Global Perspectives in Higher Education, Brazil: 
Race and Higher Education in the US and Brazil 
A Study Abroad Course offered through NYU Steinhardt 

August 9-12, 2010: Class sessions in NYC, 5:30-8:00 PM 
August 15-28: Course takes place in Brazil (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Salvador da Bahia)

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**Catalog description**

**Global Perspectives in Higher Education: Brazil, E98.215x, 3 pts., 30 hrs**

Designed to provide graduate students with an opportunity to examine Brazil’s higher education system and to discover and analyze similarities and differences in comparison to higher education in the United States. Through visits to universities and public and private colleges, we will engage in discussions with directors, faculty members, deans of students and their staffs and students themselves. Special lectures with sociologists and national officials will help us understand the goals and future aspirations of Brazilian higher education and how higher education meets the social, political, and cultural needs of society.

In addition to meeting on campus in New York, students will participate in a two-week travel program in Brazil that will provide an in-depth case study of its higher education system with particular attention to race and affirmative action. Includes lectures from scholars and visits to Indian colleges and universities to meet with faculty, administrators, and students. Additional sessions will be held with leaders of the national government commission on the future of higher education. Topics will include curricular opportunities; college admissions requirements; distribution of students by class and ethnicity; government policy and planning.

Students will also enroll in Independent Study, E98.2300, 3 pts.

**Additional program description**

Course examines race classification systems from an historical point of view in both the US and Brazil, then moves to an analysis of contemporary issues in race and higher education, especially regarding debates around affirmative action and the value of diversity in education.

**Course objectives**

Students will be able to:

1. explain the historical roots of racial classification in the United States and Brazil
2. describe contemporary US and Brazilian university admissions systems, including:
   a. public versus private university policies and institutional variety
   b. Affirmative Action or racial-quota policies
   c. legal frameworks underpinning university policies and individuals’ identification
   d. government involvement in policy and planning
3. evaluate arguments and evidence invoked by scholars, policymakers and university
   administrators on the benefits and deficits of race-based admissions policies
4. discuss the links between race-based university admissions practices and local, regional and
   national politics
5. frame their own theoretical positions about the origins, meanings, and possible solutions for
   debates on the issue

Required reading
For each class, I will assign reading from the following books and articles:

Stanley Bailey, *Legacies of Race: Identities, Attitudes, and Politics in Brazil* (Stanford University
Press, 2009), especially Introduction and chapter 7, “Affirmative Action”
Anthony Marx, *Making Race an d Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and
Brazil*, (Cambridge University Press, 1998), selected chapters
John David Skrentny, *The Ironies of Affirmative Action: Politics, Culture and Justice in America*
(University of Chicago Press, 1996), selected chapters
Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America, Origins and Evolution of a Worldview* (Westview
Press, Third Edition, 2007), selected chapters
Edward Eric Telles, *Race in another America: the significance of skin color in Brazil* (Princeton
University Press, 2004), especially Chapters Two (“From White Supremacy to Racial
Democracy”), Three (“From Racial Democracy to Affirmative Action”) and Four
(“Racial Classification”).

As background on, and critiques of, the idea of democracy racial, we will also read from:
Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and Slaves*, (various editions available, first published 1933)
Carl Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*
(University of Wisconsin Press, 1986)
Thomas Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Duke
University Press, 1993/2005)

I will also assign a small number of shorter articles, accessible on Blackboard or on the Web via
the JSTOR database, available online through Bobst Library. Please note: I expect you to do all of
the assigned reading, on time.

Course Overview
Brazil implemented affirmative action in 2001, stoking enormous cultural, legal and educational
debates. The terms of the debate, the players and the stakes are different in Brazil and the United
States, but the intensity of the issue is high on both sides. This comparative examination seeks to
elucidate the historical and cultural contingency of racial classification systems in both the US
and Brazil and to analyze contemporary controversies and social implications in the crucible of
higher education.

Some topics of sustained inquiry in the course:

1. **Racial categories and classification systems**: history of race classification in the US and
   Brazil. These categories are mutable and the systems are and have been very different in
the US and Brazil. A person considered black in the United States is often not considered so in Brazil. How have these two societies created and enforced race categories? Stuart Hall’s notion of race as a “floating signifier” and historian Martha Hodes’ analysis of the “mercurial nature and abiding power of race” structure analytical approaches to race classification.

2. Desegregation and affirmative action in higher education in contemporary US and Brazil: the post-WWII era in the US (1945-present) and the post-dictatorship era in Brazil (1985 to the present) as that was the beginning of the new constitution which has shaped the education system in its present state. The slavery and post-slavery (predicatorship) era in Brazil would be important for the defining of racial categories as well as how Brazil began to define itself nationally, but that would be its major function.

3. Higher Education issues: Affirmative Action policies in the United States; racial quotas; entrance examinations (the vestibular is the Brazilian university entrance exam, which is (only) partially analogous to the SAT); system design and funding models of private versus public systems in both countries; legal frameworks for race classification (census and other government instruments) and racial quotas in Brazil and Affirmative Action laws in the US; government involvement in university policy and planning.

