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A comparison of Brazil and the United States: How higher education can shape and be shaped by history, politics, culture, and economy

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A COMPARISON OF BRAZIL AND THE UNITED STATES:
HOW HIGHER EDUCATION CAN SHAPE AND BE SHAPED BY HISTORY, POLITICS,
CULTURE, AND ECONOMY

A Thesis Submitted
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Introduction

Many Americans know precious little about Brazil. They may know about the “Big Jesus” in Rio de Janeiro, more properly called Christ the Redeemer. Many know that a thing called Carnival occurs but do not understand its significance or that the entire country comes to a screeching halt during this four-day celebration. Many recognize the tune of “Girl from Ipanema,” one of the most recognizable Brazilian songs, though few could affirm that it was written by the renowned composer Antonio Carlos Jobim. Some Americans may know that samba comes from Brazil, but would be unlikely to distinguish it from salsa or zumba. Americans credit Brazil for their outstanding soccer technique and some of the most loyal fans of the sport would know that the World Cup will be held in Brazil in 2014, followed by the Summer Olympics in 2016. Few Americans know that the national language of Brazil is Portuguese and not Spanish. Few know that Brazil has outpaced the United States by electing a female president. While some Americans may recognize that Brazil has a growing economy, they would still define Brazil as an underdeveloped, rural nation with few resources.

These misconceptions and more were made abundantly clear to me throughout my six-month stay in Brazil in 2011. In hopes to expand my own personal strengths and perspectives, and to correct some of the above stereotypes for which I myself was guilty, I participated in a student exchange program called the *FIPSE Iowa-Midwest Brazil Exchange on Business and Agriculture*. I was not only exposed to unique customs and cultures, but also to the Brazilian educational system. While my experience did indeed allow me to grow tremendously as an individual, it also shed light on a much broader picture: there is a shocking contrast not only

between the American and Brazilian cultures, but also in the academic environment in which university students are educated.

Why is this important or noteworthy? Brazil may not seem like a nation of salient importance in the United States' foreign affairs. It is a peaceful nation that shares many values with the United States. It is not considered a high-power nation, but it is certainly on the rise. This thesis will argue that, in order to cooperate, negotiate, and coexist in the future with Brazil, it is necessary to understand the way in which Brazil is educating its youth in comparison to how the United States is doing so since the products of these educational systems are the future leaders of their nations.

Also, this thesis will analyze the reasons these educational institutions evolved so differently by reviewing how they were influenced by the intricate histories, the differing political leadership, the eccentric cultures, and the fluctuating economies of each nation. It will also evaluate how these different university educational models influence the societies in return, in the sense of requirements in the dubious job markets and the graduates who may or may not be professionally and/or civically equipped. Finally, this thesis will review the relations between the United States and Brazil and how they may build a productive economic relationship in the future based on their priorities in education.

Understanding Brazil

Although the United States is considered a young nation, Brazil is even younger: the Brazilian independence occurred nearly a half century after that of the United States. It follows that the systems of Brazil – from social welfare to health, from industry to education – developed

and continue to develop with reasonable delay compared to those of the United States. Aside from this separation of time, Brazil and the United States are also divided geographically by about 30 longitudinal degrees of Central American nations. These separations of time and space have yielded two distinct countries in terms of culture and structure. This section will summarize the creation and development of Brazil as a nation.

In 1500, Portuguese explorers accidentally landed on present-day Brazil. They encountered millions of indigenous Americans and a wide variety of natural resources (Rohter 11-12).

Although the Portuguese conquerors were greatly outnumbered by the Native Americans, they were able to dominate because the natives were neither unified nor were they immune to the smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, and influenza the explorers introduced (Rohter 12, Tiku 26).

The first slaves from Africa arrived in 1538, and the slave trade equipped the Portuguese with enough manpower to transform the land from cluttered landscape to an ideal location for the exploitation of brazilwood, sugar, cotton, tobacco, beans, manioc (or cassava) and even gold (Rohter 11-14). Thus, present-day Brazilians are descendants of three major groups: Native Americans, African slaves, and European settlers (Branco 29).

When other European nations caught wind of the opportunities in Brazil, they were eager to claim their share. The Portuguese had to defend the eastern coast from the Dutch, the French, and less directly the Spanish. These threats are attributed to the founding of the two largest and most important present-day Brazilian cities, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Defending the Portuguese colonies also developed unity and a sense of identity among the colonists in Brazil (Rohter 16-17).

Brazil gained independence from Portugal in a unique way. In 1808, the Portuguese royal family was threatened by Napoleon's power and chased out of the mother country. They

became refugees in the once-inferior colonies of Brazil. Suddenly, Brazil was home to a Portuguese empire that had far-reaching power and an influential standing on commerce and trade. Shockingly, when Napoleon was defeated and it was safe for the royal family to return to Portugal, the son of the king was more loyal to his New World refuge than his Old World motherland. Pedro I became the first Brazilian Emperor as his father King João VI returned to rule Portugal. Thus, the Brazilian independence was likely not a treasured memory for the Portuguese royal family, but it was relatively peaceful and void of bloody warfare (Rohter 19-20).

Since its independence, Brazil has had a turbulent political history. By the time Pedro I passed the throne to his son, Pedro II, corruption and mistrust were deeply engrained in the political system. Favors were granted and state positions were filled based on relationships instead of qualifications. In 1889, with strong pressure from the growing military, slavery was abolished in Brazil. That same year, a coup stripped power from Pedro II and distributed it into the collective hands of the national military, a period known as the First Republic. This non-official government consisted of rigged elections and weak leadership that ignored the interests of many regions and social classes (Rohter 21-22). According to Rohter,

“Education was not emphasized because the oligarchic families saw it as a potential threat to their authority. Since voters were required to pass a literacy test, the elite feared that greater schooling for the masses would swell the size of the electorate to levels they regarded as uncontrollable” (22).

The First Republic ended abruptly in 1930 after decades of political inbreeding, racial and class inequality, and yet, population and economic growth. An uprising surfaced after an unpopular successor was chosen for presidency. According to Tiku, “the revolution symbolized a

significant shift in power, from the traditional oligarchs to the military, technocrats, young politicians, and eventually the industrialists” (28). The presidency was granted by the unofficial and unstable junta to a man named Getúlio Vargas, who was from the previously non-influential state of Rio Grande do Sul. Rohter summarizes the Vargas era as follows:

“From 1930 to 1945, he ruled as a dictator, shuttering Congress, censoring the press, and jailing and torturing his opponents or driving them into exile. He admired Mussolini and Hitler and flirted with fascism until the entry of the United States into World War II made it clear he was better off favoring the Allied side...” (Rohter 23).

Indeed, during this World War II period, Vargas brought Brazil international recognition by sending troops to fight for the Allied forces in 1943. Ironically, however, Brazilian troops were “fighting for democracy abroad while living under a dictatorship at home.” When the war ended and Brazilian civilians demanded a democracy, Vargas was forced out of office, only to win by a democratic election in 1950 (Tiku 29-30).

Certainly Vargas is credited for economic growth, from erecting a steel mill to founding a national oil company. He was a hero for modernizing Brazil and defending the poor and their labor laws. However, his corrupt administration and intimidation of political enemies finally caught up with him in 1954. He was again forced down by the military and ultimately committed suicide (Rohter 23).

