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### 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Arts Award – Outcome Report

#### **Overview**

With many thanks to the Miller Arts Scholars Program, I had the opportunity to travel to Brazil this summer to study its dance culture. Last year, I began crafting ideas and planning my research project. With the assistance of my faculty mentor, Katie Schetlick, who had previously traveled to Brazil to study dance, we began to discuss research options and she helped me to articulate my artistic vision. I wanted to observe Brazilian dance as an art form, but also as a social practice. I wanted to understand the role of dance within Brazil's complex society. My initial questions included: How does Brazilian dance relate to race relations and how people shape their individual identities? How does Brazilian dance culture present itself in an international realm, during the World Cup, a time when the country will host a half-million tourists from around the world? I intended to capture my experiences on film to eventually create a short film including footage of Brazilian dance and interviews.

With the support from the Millers Arts Scholars Program I was able to purchase plane tickets to and from Brazil. I also received funds to purchase a new digital camera (Canon EOS 70D) and other supplies to support my research.

Overall, my experience in Brazil was incredible. I learned so much about Brazil's history, culture, and politics. I met many people who welcomed me into their culture and openly shared their thoughts and insights about Brazil. I hope that I am able to translate my experience into a successful film to share with others.

#### **Brief Itinerary**

I traveled to Brazil in late May. I stayed in Salvador (the third largest city in Brazil) for four weeks while I participated in a study abroad program (operating in conjunction with the University of South Florida and Brazil Cultural) where I took a course in Portuguese and another in Afro-Brazilian culture. I stayed with the hospitable Carvalho family in the vibrant neighborhood of Rio Vermelho. After the study abroad program ended, I traveled to Recife (a city 13 hours north of Salvador) to meet another UVA student (Rosa) in Olinda (a small town outside of Recife known for its Carnival celebrations). After about a week in Recife, Rosa and I traveled together to Rio de Janeiro where we stayed for about five days. Next, I returned back to Salvador where I flew out of the country back to the United States.

Brazil is an incredibly vast country with many different regions and cultures. For this reason, I am very thankful to have had the opportunity and resources to travel to three different cities to compare the demographics and cultures of each.

#### **Limitations**

After arriving in Brazil, I soon realized how ambitious my project was. I chose film as my project's medium, which introduced several challenges. Originally, I wanted to have my camera on me at all times, enabling me to capture all of my experiences. But I quickly realized that this is not feasible for two reasons. First of all, it was not always safe to walk around with a very expensive camera around my neck. I never felt unsafe in Brazil, but I was advised to be very careful with my belongings. Walking around with expensive electronics had the potential to draw unwanted attention to myself. So unless I was traveling in a large group, I rarely took my camera with me for safety reasons. Secondly, I always tried to remain respectful of the culture I operated within. I didn't want to come off as rude by filming Brazilians occupying their daily routine and environment. I was also around a lot of poverty, so I wanted to remain respectful in this sense as well.

With all of this said, I realize that I chose a challenging medium for my project. As a result, I did not capture all of the experiences on camera that I would have liked. However, I still believe that film is one of the best ways to represent my findings because dance is such a physical and visual form. And despite my limitations, I believe that I still captured some really interesting footage with my camera and iPhone. Additionally, I learned a lot from my experience about the process and challenges of documenting another culture.

## **My Research**

Throughout my trip, I worked to acclimate myself into Brazilian culture while absorbing as much information regarding dance as possible. In Brazil, dance and music are abundant. And they are also interconnected. Where there is live music, there is dance – and vice versa. In regards to dance, I took the role as both a participant and an observer. I viewed dance in various environments: instructional – I took several dance classes in different forms, performance – I attended shows and observed street acts, and social. I used my camera to record the dance events I witnessed and to conduct interviews with Brazilians I met. While dance remained the focus of my research, I also became interested in investigating Brazilian culture more broadly. Below I have summarized some of my observations:

- *Dance as a universal language:* In Brazil, at times it was difficult to communicate with Brazilians due to the language barrier. My Portuguese skills definitely improved over the course of my trip, but I missed having the ability to communicate with others seamlessly. When communicating through words was difficult, it was nice to have the ability to communicate through body language, gestures, and dance. Because the body is the instrument, it has the ability to transcend cultural boundaries. Of course, Brazilian dance forms are very unique to the culture and Brazilians moves much differently than I was used to, but I think there is something very powerful about people coming together to move, regardless of where you are from. So when communicating through language was difficult, it was nice to relate to someone else in a different way through dance.
- *Dance as a form of resistance:* The study abroad program I participated in focused on Afro-Brazilian culture. As the program progressed, I began to connect

the dance forms I observed to the larger conversation of Afro-Brazilian resistance in society. Through dance, populations are affirming their presence in society and are preserving historical movement traditions. Capoeira serves as a good illustration of this idea. Capoeira began during slavery as a way for slaves to fight against their masters. It was disguised as a dance in order for them to continue practicing. The form was once banned from society, but populations continued to engage in it. Today, the form is still used to remember the Afro-Brazilian past, but it is also used as a form of resistance in the current society. Afro-Brazilians still are oppressed in society and lack proper representation in the government. In this way, capoeira continues to act as a form of resistance. Candomblé shares a similar history of oppression in Brazil. Candomblé is an Afro-Brazilian religion that incorporates dance, sacrifice, and the summoning of spirits through the human body. Like capoeira, this religion was once banned for its beliefs and practices. So today, this practices acts as a form of resistance and Afro-Brazilians asserting their rights and beliefs in society.

- *Dance as a way to assert identity:* I often asked people if they could describe when they learned to dance. Most people could not identify exactly *when* or *how* they learned to dance because it's how they grew up and it is something they have always known. I found that dance is not just an activity for many Brazilians, but it encompasses part of peoples' identity. The traditional dances have been around for years and serve as a way for people to connect with their past.
- *Relationship between dance and tourism in Brazil:* During my trip, I was also interested in the relationship between Brazil's genuine culture and the culture observed from an outsider's perspective. Many people travel to Brazil for its music, dance, and celebrations. What people need to realize is that what Brazil projects to the rest of the world is not always the most accurate. For instance, a huge celebration like Carnival is much more complex than outsiders realize. It involves ideas of inclusion and exclusion that are deeply engrained in society. After my trip, I became more aware of how culture can be changed, altered, and packaged for foreign audiences. It was interesting to hear Brazilians speak about this concept in relation to popular forms such as samba, capoeira, forro, etc.
- *Brazil as a resilient society:* I learned a lot about Brazil during my time in the country. The country is currently undergoing many changes and developments. It just hosted the World Cup and is going to host another international event in 2016 (the Olympics). While the country is quickly becoming more dominant in the international realm, it still has many internal conflicts regarding poverty, political representation, sexism, etc. While problems continue to exist, I observed how resilient the society is. One of the ways I observed this resilience is through dance.

## **The Final Project**

Currently, I am working on my final film project that will include footage from my trip and interviews. I am working on the film's storyboard and ways to organize my footage. Also, with some extra money from my trip, I have hired someone to transcribe and

translate some of my interviews. The film will be completed by April when my fourth year outcome report is due.