Background and Issues
The racial quota system in Brazilian universities began with a law passed on 11/9/2001 instituting a system of quotas for students identifying as “negros” (black) and “pardos” (multiracial, mixed with black) with 40% of the state university spots going to those students. The law related specifically to the state of Rio de Janeiro, but 80 other schools followed suit, including schools in Brasilia and Bahia. Rio is the state where the racial quotas began, and the first part of the travel-progaram will take place there. The second part of the travel program will take place in Bahia, the state with the largest population of Brazilians of African descent.

One major controversy lies in the fact that the quotas are considered by some to be unconstitutional. The Brazilian constitution talks a great deal about racial equality and the notion of a “democracia racial” or “racial democracy,” is a term used broadly to express the belief that Brazil has escaped the racism and racial discrimination of other countries, most notably the United States. The higher education quotas, on their face, cut against the “racial democracy” notion because they consider race as one of the criteria for university admission. In turn, the national narrative of racial democracy has been criticized, in turn, as preventing effective action to address racial discrimination by denying its existence altogether. On both sides of the debate, some have suggested substituting social class or socioeconomic status as a consideration for university admission, contending that it is the more direct cause of underrepresentation of people of color within higher education.

Beyond the quota system being criticized by some as racist (or a form of so-called reverse-racism), including many non-white Brazilians, some critics argue that the system is too much of a copycat, a makeshift remedy based on the American system, which they say does not fit their country because: a) they never had a system of legal segregation following slavery; and b) a focus on race diverts attention from combating poverty.

In the US, many see race as more or less fixed from birth, an identity marker we are given and live with as a constant throughout our lives. Many Brazilians, however, do not identify their race in other aspects of their lives, so the creation of the quota system has been quite disrupting. Can one “choose” a race-identity? Can it change over time, or place? Can a person who lives as branco (white) research her genealogy, find ancestors of African descent, and rightfully claim to
be pardo (mixed race)? How does the importance of race in a competitive university-admission system reduce the importance of social class or other categories of identification?

Some Brazilians believe that there should be a series of interviews or evaluations external to the bubbles filled out standardized tests to determine one’s race or general background (based on objective and subjective criteria) in order to decide whether or not the applicant should be eligible to benefit from the quotas. Some schools require that applicants send in a photo with their application (this is typical in Brazil as they often request a photo with your resume when you apply for a job) and do not only rely on self-selective polling (i.e. on tests). One interesting case that is often cited in opposition of this visual method of determining race is that in 2007, a set of twins attempted to gain admission to the University of Brasília, and they were considered to be of two different races based on their phenotype.

All of the above will be compared to the US history of desegregation and higher education Affirmative Action programs, with a focus on contemporary legal and cultural debates.

Sampling of Brazilian universities with affirmative action programs include:

- Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná
- Universidade de Brasília
- Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
- Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense
- Universidade Estadual da Paraíba
- Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte
- Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul
- Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina
- Universidade Federal de Santa Maria
- Universidade Federal de São Carlos
- Universidade Federal de Sergipe
- Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica da Bahia

This list is not comprehensive; universities use racial quotas in some form in Bahia and São Paulo as well.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Short Essay
I will ask you to submit a shorter (6-8 page) essay on the topic of race in historical context. As you plan the essay, ask yourself: What are the most important questions that the authors raise? What answers do they provide? How do they justify these answers? What historical evidence do they use and do you agree with their interpretation(s) of this evidence? Why or why not? My major criteria in evaluating these papers will be the CLARITY of your argument and the EVIDENCE that you offer in support of it.

Scholarly Blog, aka online reflective journal
You will create a scholarly blog on the course topic and update it with: 1) your analyses of class readings and activities; 2) your reactions to guest lectures and site visits while abroad; 3) relevant newspaper and other articles and links on the course topic, and 4) visual images relevant to the course. Students will complete at least eight substantive blog entries over the duration of the program (before and during travel combined). I will give you more guidelines on this component as we move forward.
**Research paper**
The research paper (approx. 15-20 pages) will be on a topic of your choice, drawing together themes and issues that we examine in the course. This paper can address your specific interests as they intersect with course content. I must approve the topic in advance of travel based on a review of literature you submit. I will give you other guidelines well in advance of the due date.

**Participation**
Because we will ask questions of history, your participation in this course is critical. I will encourage you to ask questions of lectures, of the sources we read, of yourself, and each other; participate, have fun, be troubled.

I expect that you will read all assignments thoroughly before each class and come prepared to ask questions, engage in discussion and listen thoughtfully to your classmates and me. Listening is part of participation, and therefore your careful attention to discussion is important. Please remember that attendance ≠ participation. Attendance at all class sessions does not automatically confer a participation grade of A. I absolutely expect full attendance, and therefore simply coming to every class session will be regarded as “average,” which translates into educational bureaucracy as a grade of C. *Participating in class* will increase your grade beyond the C.

**Attendance**
Since the course depends on an exchange of verbalized ideas and experiential learning, attendance is critical. I expect you to attend, on time, all class sessions. If you must miss a class, you remain responsible for completing that meeting’s readings and also submitting to me any written work due on that day. Missing class does not allow you to submit work late: instead, you should submit your work before your absence. I excuse absences only with medical or other third-party documentation.