To recover from a long, politically unstable term by such a controversial leader, Brazil was in need of a president with constructive ideas. Juscelino Kubitschek de Oliveira is known for his “fifty years in five” ambition to dramatically and rapidly advance the nation. Kubitschek is mostly known for moving the national capital from the coastal city of Rio de Janeiro to a small

pocket of land in the central state of Goiás. Brasília, as the capital was named, was built in four short years to represent a progressive, modern Brazil. In addition to this accomplishment, Kubitschek is credited for the development of the domestic automobile industry, the expansion of steel mills, the construction of dams and power plants, and the production of appliances. However, all of this expansion and growth came at a high cost. Brazil's national debt ballooned during this period, and in 1960 Kubitschek began taking out loans from the International Monetary Fund that plagued the nation for decades to come with repayment demands (Rohter 24-25).

Unfortunately, this debt was not the only issue after the five years of Kubitschek's leadership. Rohter explains, "...Almost immediately after Kubitschek left office in 1961, the political situation began to unravel, and not until 1998 would an elected civilian president again manage to complete a full term in office" (25). A truly turbulent period was to unfold in Brazilian politics.

Kubitschek's successor was Jânio Quadros, who remained in office for a mere eight months before unexpectedly and mysteriously resigning. The vice president, João Goulart, who had been a member of both Vargas's and Kubitschek's administrations, took office only after the military and civilian opposition had agreed to transform the government to a parliamentary form. A prime minister was appointed in an effort to weaken the powers of the mistrusted Goulart. Indeed, even the United States was starting to worry about Goulart's populist tendencies, such as extending the right to vote to illiterates, limiting residential property ownership, restricting profits by foreign companies, and planning to nationalize privately owned oil companies (Rohter 25-27).

In 1964, Goulart was forced into exile after a series of opposing riots and rallies. The United States wholeheartedly supported the coup and even was accused of instigating it, though no substantial evidence of this has been found. This 1964 coup in Brazil was an inspiration for several other nations throughout South America which were also stifled under social inequality, economic exploitation, and Communist threats (Rohter 27-28). In the wake of Goulart's dethronement, "Congress declared the presidency vacant, leaving control of the country in the hands of the armed forces" (Rohter 27).

Thus began Brazil's 21-year period of military rule. This period began with an Institutional Act in 1968 that "suspended the constitution, dissolved Congress and all of the state legislatures, and imposed censorship," and was littered with human rights violations, violent dictatorship by army forces, and resistance bred by repression. Throughout this suppressive environment, the military government tried to force national pride upon people with slogans such as "Brazil: Love It or Leave It." Government-led projects of infrastructure and investment caused economic growth in the 1970s known as the Brazilian Miracle (Rohter 28-30).

Slowly, due to global factors and more democratic military leadership, the dictatorship dissolved (Rohter 31); however, it was not until 1985 that the military rule ended and a civilian president was elected—not through a free, democratic election, but through an Electoral College vote (Tiku 31). Tancredino Neves was elected but died a month after his inauguration. The vice president José Sarney took office facing two blinding challenges: transitioning from military power to a democracy and fixing the economic crisis.

"In political terms, the transition from a military government to a democracy was remarkably successful. But in economic terms, the picture was mixed. Brazil had undergone a huge transformation since World War II. The country had developed

an impressive industrial base, but the closed economy meant that these industries were not prepared to compete in the world markets. A tradition of wasteful and irresponsible government spending was a drain on the economy” (Tiku 31).

Finally, in 1989, a true democracy was restored and a new constitution was written. Millions of Brazilians elected President Fernando Collor de Mello and he began the process of recovery by reducing the national influence on the economy, but unfortunately, he was impeached three years later for corruption. His vice president took office but made no substantial improvements.

Then, in 1994, Fernando Henrique Cardoso was elected president largely due to his popular “*Real Plan*” which reduced inflation, balanced the budget, fixed the exchange rate, and reformed the national currency into *real*. He also continued to privatize state-owned utilities and businesses and attempted to attract foreign investment. His efforts, particularly the *Real Plan*, received much popular support and gave Brazilians overdue hope for the future (Tiku 32-34).

Cardoso, being the first president in nearly forty years to serve a full term, was the first to effectively tackle social issues in addition to the fiscal and economic priorities. His administration succeeded in improving the national health system, expanding elementary education through a *Bolsa Escola* program, and lowering illiteracy rates (Branco 48, Einaudi 3).

The *Real Plan*’s effect on the economy made educational progress more possible:

“Once the dragon of inflation was vanquished, it was no longer thought necessary to put your child to work at an early age just to help the family make ends meet. During Cardoso’s first term, high school graduations increased 35 percent, growing more in absolute terms than in the previous 50 years” (Rohter 169).

His presidency, however, also experienced plenty of controversy. Some of his privatization measures caused job loss among the blue-collar workers, and his effort to balance the budget and lower the poverty levels meant increasing taxes and interest rates and reducing social security benefits. Nevertheless, he was reelected in 1998, but the country was in a truly dire economic state:

“The country was on the brink of financial disaster...the budget deficit was close to 7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and investors again began to pull money out of Brazil...the high interest rates keeping the *real* in place were dramatically increasing government debt and preventing economic growth... by mid November [1999], the *real* had been devalued by 37 percent, the economy had contracted, and unemployment had increased, fueling general discontent” (Tiku 36-37).

Weaknesses in the *Real* Plan were becoming ever more apparent and the economy was extremely volatile, causing Cardoso to lose much of his initial popularity (Tiku 37).

In 2002, Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva was elected into office and became Brazil’s first blue-collar president from a poor upbringing and with only an elementary school education. It was not only this, but also that this was his fourth attempt at presidency, which made him an exceptionally inspiring character in Brazil. Motivated by his commitment to the working class, he founded the political party entitled “Worker’s Party” (Tiku 33). Tiku presented a clear picture of Lula’s social and economic obstacles beginning in 2002:

“The real challenge Lula faced was how to keep the economy growing while simultaneously reducing poverty and inequality. He based his strategy on macroeconomic stability, strong export promotion, and wealth

redistribution...Lula implemented strict fiscal policies, overseeing economic stabilization, falling levels of inflation, and decreasing foreign debt. He managed to increase government savings, pay off the balance owed to the IMF...steadily reduce interest rates... [revamp] the pension system, [increase] the minimum wage, and [help] millions of poor families through social welfare programs...”

(38).

Also during his presidency, Lula expanded the *Bolsa Escola* program that Cardoso began. His *Bolsa Familia* initiative awarded cash to families who upheld their children’s school attendance. Today, this program is the largest conditional cash transfer program in the world (Einaudi 3).

Due to his first term success, Lula won the 2006 election by a landslide, but still faced many challenges, such as correcting the high interest rates, reducing the high government debt-to-GDP ratio, reducing bureaucracy in business, improving education, justice, and security, and developing infrastructure (Tiku 38-39). All these issues lingered throughout his second term and greeted candidates in the 2010 election.

