

Elena Dimitri

## **Project Overview Narrative**

**Project Title:** Brasil; Dança e Relações

### **Project Description**

With assistance from the Arts Award, this summer I will travel to Brazil to collect research on Brazilian dance culture to view its role as both an art and social form. I want to see if dance has any impact on race relations or individuals' interactions with diversity. Through travel, conversations with citizens, and participation in dance forms, I will observe the state of diversity in Brazil. After returning to the United States, I will begin working on a performance to present my findings through dance and film. The presentation will include collected audio and photographic highlights of my experiences. From an outsider's point of view, I hope to examine how Brazilians today interact with the question of diversity and if dance provides a shared space for a variety of races and ethnicities. What is dance's role in an individual's self-identification? Dance is an art form requiring the body as its medium. How does this embodiment affect an audience's perception of who is performing?

At UVA, I am currently studying Elementary Education, American Studies with a concentration in race and ethnicity, and Dance. I have also taken two semesters of Portuguese courses. While these interests are varied, this research project will act as a way to integrate them all.

First, I'd like to explain my fascination with Brazil and why I choose it as my research destination. Brazil is a country with a wide range of demographics and a deeply rooted history of complex race relations, possibly even more so than the United States. The country is vast in its geography as well as cultural makeup. Different regions in Brazil are full of large populations of Portuguese, Natives, Africans, Europeans, Arabs, and Japanese – the list continues. Like many societies, Brazilian society classifies different groups of people according to race and class. However, because Brazil is so diverse, these classifications become malleable. For instance, an individual's wealth may alter their racial classification, which becomes controversial. I have learned about America's racial history extensively, but want to learn how Brazil compares. Due to Brazil's size, I realize that I will not formulate all-inclusive conclusions regarding diversity, but I want to observe if the classifications by race and class are evident to the eye of a visitor.

Brazil is also known for its rich dance culture. It constitutes an important social form and many people participate in traditional forms like samba as well as more modern forms. From my current perspective, dance is an essential component of Brazilian history and life and I want to observe it and participate in it firsthand.

In Brazil, I want to travel to different regions with rich histories (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador, Bahia). Throughout my travels I want to witness and participate in dance events. I also hope to meet people of different ages, ethnicities, and occupations to

observe their awareness of and experiences regarding the question of diversity, social relations, and dance. I will capture these interactions with my camera (Nikon D500) and an audio recorder. I will also keep a written and visual journal of my experiences, which I will update each day. In addition to social interactions and dance events, I hope to capture the energetic movement that helps to define Brazil.

While in Brazil, I will participate in a traditional study abroad program in Bahia through UVA. Through this program, I will enroll in a language intensive course as well as a cultural course. These two courses will enrich my overall experience by improving my communication skills and cultural understanding. This program will also provide appropriate housing and structure, which will make my stay more secure.

While I plan to participate in the traditional study abroad program, I also hope to work with organizations that use dance as a mode of cultural understanding. For example, I aim to learn from Grupo CoMteMpu, a contemporary dance company from Bahia that works with urban intervention. Other options include visiting the arts program at the University of Bahia (UFBA) and taking samba and capoeira classes. Talking with individuals in the dance community will most likely provide me with insights that relate directly to my research questions.

After the traditional UVA study abroad program, I hope to lengthen my stay in Brazil by a week or two, enabling me to visit other regions of the country. This will require more planning.

When I return to the United States and start school next fall, I will begin to work on my outcome presentation. I will create a dance piece that incorporates my visual footage and audio recordings. I want to generate movement that reflects my interactions and experiences in Brazil. In addition to the live performance, I plan to create a short artistic film that can stand-alone. I hope that this film will serve as a way for others to learn about my experience. It will become a part of an artistic archive addressing Brazilian race relations and the significance of dance in this conversation.

Most of my concerns revolve around the fact that this will be a new experience for me. I have never been to South America before. I do not speak Portuguese fluently and I worry that the language barrier might limit the quality of research I conduct.

Another concern includes *how* I conduct my research. With any type of documentary work, it is important to be mindful of representation. I need to think clearly about how I want to display my experiences and the individuals I encounter. I also need to be sure to receive permission to use all of the information I collect, whether it is from an individual or from a place. Given these concerns, I plan to talk to several professors at the university who have dealt with documentary work or photojournalism.

I have always admired Brazil: its culture, diversity, natural wonders, and music. The 3<sup>rd</sup> year Arts Award will enable me to travel to Brazil to observe its rich diversity and to see how dance fits into this conversation through anecdotal interactions. I have no doubt that

this onsite experience will be exciting, educational, and inspirational. After returning to the United States I will create film and dance to record, reflect, and analyze my experiences.

## **Timeline**

Fall 2013

- Complete research paper
  - Will cover a topic that will inform my research in Brazil
- Finalize itinerary
- Research visa information

Spring 2014

- Apply to study abroad program
- April: Presentation of Progress at the Center of Undergraduate Excellence

Summer 2014

- Travel to Brazil to conduct research, and dance
- Compile all audio/video recordings and photographs

Fall 2014

- Begin working on final product (dance performance and film using footage and recordings)
- Perform work (in progress) in the Arts Scholars Showcase

Spring 2014

- Presentation of Outcome at the Center of Undergraduate Excellence
  - Present film and/or dance performance
- Perform work in the Spring Experimental Dance Showcase

## Budget

For this grant, I request funds for my plane ticket to Brazil. See below:

<b>Airfare</b>	<b>\$2000.00</b>
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I plan to cover the remaining cost of airfare from a combination of saved funds from my summer and year-round jobs, family contributions, and potentially applying for another grant through the College of Arts & Sciences Deans' Scholarships.

I plan to apply for the fourth-year Arts Award in April to cover additional costs for the trip. I project the overall trip budget to be as follows:

Airfare	\$2000.00
Food/Lodging	\$1600.00
Transportation within Brazil	\$500.00
Dance Experiences	\$200.00
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$4300.00</b>

## **Evidence of Participation in the Arts**

### **Participation in the Arts at UVA**

- Course Work: In the process of completing all dance minor requirements
- Performed in Fall Experimental Concerts (2011, 2012) and Spring Experimental Concerts (2012, 2013)
- Choreographed for Spring Experimental Concert (2013)
- Interned for Professor Claude Wampler and traveled to NYC to help produce her show entitled “N’a pas un gramme de charisma”
- Performed in Final Fridays at the Fralin Art Museum
- Participated in workshops and guest residencies with Susan Weisner, Christopher K. Morgan, members of Pilobolus, members of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company
- Leadership Roles: Publicity Chair of Dance Committee at UVA

### **Participation in the Arts Scholars program**

- Seminars: Enrolled and participated in CASS 1010 (2011, 2012, 2013) and CASS 1011 (2012, 2013)
- Leadership Roles: President of Student Executive Board (2013-2014 School Year)
- Performed and volunteered at Arts Progressive event (Fall 2012)

## **Examples of Work**

<https://vimeo.com/65193039>

This video captures a segment of the piece I choreographed for last semester’s Spring Experimental Concert entitled “Propelled Progression.”

<https://vimeo.com/76707071>

This is a film I created this semester in Dance for Camera. For the project the entire class filmed segments of improvisational movement. From the same body of footage, each student created a unique film with different narratives. This was my result.