**Note on Form**
Written work must be typed in 11 or 12 point font (I prefer Times New Roman), double-spaced with page numbers and normal margins. Papers should be stapled, not paper-clipped. I expect you to follow formal style in your written work and properly cite all sources and quotations. A good manual can help immensely, and I recommend the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th Edition, by Joseph Gibaldi. Another excellent book, and one you should own and refer to often, is Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*.

**My policy on late work, extensions, incompletes**
I do not accept late work and I do not grant extensions. Written work is due at the start of class on the dates stipulated unless otherwise directed. I will not grant incompletes in this course except in the most calamitous circumstances, usually medical.

**Academic Honesty**
I take very seriously any breach of university policy on academic honesty, including plagiarism, submitting the same work for two courses, or other academic fraud or dishonesty. Plagiarism will normally result in failing in the course, not just the paper itself.

**GRADING**
Short essay, due before travel commences: 25%
Blog entries: 25%
Discussion/Participation: 10%
Research paper, due three weeks after end of course: 30%
**Evaluation Standards**

**A = Outstanding.** “A” students demonstrate commitment to class in attendance, participation, and preparation; this means virtually perfect attendance, reading assignments fully, and showing interest during class time. They ask questions, are able to connect past learning with the present, show initiative, and are not afraid to be creative. Written work demonstrates comprehensive and solid understanding of the material, and presents thoughtful interpretations, well-focused and original insights, and well-reasoned commentary and analysis. Students also demonstrate skillful use of source materials, illuminating examples and illustrations, fluent expression, and no grammatical errors. [A = 94-100 points; A- = 90-93]

**B = Good.** “B” students may miss class from time to time, but are generally well prepared and participate positively. Their commitment to class may vary: at times they may seem bored or distracted, at other times engaged and involved. They have interest in the subject and have the ability to master novel material. Some students under-utilize their skills, but such students tend to improve over the duration. Written work demonstrates a complete and accurate understanding of the material, presents a reasonable degree of insight and broad levels of analysis. Work reflects competence, but stays at a general or predictable level of understanding. Source materials, examples, illustrations, are used appropriately and articulation/writing is clear. Papers have been carefully proofread. [B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83]

**C = Fair.** “C” students miss class too frequently and show little interest in course readings and class discussion. They are not visibly committed to class and body language often expresses boredom. Such students may be talented, but for whatever reasons have clearly not mastered the given material. They have poor study habits and try to minimize their study time. Written work is only fairly correct, superficial, incomplete, or expresses some significant errors or weaknesses. Source materials may be used inadequately or inappropriately, and arguments lack concrete, specific examples and illustrations. Writing/articulation is vague, hard to follow, or cluttered with technical errors. [C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73]

**D = A student in difficulty.** “D” students miss class frequently, participate rarely, show lack of interest, and have generally misunderstood much of what we have done, said, and/or read (if they prepared or read anything to begin with). Written work demonstrates serious errors in understanding, fails to express the most rudimentary aspects of the material, and may contain little logical development in its arguments. Sources may be used inappropriately or not at all, and writing/articulation appears deficient. [D+ = 67-69; D = 64-66]

**F = Fail.** Work is unacceptable, not submitted, or not attempted. This is also the grade for plagiarized work or work that breaches university policy on academic honesty. [F = 63 and below]

**Sample Schedule of Class Meetings and Travel Schedule**

This is a schedule in progress; the general timeframe will include:

**August 9-12:** New York City
Evening Class sessions Mon-Thurs 5:30-8:00 PM. Topics will include:
- Course overview and orientation
- Readings on history of race ideologies and classification systems in the US and Brazil
- Readings on organization of university system in US and Brazil
• Guest lectures with possible speakers: Barbara Weinstein, NYU history department; Peter Lucas, author of *Viva Favela: Photojournalism, Visual Inclusion, and Human Rights in Brazil*; NYU higher education faculty
• **Short paper due** before travel commences.

**August 15-28: Brazil**

**Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro**
• Morning course lectures; afternoon site visits (schedule TBD as sites confirmed)
• Topics above continue in increasing depth. Course readings continue.
• Site visits include
  o Public and private universities, as arranged (PUC-Rio, UNIRIO, UFRJ, etc)
  o Government ministries, as arranged
  o Editors and writers of “Raça Brazil” magazine
  o National Historical Museum of Brazil (*Museu Histórico Nacional*)
  o Tours: city tour, favelas, sites of cultural interest

**Salvador da Bahia**
• Morning course lectures; afternoon site visits (schedule TBD as sites confirmed)
• Topics above continue in increasing depth. Course readings continue. Particular focus on Afro-Brazilian history, as most slaves imported to Brazil were brought through Salvador’s ports; according to most recent census, Salvador’s population is approximately 20% white, 15% black and 65% *pardo* or mixed-race.
• Site visits include
  o Public and private universities, as arranged (UFRB, UCSal, etc.)
  o Government ministries, as arranged
  o Projecto Axé, humanitarian NGO working with street children
  o Slave castle, city tour, Pelhuorino, Museum of Afro-Brazilian history