Currently, the Brazilian politics, albeit corrupt in many ways, is more in line with first-world nations, with a democratic government which, as previously stated, recently elected its first ever female president in 2010, Dilma Rousseff. The political structure, as determined by the 1988 Constitution, very closely models the American system of the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches. Unlike the United States, however, Brazil has multiple strong political parties, making it impossible for one party to dominate or govern in isolation (Branco 51-52). Also unlike the United States, voting is obligatory between the ages of eighteen and sixty-four. This law, which is not uncommon in the Central and South American regions (“World

Factbook"), yields both positive and negative consequences: "Although this policy has been open to abuse via the manipulation of the poor and the illiterate, it does compel everyone to participate in the political process, and the problems of low turnout as experienced in the U.S.A. and U.K. are not a feature in Brazil" (Branco 51-53).

Brazil is the fifth largest country in the world, slightly larger than the continental United States (The Economist 122-123, 236-237). It is the only Portuguese-speaking country of South America and comprises about half of the continent's area. It has the fifth largest population in the world with just fewer than 200 million people (The Economist 122-123). About 86.5% per 1,000 population lives in an urban area, as compared to 82.3% in the United States (The Economist 122, 236).

Brazil has a very eccentric culture. In general, the Brazilians' greeting and social interactions are informal. They take care to give personal attention to each other and to visitors. Within family settings, interactions are quite formal and it is common to address parents and grandparents as "Mr." or "Mrs." They consider fashion, cleanliness, and appearance of great importance. They frequently observe both federal and state holidays, leading to inconsistent schedules. The Brazilian culture does not welcome long-term projections or rigid punctuality: even for important meetings or formal situations, it is not rude to arrive and begin late. Government and administrative processes are naturally slow, and can be delayed by a multitude of factors. The people live in the moment and if an opportunity is lost, they find a "jeitinho" or "little way" to a creative solution (Branco 54-104). Brazilians are regularly exposed to American culture through music, movies, and tourism, though most of the depictions are inaccurate and exaggerated. Using English in business or conversation, even non-fluently, is considered chic.

Brazilian policy has always struggled to keep up with its economic potential. A common theme throughout its history, as Rohter puts it, was that “economic growth continued to outpace political change” (21). However, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Brazil began its climb into the international spotlight. In 2001, Jim O’Neill accurately predicted that four economies would develop significantly in the upcoming decade: Brazil, Russia, India, and China (known as the “BRIC” nations) (O’Neill). Indeed, from 2001 to 2011, Brazil progressed from ninth place to sixth place in its share of the world’s gross domestic product, or GDP (O’Neill; Evans). This has offered significant competition and opportunity for the well-established “G7” nations, including the United States, that comprise over half of the global nominal GDP.

While Brazil’s economy has indeed been growing, it is not growing as quickly as Korea’s, Russia’s, or India’s. A large factor contributing to this slow growth is the distribution of the labor force.

“Brazil’s large population is primarily employed in low-wage, labor-intensive jobs such as agriculture, retail sales, and construction...Most experts point to poor labor productivity as the main culprit behind Brazil’s slow GDP growth. About 20 percent of the population is employed in low-wage agriculture jobs, an industry that represents just 8 percent of the economy” (Tiku 44).

Another issue is the unequal distribution of the benefits of this growing economy.

“...Patterns established during Brazil’s colonial history have continued to influence its economy and culture. In the seventeenth century, a small white elite controlled vast landholdings and dominated the economy and political system over a huge nonwhite majority. Four centuries later, politics have changed and the

economy has developed, but Brazil is still a very rich country full of many poor people” (Tiku 25-26).

Nevertheless, Brazilian markets are strengthening. Brazil’s economy is largely fueled by consumer goods, foods, oil, and ethanol (Pereira). Additionally, “with the world’s largest reserves of iron ore, as well as large deposits of bauxite, manganese, uranium, and precious gems, Brazil is exceptionally rich in natural resources” (Tiku 25). Three major industries of Brazil will grow in the future based on their market capitalization: Materials (building materials, chemicals, forest products, metals, etc.), Energy (crude oil and oil products), and Financials (banks and financial institutions) (Tiku 52-54). These markets, instead of directly benefiting a large population of Brazilians, will be an opportunity for the rich to get richer and for foreign investors to expand their reach to South America.

Understanding the United States of America

Now that Brazilian history, politics, culture, and economy are clearer, it is necessary to also take a close look at these same components of the United States, keeping in mind the way these characteristics could have affected the structure of education. Contrary to Brazil’s relatively peaceful independence from Portugal, much blood was shed for Americans to gain independence from Great Britain, and war continued to be commonplace in American history and culture. However, quite unlike Brazil, the United States has remained a constant democratic nation for nearly two and a half centuries.

When the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus sent word that he had found a New World of abundant resources, much of Europe responded. Throughout the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries, the Spanish settled in the South and Southwest, the French claimed the North, and the British colonized the East of present-day U.S.A. As the various ambitions outgrew the land available, the Seven Years' War emerged and lasted from 1757 to 1763. The British emerged victorious, owning all North American land east of the Mississippi River. Soon thereafter, however, the British colonists grew weary of the taxes imposed by the mother land and the famous Tea Party exemplified the increasing discontent (Teague 35-36).

The American Revolution began in April 1775 in Lexington, Massachusetts and a little over a year later the Declaration of Independence was written and signed, declaring the colonists' unity with each other and against Britain. This July 4, 1776 date is known as Independence Day and is fervently celebrated by present-day Americans, even though the full independence was not secured until 1781 when the British surrendered and the war ended (Teague 36-37).

With the birth of the United States of America, new demands surfaced to provide a foundation for this highly strained and war-tattered nation. To prevent a repeat of history, there was a careful effort to create a constitution that was uniquely appropriate for the U.S.A:

“The ‘Articles of Confederation,’ the wartime manifesto drafted to unite the colonies, was deemed inadequate to address the post-Revolution challenges of governing the country. Summoned to Philadelphia in 1787 to revise it, the state delegates (later immortalized as the nation’s ‘Founding Fathers’) preferred to start with a blank slate – a metaphor for the newly independent country. The result was the U.S. Constitution, a document that has provided the political and legal framework for the country since its ratification in 1788” (Teague 37).

With this blank slate and the war endured to earn it, the country could truly define itself to be independent, both in its international position and in its developing national culture. The country also established a system of checks and balances through its three branches – executive, legislative, and judicial – that would prevent a central power in government. The Bill of Rights, added in 1791, protected the individual rights of American citizens, such as “free speech, the right to bear arms, and the right not to incriminate oneself” (Teague 30-31). United States democracy, established in these crucial eighteenth-century years, has been preserved throughout history without substantial fluctuation in power or law. Teague expresses how the Constitution has endured the test of time:

“The ever-shifting distribution of powers between the different branches of government is a constant source of controversy. Applying the sometimes ambiguous words of the 200-year-old Constitution to today’s societal challenges provides job security for constitutional scholars and Supreme Court justices alike. Yet few would dispute that the document is remarkable in having articulated the values and aspirations of successive generations of Americans since 1788” (31).

This attitude continued as the new nation pressed onward, upward, and Westward in the 1800s. Through various purchases, territorial wars, and land treaties, the United States reached the Pacific Ocean, fulfilling what settlers considered to be their “manifest destiny.” However, this expansion was at the great expense of Native Americans who had long inhabited and dominated the land. They were deceived, mistreated, and eventually forcibly relocated to designated territories. Battles continued between U.S. troops and Great Plains tribes between 1862 and 1876, at high cost to both sides. According to Teague, “Territorial wars, disease, and

confinement to government reservations reduced the Native American population from an estimated 4.5 million at the onset of European colonization to 350,000 by 1920” (38-39).

