  
Washington State  
University

programs, says that when she joined the university two years ago, the group had “somehow started to disintegrate,” overshadowed by WSU’s growing interest in China as well as India and Australia.

“That engagement with Latin America from way back needed desperately to be resurrected,” and when this program presented an opportunity to look anew at Brazil, “it fit with me and we recognized it as definitely an emerging area of the world where we needed to be engaged,” Arasu says.

of the summit visit of Brazilian President Rousseff.

The signing capped a campaign that included a visit to Brazil by Arasu and WSU Honors College Assistant Dean Jessica Cassleman to meet with potential partner campuses, learn about Brazilian higher education and establish student internships and exchange programs. The delegation went to Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, Campinas, and Piracicaba to meet with faculty, students, and officials from public and private institutions, the Fulbright Commission, CAPES, and CNPq.

Among other activities, the WSU representatives engaged in several high-level policy events, including a U.S.-Brazil Partnership roundtable in Sao Paulo. Discussion on the challenges and opportunities for expanding U.S.-Brazil educational relations featured Arasu, Jeffrey Peck from CUNY's Baruch College, and representatives from the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo and another Brazilian institution.

### Improving Language Scenario

WSU also is preparing to send some of its undergraduate students to Brazil and is addressing the

Portuguese language barrier as part of that. A large number of WSU students studied Spanish in high school or study it now at WSU, and "the neat thing is that while Portuguese is a different language, having them fluent in Spanish has made it easier" to relate the two, Arasu says. She suggests that WSU students could go to Brazil with a Spanish background and a minimum of two weeks of intensive training in Portuguese so they could at least "start to communicate and wouldn't be completely dependent on having an English-speaking counterpart on the other end."

Other U.S. universities are taking different approaches to the language issue. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which has maintained an active student exchange with Brazilian institutions for four years, a "strong Portuguese contingent" of faculty in the Romance Language Department teach the language, and Illinois students who go to Brazil as part of a research consortia must take three semesters of it, reports K. Peter Kuchinke, associate professor and director of graduate programs in the Department of Human Resource Education.

**Washington State University students study abroad in Brazil.**





**Esther Liu, an alumna of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, at Iguazu Falls in Brazil.**

Students who have come to Illinois from Brazil, mostly at the graduate level, have arrived with no English language problems. “Only those students who had very good academic and conversational, colloquial English skills were accepted” after going through screening in Sao Paulo and Brasilia, Kuchinke says.

### **Capitalizing on Connections**

Illinois has multiple connections with Brazil that go back many years, many built on their joint farming interests. “Our College of Agriculture has been working with Brazil forever and a day” and senior economists at the university helped Brazil reform its economy in the 1980s, says Kuchinke. “From the farm and commodity point of view, they are an important trading partner. Farm reports here every day talk about farm prices in Brazil,” he declares. “In the recent past, we have seen a lot of interest by Brazilian students to come to the U.S. to study here,” he adds, creating affinities in areas including sustainable agriculture, bio-energy, economics, education, and business.

The relationship between the University of Illinois and Brazil got a significant boost in 2009 with a \$14 million donation to the school, its largest gift ever by a non-alumnus, to establish a Brazilian Studies Institute on the Urbana-Champaign campus. The endowment, by Jorge Paulo Lemann, a Brazilian entrepreneur, has enhanced the university’s existing studies on Brazilian culture, making it one of the leading Brazilian studies

program in the United States, according to the *Illinois International Review*.

Lemann, who was born and raised in Brazil, said at the time of his donation that it was prompted by the increasing number of Brazilian students the university was attracting. “They, in turn, positively affect Brazilian development and society, as evidenced by the number of Illinois graduates in important jobs throughout Brazil,” he asserted.

The Lemann Institute is based in the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at Illinois, within the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and International Programs and Studies. Its goal is to support joint research between those at the university and in Brazil, giving students of both nations, along with Brazilian professionals, the chance to further explore the history, economy, and cultural heritage of Brazil.