Throughout this same period, tensions were growing between the North and South that culminated in the American Civil War. While the North’s focus was on industry and small-scale farming, the South was supporting massive labor-intensive plantations of tobacco, sugar cane, and cotton. These different priorities developed into extremely polarized attitudes toward African slavery. While the stronger Northern states abolished slavery in the early 1800s, the Southern states continued to require dependable, cheap manpower, and between 1619 and 1865, three million slaves were imported to the United States. As the North gained momentum and support by the newly added western states, the South “felt the political and economic tide [shift] against them... When... Abraham Lincoln was elected President (1860), the Southern states defiantly announced they were seceding from the union and forming a Confederacy.” The tragic, bloody Civil War between the North and South lasted from 1861 to 1865 and resulted in the South’s surrender, the formal abolition of slavery in the United States, and the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln (Teague 40-41).

While the South struggled to recover from the Civil War, the North launched into the Industrial Age as businesses boomed, empires materialized, and true wealth was attained. National transportation helped to advance the developing country. Additionally, the United States was expanding internationally by opening the Panama Canal, purchasing Alaska and Hawaii, and gaining an influence in Guam, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba (Teague 43).

Even though the United States attempted to remain isolated from the World Wars, the nation could not escape involvement due to its growing influence. After the Allied victory of

World War I in 1918, the U.S. experienced a strong economy, mass consumption, and mass production. Then in 1929, the stock market collapsed and the country dove into the Great Depression. The “American Dream” was no longer a common luxury and many families lost their jobs, businesses, and life savings through the 1930s. Then, just as the New Deal was providing relief and a slow recovery was unfolding, the U.S. was attacked by Japan in 1941 and was thrown into World War II. Years later in 1945, after the Allied war victory, the United States counter attacked Japan by dropping two atomic bombs (Teague 43-44).

The United States clearly no longer had “isolation” intentions. They were involved in the post-war reconstruction of Western Europe and intervened when Communist influence expanded to Asia by invading both Korea in the 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s. The U.S.A. also became the prominent superpower to challenge the Soviet Union during the Cold War’s proliferation of atomic and nuclear weapons (Teague 45).

Although an atomic war was averted, turbulent times were ahead for the nation. President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, as was Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. Meanwhile, the Vietnam War was polarizing the nation, with the popular opinion being that “stemming the Communist tide half a world away was no justification for the loss of 58,000 American lives.” President Nixon finally signed a peace treaty with North Vietnam in 1973, but resigned from presidency a year later after the Watergate scandal came to light. Eventually in the 1990s, the nation returned to a booming economy and established more stable relations abroad. Any sense of security was lost, however, on September 11, 2001 when the United States endured a terrorist attack killing 2,800 civilians. The nation once again launched a war with Iraq and Afghanistan (Teague 45-47).

Throughout its war-plagued history, the United States has remained an international superpower. It is the fourth largest nation in size and the third most populated nation of the world (The Economist 236). It remains a melting-pot nation of immigrants: about 40% of the present-day population are descendents of the mostly European immigrants that arrived in Ellis Island between 1892 and 1954. As of 2000, nearly 70% of the nation's citizens are considered White, while 13% are Hispanic, 13% are African American, 4% are Asian, and 1.5% are Native American Indian and Alaskans. By 2050, the percentage of Whites is projected to fall to 52% while the Hispanic American and Asian American populations will increase to 25% and 10% respectively (Teague 27-29).

The federal government has steadily expanded its power, but each of the fifty individual states holds a certain amount of autonomy. Each state has its own government, and some laws vary from state to state. Unlike Brazil, political parties have become extremely polarized between liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans due to the nation's electoral structure (Teague 32-33). Voting is voluntary in the United States and only about 57% of the eligible population casted ballots in the 2008 federal presidential election ("Statistical Abstract of the United States").

While Brazilians define themselves greatly on the basis of their rich culture and unique customs, United States culture is founded on the ideals and values of freedom, hard work, and equality. Opportunities of individuals are valued and protected by the greater American society. Due to this individualism, there is no guilt associated with hard-earned success. The purpose of working in the U.S. is not only to earn an income, but also to define oneself professionally. Americans are fixated on controlling time: successful time-management and punctuality are highly appreciated traits. The United States is known for its informal culture and interactions

among its citizens may be perceived as inconsiderate to foreigners (Teague 48-63). The international opinion of the United States seems to be a paradox of an endearing yet enviously influential nation full of overconfident and ethnocentric people. As Teague argues, “In today’s global village, who can afford not to understand the U.S.A, the only remaining superpower and, by most standards, the world’s most important nation?” (8).

While the Brazilian economy is experiencing slow and steady growth, the American economy is experiencing turmoil and recession since the 2008 economic collapse. The last four years have burdened the middle class with “massive job losses, skyrocketing unemployment, lower wages, and a growing number of American families at risk of foreclosure and poverty,” and have saddled the United States government with a financial overhaul and skyrocketing debt (Swagel).

Basic Education in Brazil and the United States

Understanding the history, politics, culture, and economy and of a nation can reveal much about its priorities. In cultures that evolved independently from one another, a term like “education” can have completely different meanings and certainly different implementation. At the subconscious level, there is a hidden meaning and motivation to this idea of education. According to Rapaille, “It is obvious to everyone that cultures are different from one another. What most people don’t realize, however, is that these differences actually lead to our processing the same information in different ways” (5). Therefore, it is reasonable that education can be greatly variable between the United States and Brazil – two unique cultures with unique histories – and that these differences between them may have important ramifications.

Indeed, it is clear from the preceding sections that these two countries developed completely differently; consequently, their social systems have developed from two very different foundations. In terms of higher education specifically, two contrasting models have emerged. Each higher educational model has its strengths and weaknesses that will be described, but first, it is beneficial to compare the primary and secondary educational systems and the emphasis that society and government place on education.

The United States government spends about \$11,700 per person per year on education. In Brazil, this value is about \$1,700. However, both of these values are about 5.5% of the respective nations' GDP and between 14 and 16% of the respective governments' expenditures (Wolfgram|Alpha). Compulsory primary education between the two nations differs significantly – the United States requires 12 years whereas Brazil only requires eight (NationMaster). Brazilian education at the primary and secondary levels has been crippled by underfunding and limited resources. Children are suffering from slow progress through or simply failure to complete grade school.

“...More than one quarter of children will not complete basic education and only one half will complete secondary education. The fact that students are lagging behind is not only a problem for the students themselves, but for the educational system overall. A negative consequence of this is increased inefficiency and wasteful resources expenditures. Too many students spend excess time in primary education (in the form of grade repeaters and students who previously dropped out and are returning to school), overburdening capacity at the lower levels” (Thinking Brazil 25).

High drop-out rates at the secondary level are attributed to students' low expectations even after receiving their diploma. Attending higher education in Brazil is extremely difficult due to either the challenge of passing the competitive entrance exams of public universities or the financial burden of paying tuition of private colleges (this phenomenon will be explained more in the subsequent section). According to Ricardo Paes de Barros, a researcher at the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economic Research,

“The reason why Brazilian teenagers are not remaining in school... is because of the increasing difficulties in attending college. Universities are not expanding their ranks to accommodate the increasing number of high school students and graduates—only 15 percent of the population enters college. Teenagers thus drop out of high school because they see the pursuit of a college degree (and necessary preparation for it) as futile” (Thinking Brazil 25).

Samson Schwartzman, a prominent researcher and writer of Brazilian higher education, also recognizes this unfortunate gap between basic and higher education in Brazil. He adds that private primary schools give students from wealthier families an opportunity to receive a higher-quality education and therefore better access to public universities:

“Primary education is supposed to be provided by local and state governments, and its quality is usually quite low... Those who can afford it usually go to private schools. ... there is a strong correlation between being in a private secondary school and having access to the most prestigious courses in public universities” (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 15).

Although former Brazilian President Lula only received a primary education, this case is widely believed to be unique. In general, it is reasonable to assume that most of the upcoming

leaders from Brazil will be college graduates. Therefore, the following section will break down the history, structure, and priorities of higher education in the nation in order to better understand how these future leaders are educated.

Higher Education in Brazil

Brazil had institutes of post-secondary education before the nation itself was established, forming in cities like Salvador and Rio de Janeiro in the late 1700s, decades before Brazil gained independence from Portugal in 1821. They were professionally-focused schools under government regulation, modeled after the highly selective French system (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 3). It was not until the 1920s that these types of institutions were deemed “universities” (Thinking Brazil 23). The first official university in Brazil was the University of Rio de Janeiro in 1920 and the development continued with the University of Sao Paulo in 1934 with many more following (Laus, and Morosini 111-147). Due to political and economic instability in the past, however, Brazil has faced major delays in significantly developing its higher education (Thinking Brazil 25).

Brazilian university programs are more course-intensive and vocationally specialized than United States university programs, which instead have a large focus on general education courses during undergraduate studies (Mechitov 65-74). Despite – or probably due to – a shortage of qualified specialists in Brazil, the focus of the university is to train professionals with the best available knowledge of science and technology (Paul, and Wolff 523-554). This current educational structure emerged from a long, winding history of leaders, reforms, and influences.

Much of the significant development and change began in the 1960s when enrollment increased nearly tenfold in merely fifteen years (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 1). This sudden demand provoked the founding of private institutions, which were and are much less regulated by the government (Thinking Brazil 23). During that same period the first significant educational reform in Brazil occurred, brought about by highly educated groups wanting to raise the Brazilian standard in education. This 1968 reform aimed to standardize all institutions of higher education and to adopt the departmental structure, credit system, research institutes, graduate programs, and a general education model similar to that of the American university (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 3-4).

While these ideas were attractive in theory, they were not strong enough to succeed in the state of political and social unrest of that period. According to Schwartzman,

“As new legislation was introduced in 1968, applications were rising, and it was impossible to keep the system so small. This was also a time of intense street demonstrations against the military authorities in power since 1964, which gave rise to several years of student-based urban guerrillas and violent government repression, including tight political control over political activities at the universities. The 1968-78 decade was also a period of rapid economic growth, with new jobs being created and intense social mobility. When combined, these factors led to a complete revamping of the country’s higher education, not necessarily in the directions prescribed by the 1968 legislation” (“Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 4).

The credit system that emerged from this reform was successful in a merely statistical sense, but it demobilized the implementation of a “general education.” By the credit system, students compete through entrance exams for the few spots available in a certain field. After being admitted, they are destined to remain in that college until it becomes their career, with no chance of transferring without re-examination to a different college. In other words, the student is admitted to a single college, not to the university as a whole. By this system, the general education became overlooked because in most cases, both the staff and student prefer to focus on their chosen specialty (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 5).

The consequences of the reform were not entirely negative. The organization of departments became firmer and the research institutes and graduate programs became more successful, giving Brazil a new edge in the international community of advanced education. It also provided the long-term benefits of being able to educate its own leaders of the future instead of sending promising candidates abroad to obtain advanced degrees (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 5).

As the result of increasing demand and stagnant resources extendable by the public university, more private institutions emerged throughout the country. The requirements and accreditations of these private-sector institutions were lenient, but due to their less vigorous entrance requirements, they provided opportunities for certain students where there once were none. By 1985, there were far more students in lower-quality private schools than in higher-quality public institutions. In general, nationwide, there was far more variation among institutions of higher education than the 1968 reform intended, not only between public and private sectors, but also among the country’s five geographic regions (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 7-8).

Then in 1985, when the dictatorship ended and the civilian government came to power in Brazil, many leaders viewed the change in politics as an opportunity to improve higher education. This indeed was a promising step in the right direction, but there were many conflicting ideas on what the major issues were and what the best way to solve them was. Upon his inauguration, President José Sarney announced the appointment of a Commission that would involve 25 professionals who were to complete a report in six months (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 2, 9). There was representation from all the relevant sectors of higher education of the time:

“...Slots were given to student, business and trade-union leaders, to members of private, Catholic (both conservative and liberal) and Protestant schools, to university bureaucrats, members of teachers associations, and persons identified with the full range of ideological preferences from Communists to the conservative military. Finally, some places were given to persons involved with scientific research and graduate education...” (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 10).

In an effort to represent all interests, the government appointed a group with extremely contradicting ideas and one that struggled to effectively collaborate and communicate. Their final report provided little direction for a positive change in policy of higher education. However, there were a few important recommendations in the report that represented the general priorities of the era. One was that universities should indeed vary from one another, contrary to the 1968 reform’s ideals. Instead of a universal model to which all schools should conform, individual institutions can and should take unique directions and structures, according to the Commission. Secondly, the report suggested that individual institutions should have the liberty and

responsibility for “academic, administrative and financial matters,” but with regular evaluation of competency (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 12). Simply stated, the Commission recommended a shift of power from the State level to the university level, but with continued evaluation and financial support from the State.

In fact, the notion that the federal government was primarily responsible for funding public universities was never challenged by the Commission. The concept that students or their families should have to pay for their education was readily dismissed, mainly because it was determined that any price, no matter how small, would be unaffordable for most families. Charging for higher education would further limit access for lower-income classes which already had a disadvantage due to low-quality primary and secondary education (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 14). In fact, any issues of social access to or individual investment in higher education were scarcely discussed by the Commission. According to Schwartzman,

“While the political debate on internal governance and external evaluation consumed most energies, questions of equity of access and opportunity, the corporatist nature of the professional and educational legislation, and the actual needs of society for educated persons, although present in the final report, were almost ignored” (“Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 15)

The Commission did, however, identify a complex issue with the existence of professional councils. While the idea of professional councils was to regulate and standardize similar degrees nationwide and to ensure careers for individuals entering into a certain field, they yielded additional, less favorable outcomes. First, the councils produced a large collection of

minimum required courses that limited the amount of creative autonomy that each individual institution or program had. Secondly, the councils' regulations on ensuring a market niche for its graduates put a significant strain on the economy. Schwartzman explains,

“If resources are available or the market can bear it, professional privileges are maintained at the expense of the general public and there is no limit to the expansion of the educational system. Diplomas, rather than the knowledge associated with them, is all that matters. When economic conditions do not allow for it, the result is professional unemployment and useless diplomas, and the first to suffer are the graduates from the less prestigious schools and careers” (“Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 16).