Lemann’s gift has provided short-term fellowships to Brazilian professionals with an interest in participating in one of Illinois’ extensive training programs, as well as opportunities for Brazilian nationals to earn their master’s degrees there. Undergraduate and graduate students also were expected to benefit greatly from the presence of the Lemann Institute on campus. In addition, the endowment provided a graduate fellowship for study pertaining to Brazil, study abroad fellowships for both Brazilian and University of Illinois students, and scholarships for undergraduate research on Brazil.



## Trade With Brazil Encourages Ties

In the southeastern United States, trade relationships underscore the bonds that have developed between Brazil and the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa, which USF is trying to expand. “We believe Brazil is the dominant regional power in Latin America. We refer to it as one of the ‘bricks’ of emerging international power worldwide, with Russia, India, China, and South Africa,” says Maria Crummett, USF’s associate vice president for global affairs.

Accordingly, Brazil represents “enormous opportunities” for a global research university like USF, which has major engagements with numerous possibilities around the world, Crummett says. Through IIE’s International Academic Partnership Program, USF is moving forward now to engage similarly with Brazil and its institutions as strategic partners.

“We do not yet have the kinds of links with them that are broad and deep across the university, but that is the exercise we are involved in now—to identify one or more like-minded institutions in Brazil that would allow us to engage students, faculty, administrators, and links to the community as well,” Crummett explains. She cites the Brazil Tampa Chamber of Commerce as the type of link that would help identify USF “in its context in the local business community and beyond.”

Developing research relationships with Brazil also is an objective, she says, pointing to “such huge areas that Brazil is confronting” like issues of global warming, sustainability, biodiversity, and emerging infectious diseases. “There are institutions in Brazil that are at the forefront of many of these issues, and we at USF also have the expertise and interest to work with like-minded institutions that are addressing them, where we can contribute equally,” Crummett says.

“We want to begin to build very long-term, productive, strategic partnerships,” she continues, but acknowledges that “very tight budgets” in Florida will play a role. “We have to identify those areas where we are going to commit the resources that will allow us to build those kinds of partnerships,” she says.

Even as USF builds these “wonderful and important” economic ties with Brazil, USF has to work on building its population of Brazilian students, Crummett says. “We have relatively few of them, so another angle of this whole initiative is to build our international profile to reach out to undergraduate, master’s, PhD, and postdoc students to interest them in pursuing part of their education in the United States, and specifically at USF. It’s a shortcoming on our end that we haven’t

engaged fully in clearly identifying USF as an institution that offers a multitude of academic disciplines and opportunities, in a state closely identified with Brazil.

“Brazilians know Florida. They know Miami, but Tampa still is under the radar in ways that the state and other cities have been identified. So how do we brand ourselves and get the attention of like-minded institutions and others in Brazil that may or may not be in the range that we are as a public research institution?”

She comes back to the language issue that officers at other universities cite. “We don’t have the level of Portuguese being taught here that would enable a deeper engagement because it is a kind of respect—a sign that you can say ‘hello,’ do some basic readings, and appreciate a culture that is significantly different from the rest of Latin America. Rebuilding our language capabilities is something we need to work on. It’s a resource commitment that the university needs to think seriously about,” she concludes.

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—K. Peter Kuchinke, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



**K. Peter Kuchinke**  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## Successful U.S.-Brazil Student Exchange

Language also is a challenge at the University of Pittsburgh’s Swanson School of Engineering because the domestic undergraduates it recruits for its student exchanges with Brazil “typically have zero Portuguese,” says Lalley. “So we start the recruitment process pretty far in advance,” requiring selected students to take at least one full semester of Portuguese language that the university teaches as part of its regular curriculum, Lalley says.





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—Kristine Lalley,  
University of Pittsburgh

The University of Pittsburgh also hosts a Center for Latin American Studies, which provides “pretty solid” Portuguese and Spanish language instruction as well as outreach and other educational activities “wrapped around that part of the world,” she continues. “We work very closely with our colleagues in that Center. In everything we do with Brazil, we lean on them to help us because they have great connections, in addition to language capabilities,” she declares.

The Brazilian undergraduates who come to the Swanson School are “remarkable,” she says. They arrive with “good academic preparation, and already know English, so they are integrated right into our system and take classes alongside our other students.” That also has helped the school build awareness of and interest in Brazil among its broader student body because “they get to know the Brazilian students and say ‘wow, they’re a lot of fun.’ The Brazilian students have been some of our best sales people on why Brazil is such a great destination for our students,” Lalley says.