In Schwartzman's opinion, the obvious solution to this issue was to deregulate and de-standardize institutes of higher education and to decrease government influence and control. The Commission, however, spelled out no clear solution to the problem of professional councils that they so clearly defined (“Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 16).

The final report of the Commission was criticized by many parties almost immediately after its release. Some notable opposition was from the teachers associations concerning the report's recommendation to encourage institutional differentiation and appoint educational authorities non-democratically. Other opposition came from the Federal Council of Education and the Education ministry for the report's suggestion to make individual universities more autonomous and essentially discredit their intention to tightly control universities. The bill that emerged from the 1985 Commission was protested so heavily that it was withdrawn (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 17-18).

Then, in response to the *Real Plan*, enrollment in Brazilian higher education again inflated throughout the 1990s, doubling from 1.5 million to 3 million (Rohter 254, Schwartzman, “Equity, quality and relevance in higher education in Brazil” 173). Again, newly founded private institutions were largely responsible for absorbing the increased numbers of students, and higher education became more diverse. This expansion, however, did not significantly change the composition of students – Whites remained the majority at about 76% of the national student population in 2002 (Schwartzman, “Equity, quality and relevance in higher education in Brazil” 174), whereas Whites represent only about half of the general population (Branco 28). Also, despite these historic surges in higher education enrollment, to this day the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds attending tertiary education remains lower compared to other nations, and “the main explanation for the limited size of Brazilian higher education is the small number of students coming out of secondary education” (Schwartzman, “Equity, quality and relevance in higher education in Brazil” 175).

The improved economy and increased enrollment created the perfect formula for collaboration between the academic sector and productive sector. President Cardoso attempted to use this opportunity for applied education and to award institutions for creatively and uniquely differentiating:

“The economic reforms of the 1990s increased demands on the system of higher education to improve the quality of education and academic research... In response, the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso adopted new approaches designed to promote better performance and a stronger link between institutions and the productive sector. These reforms encouraged differentiation within the

private sector... and created a more competitive environment for higher education as a whole” (Thinking Brazil 23).

Differentiation was occurring not only within the private sector, but also between the private and public sectors. Throughout this period and presently, the students who succeeded in attaining the highly competitive spots in the public universities received the highest quality of education at no tuition fee, while the remaining students paid high tuition to receive a lower-quality education from a private institution. However, the opposite is true in the primary and secondary education levels, where private education is superior and public education suffers from severe underdevelopment. Therefore, there is an advantage for the students of wealthy families to earn a public university education because their families could afford high-quality private primary and secondary education (Schwartzman, “Equity, quality and relevance in higher education in Brazil” 176, Thinking Brazil 25). This system is highly criticized:

“The government over-invests in higher education at the expense of basic education. Free college tuition, guaranteed in the 1988 Constitution, serves as a subsidy to the rich, as only the children of wealthy families are competitive enough to gain entrance to universities (thanks to private secondary education). Such distortionary measures perpetuate income inequality and help explain the lack of college education among Afro- Brazilians, who are often too poor to purchase private education for their children” (Thinking Brazil 25).

Because of this phenomenon, competition has developed between the public and private sectors of higher education to receive federal funding. Both types of institutions feel that their student demographic is more deserving:

“...If the students could not pay, supporters of private education argued that the government should subsidize their institutions; while supporters of public institutions concluded that, if the state was to pay, there was no reason for the private sector to remain private. The state should increase the public sector so as to provide a place for all who wanted it, and allow the private institutions and their patrons to bear the full cost of their activities” (Schwartzman, “Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 14).

The differentiation in Brazilian higher education that occurred throughout the 1990s offered other options, although many still unattainable for a large portion of the population. For this reason, when President Lula took office, he focused his attention away from the quality of existing institutions and instead on the accessibility of higher education. In an effort to tackle the social issue of education, Lula implemented rules and regulations on both private and public institutions that caused a big strain:

“New regulations prevented public universities from charging tuition, raising and managing money independently, or introducing any measure for external assessment. These regulations increased the dependence of public institutions on the state...However...the state has been unable to provide the necessary funding, resulting in a shortage of resources, salary constraints, and little incentive for individual academic initiatives. Lula’s government has also placed stringent restrictions on the private sector to create similitude with the public institutions. These restrictions...were unnecessary budgetary burdens on private institutions causing them to cut salaries and halted the process of differentiation that began in the 1990s” (Thinking Brazil 23).

It is no wonder that goals of educational quality, set by various political leaders in the last half-century, have not been met by public or private tertiary educational institutions. Although reforms were well-intentioned, the resources and funding did not match the demand or expectations for change. Institutions are caught in the middle of inflexible bureaucracy and cumbersome regulation. Another factor that feeds into this unfortunate cycle is that when Brazilian educators and faculty feel trapped or stretched thin, they have historically used lengthy and inhibiting strikes to provoke change – the most recent nation-wide strike of public university employees occurred from May to September 2012.

Higher Education in the United States of America

The first United States college was erected in 1636, six years after settlers arrived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. It began small, inefficient, religious-oriented, and significantly modeled after the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom. Today, it is Harvard University. Harvard was influenced by the circumstances of its era and government. In turn, according to Christensen and Eyring, it shaped the structure of future universities over the next hundreds of years. These universities followed the same basic “DNA” of Harvard with traits like face-to-face instruction and a general education core (Christensen and Eyring 33-35). Based on the Harvard “DNA” model, the goal of the university is to equip students to communicate, think critically, morally evaluate, and practice responsible citizenship – in addition to acquiring a job (Bok 58-81). Today in the United States, 83% of the relevant (i.e. college-aged) population is enrolled in tertiary education (The Economist, pg).

In its earliest stages, prior to the American Civil War, the American university was structured with a classical education and a slew of required curriculum including “mathematics, logic, English, and classics, with a heavy dose of Latin and Greek... with two important objectives: training the intellect and building character.” Religion was integrated not only into curriculum, but also disciplinary guidelines. Higher education was widely considered dull, unnecessary, and purposeless; however, there was a final, highly popular course offered to graduating seniors that was a culmination of their education and a combination of several fields, preparing students for civic life and focusing on issues of morality and current events. With only one rewarding class amidst years of aimless memorization, student enrollment declined proportional to the population from 1850 to 1870 (Bok 12-14).

By the late 1800s, the dynamic of higher education in the United States was changing to a more practical approach. Life sciences and modern languages were becoming more prominent in addition to commerce and engineering. Religion and faith were no longer considered central to a college education – moral or otherwise – and instead were offered as elective curriculum. The Morrill Act of 1862 had the objective of forming land grant universities that would focus on teaching agriculture and mechanic arts – subjects of practical, vocational value – “without excluding other scientific or classical studies” (Bok 26). According to Bok, “Inspired by the model of the great German universities, [institutions] encouraged research, welcomed science, and introduced Ph.D. programs to build new cadres of scholar-teachers.” In fact, Harvard president Charles W. Eliot repealed nearly all required classical courses and instead allowed students to entirely choose their own path for four years of coursework (Bok 14-15).

This degree of student choice was not widely accepted because it enabled students to take many light introductory courses instead of truly digging into any college-level curriculum. Bok

explains, “For many undergraduates, college was not a serious intellectual experience but an excuse for making social contacts and enjoying the good life...The casual attitude toward coursework reflected the spirit of the times more than the nature of the curriculum.” However, this era also birthed extra-curricular activities, such as social clubs, fraternities, and sports (Bok 16-17), which today are highly valued American experiences that demonstrate student preparedness for the working world.

By the early 1900s, both extremes of the course-requirement spectrum were represented by different colleges in the United States: unregulated student choice was highly criticized for the lack of accountability or subject depth, and the traditional, classic model was criticized for its lack of practical application or relevance. Both were unfitting and inappropriate for the present-day demands. Slowly, through the decades, curricular models were morphing to incorporate both classical coursework and specialization. Students were required to choose a major but also to take several courses from a variety of traditional sectors, in other words, receive a “liberal arts education” (Bok 17-18). This system was certainly more versatile, but not necessarily more clear: “In 1942, the Progressive Education Association concluded its eight-year study of undergraduate education with the mournful lament that ‘Liberal arts college faculties seldom state what they mean by liberal or general education. Perhaps they do not know’” (Bok 23).

Nevertheless, this more modern model pioneered by liberal arts colleges was adopted by public universities after World War II in an effort to make universities more appealing for a larger population. Indeed, enrollments grew due to the growing appeal of the university in addition to the changing social and economic environment:

“Encouraged by the GI Bill and later by the demands of an increasingly sophisticated economy, larger and larger numbers of young people crowded into colleges. Existing universities expanded, and new ones were founded. From 1945 to 2000, the number of B.A. degrees awarded annually rose almost eightfold... higher education was no longer reserved for the elite but now attracted a majority of American youth... As applicant pools grew larger, the best-known institutions became highly selective, teachers’ colleges evolved into multipurpose universities, and community colleges sprouted like mushrooms. Many new students (and their parents) were more interested in preparing for jobs than in acquiring a broad liberal arts education. Responding to this demand, more and more colleges began to offer vocational programs. Before long, the number of students choosing vocational majors exceeded the number concentrating in traditional arts and sciences disciplines” (Bok 18-19).

Thus, specialization in American universities became of higher priority, but not without preserving a minimum course requirement of liberal arts. Universities became more research-oriented, new fields sprouted in response to women’s and minority rights, and America’s international prominence promoted outreach programs by universities to other world regions. This mid-to-late 1900s era represented the establishment of honors programs, the advancement of professional opportunities for undergraduates, and the implementation of technology and internet in the classrooms (Bok 20).

True to history, this dubious balance between liberal arts and vocational education was criticized, despite the university’s effort to achieve both breadth and depth through modern innovation:

“Disapproving voices from within the academy and beyond attacked universities for lacking a clear vision for undergraduate education, failing to counteract the growing fragmentation of knowledge, sacrificing the liberal arts in favor of vocationalism, and neglecting undergraduates to concentrate on research” (Bok 21).

While that may be true, this level of specialization has also enabled profound advancements in knowledge. Therefore, specialization is likely here to stay:

“No one yet has demonstrated convincingly that the drawbacks of fragmentation have outweighed the contributions to knowledge made possible by specialization. Nor has any general theory or universal method emerged to knit the separate disciplines together. The unity of knowledge remains an elusive ideal” (Bok 25).

This specialized education with a focus on professional gain is also propagated by factors outside the university. American employers tend to value high skill-level in focused areas, which in turn convinces college students that they must choose a university and a major that will most likely secure them a reliable job. Secondly, students in general are placing higher value on financial success and professional gain than ever before, while the desire to acquire “a meaningful philosophy of life” has dropped significantly. The modern student demand in the higher education market, then, is more on training for a job than on acquiring any sort of liberal, moral, or civic education (Bok 26).

Hence, there is no period in American higher education that scholars agree to be a “golden age,” possibly because, to this day, scholars do not agree on a vision of higher education that is superior to the others experimented throughout history (Bok 21-22). The majority of

colleges simply require the selection of one major course of study in addition to a few courses from three major liberal arts sectors – humanities, sciences, and social sciences. Otherwise, there is much differentiation both in quality and purpose among institutions of higher education, “featuring large colleges and small, secular and religiously affiliated institutions, single-sex and co-ed student bodies, and a rich mix of educational opportunities and programs” (Bok 23-24). There are varying types of institutions – public universities receiving considerable government aid, private colleges with higher student tuition, community colleges and for-profit universities featuring low-cost vocational training – all creating their niche in the versatile higher education market.

In short, the classic English model that Harvard borrowed from Oxford to educate, not train students, while still traceable and surviving, is no longer relevant or popular in modern United States culture. However, few institutions have relieved students of their liberal arts requirements altogether and many still offer a wide range of majors in non-vocationally oriented disciplines (Bok 27-28).

Conclusion

Vocationalism: The Modern International Priority of Higher Education

In a time of uncertainty and renovation in higher education, it is important to understand how the United States stands in a global perspective. The United States has stood alone for many years with its persistence to include liberal, non-vocational curriculum in its higher education in addition to specialized research and training. Brazil, however, like many other nations, has long

been more vocationally specialized in its curriculum, focusing on the future job opportunities of the students instead of a thorough understanding of the past and world.

In the recent decades, the United States has drifted more towards the common vocational model simply because students are demanding it. Especially in the volatile American economy, it is more important than ever that college graduates are equipped with the necessary skills to attain and retain employment. The universities have also had to pick and choose their most viable programs because government and state funding is slipping and universities are becoming more and more dependent on student tuition. Despite these strains, however, American universities and colleges have clung tight to liberal arts education in at least a portion of their required coursework. Defenders of liberal arts education accredit frequent career moves in graduates' lifetimes and the demand for versatile skills and knowledge in the weak job market as validation.

The United States has been slow to accept this specialized educational model because higher education in the U.S. was born with a classical education motive. That classic model held on through the War of Independence from Britain, the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War II, the birth of technology and internet, and many other such pivotal moments in U.S. history. All of these events provoked change and revision in education, but a liberal education was never completely removed from curriculum. However, these drastic, modern developments in combination with a struggling economy are taking a toll on the liberal education foundation. Education in the United States, especially for-profit universities and community colleges, are evolving to be more similar to the institutions of Brazil that have clear-cut departments of defined fields, limited flexibility, but very much success in producing professionals.

Additionally, the growing requirement by employers for specialized higher degrees (for example,

Master's and Doctorate degrees) in the U.S. implies that it is moving towards the Brazilian-like system of placing more value on vocational training and expertise than on general knowledge.

One major criticism of the current American system is the over-specialization of subjects within the university, which many scholars say are fragmenting the system to a point that certain discoveries in one field may not receive proper recognition or achieve their potential impact on society due to the lack of understanding by outside fields. In short, the criticism of the American university is the very backbone of Brazilian universities -- specialization. With a lower population of qualified, specialized professionals in Brazil and the desire for many to become specialists, the fragmented nature of their model does not receive similar criticism.

Although higher education itself developed later in Brazil, the nation's model focused on vocational training much earlier in time – unlike the United States' original university model, Brazil higher education always had an eye toward the future, toward development and growth, toward commercial and professional success. The departments may be rigid and, in the public sector, very competitive and imbalanced, but they have a focus and purpose that many U.S. universities still lack. This focus on professional, material, or social success may be attributed to the country's third-world status in combination with its abundant exposure to first-world wealth. Even the lowest-educated Americans have easier access to quality healthcare, employment opportunities, and living standards than many Brazilians. The fact that Americans receive a liberal education means that for some jobs, a graduate with any degree is considered. This phenomenon is nonexistent in Brazil, however, because a degree in a certain field means the student *only* received education pertaining to that field.