In addition to undergraduate student exchanges, faculty and administrators also go back-and-forth between the Swanson School and Brazilian institutions. In 2010–2011, two faculty from Brazilian partner universities spent the entire academic year at the University of Pittsburgh as visiting scholars and “that was really exciting,” Lalley relates. One was a civil and environmental engineer from the University of Campinas, and the other was a mechanical engineer from the Federal University of Espirito de Santo. Both had strong research agendas on issues of sustainability, one with Fulbright funding and the other supported by various sources. Swanson provided them with office and laboratory space.

“They were terrific. They collaborated with our faculty, got some publications out of it, and did some conference presentations. All in all, that’s what you want to see with faculty exchanges,” Lalley exclaims.

The Swanson School looked forward this past fall to welcoming four Brazilian undergraduates for the full academic year, fully funded by their own government. “We had a few challenges making this work because we’re a large institution, not fully centralized, but we pulled some key players together. Everybody agreed we would be crazy not to host students from Brazil in this highly competitive program. Those students are the best,” says Lalley.

Pittsburgh sees them as a good investment from another perspective, as prospective graduate students. “They are looking to recruit the best PhD



**Maria Crummett**  
University of South  
Florida

students they can find, and hopefully we will see that happen,” Lalley says.

“We have a lot going on with Brazil. It’s one of the most important countries where we have been trying to actively develop more presence, through both sending and receiving students,” she concludes. But she makes clear that building long-term commitments in partnership with Brazilian institutions “is not easy. You have to work hard on that. It’s critical to have a lot of personal interaction, and if you rely only on phone and email, you’re going to be limited in how far you can go. You’re far more likely to succeed if you sit down with them. It’s a very high-touch culture. Otherwise, chances are you will go nowhere fast,” says Lalley, who has been to Brazil several times, although she acknowledges she does not speak Portuguese.

### Canada Seeks More Student Exchange With Brazil, Too

The U.S.-Brazil relationships notwithstanding, the United States isn’t Brazil’s only Western Hemisphere partner. Canada, too, is making a significant push to bring more Brazilian students north of the border and hoping Canadian students will go south as well through about 75 partnership and exchange agreements that presidents of universities in both countries signed at a roundtable in Rio de Janeiro last April.

In an initiative of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), Canadian Governor General David Johnston led a mission of about 30 Canadian university presidents to the conference. “I was struck that everywhere we went there, we met people who had

studied in Canada,” says Christine Tausig Ford, AUCC’s vice president and chief operating officer.

She emphasizes that with Canada, as with the United States, Brazil has “a lot of natural affinities.” One of them is in the economic realm, where Canada has more investment in Brazil than it has with India and China combined. Academic research collaboration between the two countries has already begun because each has long borders with oceans and frontiers and they share a focus on “some of the environmental challenges that come with those natural resources,” like the Amazon rain forest in Brazil and the Arctic in Canada, Ford says.

She acknowledges that Canada is pushing to expand its relationships with Brazil as part of a broader effort to internationalize its higher education by attracting and exchanging students with many countries. “There’s a real recognition that foreign students bring benefits to Canadian classrooms, as well as financial benefits, but it goes beyond that. Our universities recognize the need to provide their students

with an international outlook and education. There is a growing recognition in Canada that we need to get our students beyond our borders more frequently. Not everyone will be able to travel outside Canada, so one of the ways to provide an international outlook in our classrooms is to bring more Brazilian students to Canada,” Ford explains.

“Let me say how pleased Canadians will be to welcome so many of Brazil’s brightest students and researchers to our country. I know that Canadians will likewise deepen their knowledge of Brazil, and I am certain that these exchanges will bring us closer together and will lead to many shared insights and new discoveries,” Johnson declared in remarks at the Rio de Janeiro roundtable. **IE**

**ALAN DESSOFF** was an independent journalist in Bethesda, Maryland. A frequent contributor to *IE* since 2005 and former *Washington Post* reporter, he passed away at the age of 73 in December 2012, shortly after submitting this article for publication.

**University of South Florida students studied abroad in São Luís, Maranhão, Brazil.**