However, by depriving its graduates a liberal education, Brazil is subtly suffering in at least one important aspect: throughout fairly recent history, Brazil went from no voting rights to

obligatory voting. Due to the poor quality of Brazilian primary and secondary education, it is safe to assume that children are not receiving a basic education of history or citizenry prior to college. Then, without a general education in college, the Brazilian population – college graduate or otherwise – is expected to vote without substantial, critical education about political practices or civic responsibilities. If every citizen is required to vote, they deserve to vote with intelligence, and this connection between politics and higher education is a major argument of liberal arts defenders in the United States.

Needless to say, neither educational system is perfect. The right amount of government involvement, power, or financial support as well as the level of specialization in education is not exactly clear. The path to improvement is not to compare which nation has better or worse higher education, but how it is implemented, how it is valued, and how quality higher education is distributed or attainable for all classes. In terms of vocational training in higher education, it is reasonable to claim that the Brazilian educational model is more internationally popular than that of the United States. Americans might benefit from recognizing that the American model is the worldwide outlier.

The Influence of Political History on Higher Education

Brazil's slow development of education can be attributed to its turbulent political past. The nation has been plagued by corrupt administrations both before and after the twenty-one years of dictatorship that ended only twenty-three years ago. Only recently have truly effective and popular leaders surfaced in Brazil. The periods of growth and change in higher education coincide with flourishing and stable political periods, while the era of government suppression drastically hindered education. The delayed, unstable, and inconsistent modernization of

education is not only because Brazil gained independence from Europe later than the United States, but also that its government did not lead down quite the same stable path. Consequently, Brazilian education at all levels is inadequately funded and poorly administered. The poor primary and secondary education in combination with the vocational focus of tertiary education leave students unfamiliar and unformed in liberal arts.

Meanwhile, the U.S. has been consistently a democracy since its birth; however, the nation has been far more influenced in history by wars. Following the War of Independence were the American Civil War and active involvement in both World Wars. While the political structure has remained constant for over 230 years, there has been much concern, effort, resources, and lives cost for the sake of peace and humanity.

Bok uses wars to mark milestones throughout the evolution of American colleges: “After the Civil War...colleges took very different paths, with some advocating almost total freedom in the choice of courses, other clinging to a largely prescribed, traditional curriculum, and still others adding programs of a more practical, vocational sort” (Bok 22). Throughout history, it is undeniable that war provoked change, patriotism, and independence in American culture, and education was affected just as the rest of society.

The two systems cannot exactly be compared side-by-side because the political and economic environments have not been similar between the two nations. However, it is important to question: in a well-funded, well-organized educational institution with perfect freedom to be structured in any way, what would be the best way to educate students based on the nation’s and world’s economic needs?

The Relationship between Education and Economy

The historical prominence of vocational education in Brazil indicates that the current professional focus in universities is not a direct consequence of the nation's status as an economic leader. The specialization in education occurred due to government and historical factors, but the modern economic demand ensured that the educational system would remain focused on economic productivity.

However, strict government regulations demand higher education to be more accessible to all social classes while failing to provide sufficient funding. Therefore, although in theory the attention given to specialized coursework should produce more knowledge and research, any advancement is stunted by limited resources:

“...despite the recent awareness in Brazilian society that academic research and science can upgrade the country's position in the world economy, the new regulations only reinforce past tendencies that insulate academic institutions from the surrounding society and weaken the country as a whole” (Thinking Brazil 23).

This relationship between a nation's economy and its education is not just an issue in Brazil, but worldwide. While the economic strength of a nation may not directly influence its priorities in or structure of higher education, institutions can certainly affect the fluctuating job market, according to Schwartzman:

“In Brazil as elsewhere, higher education plays many other functions besides the obvious ones of generating and transmitting knowledge. It is a source of employment for the educated, the more significant the less there are other alternatives; it provides a legitimate waiting place for youth, indispensable when the job market is saturated; it imparts a sense of social prestige and esteem; and it

grants credentials which at best can guarantee comfortable and life-long employment and at worse can always help to displace the next fellow down the educational ladder. None of these functions depend much on the quality of the education received or on the efficiency by which the educational institutions are run; and many of them can be hurt by improvements in this direction” (“Brazil: Opportunity and Crisis in Higher Education” 20).

Consider the fact that a large proportion of the Brazilian population is employed in agricultural, construction, and other labor-intensive jobs. The educational and professional systems feed into each other: the job market demands few specialized, high-skill jobs and the underdeveloped and underfunded educational system limits the access to these fields.

Schwartzman’s final critique in the excerpt above – that truly improving higher education could conceivably impair parts of the job market – leads to the final point of this section. In both the United States and Brazil, and likely many other countries, there is a tangible and sustainable disconnect in the educational and professional sector. However, ironically, Brazilian higher education is “vocationally focused” and the United States is drifting that way. Three distinct levels of society – early education, higher education, and professional market – are not accomplishing a seamless progression for students. Primary and secondary education is not preparing students well for higher education, which in turn is not adequately preparing students for adult life and professions. There are countless compounding reasons for this disconnect that are unique to the nation and its history.

The Relationship between Education and Culture

A nation's cultural characteristics are both difficult to describe and challenging to trace through history. One scholar by the name of Regiani Aparecida Santos Zacarias cited the two Constitutions of Brazil and the United States to demonstrate differences in their legal priorities:

“Both constitutions reflect each country's historical background. The U.S. was colonized by people who arrived at the Promise Land with the good will to make this land a perfect place to live. The Constitution was written under the national spirit of freedom and foreseeing a better future for each colony, united as a federal state, and of course as a strong country. Brazil was not colonized at first but only exploited as a colony. The people who went there during the pre-colonization and colonization periods were interested in exploitation and in profiting from the land. In this way, the first national documents were at the same time aimed at preventing the country from being exploited... and to establish rules on how exploitation could be done” (Santos Zacarias).

In the same way, the mission statements of the institutions of higher education are greatly representative of the nation's priorities. To analyze this idea in more detail, ten colleges and universities from each Brazil and the United States were selected and their mission statements were reviewed. In an attempt to include all types of institutions, the list contains both prestigious, influential schools as well as the lesser-known universities, such as those the author attended as part of the *FIPSE Iowa-Midwest Brazil Exchange on Business and Agriculture*. Also, at least one school from each region of the countries was chosen and both private and public schools were

represented. This list of institutions and the websites describing their mission statements can be found in Appendix A.

Based on each institution's mission statement, main themes of the Brazilian universities and main themes of the American universities were determined. A summary of these themes is on the following page. The comparison demonstrates that many of the themes are similar – service to community and world, advancement of research and technology, promotion of diversity and ethics – but the final, bold point is a significant contrast. While many prominent American institutions strive for an inter-disciplinary education, many Brazilian institutions of equivalent prominence repeatedly cite “vocational training” as their main missions.

Main Mission Themes of 10 American Institutions:	Main Mission Themes of 10 Brazilian Institutions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to the community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adapt to a changing environment; ○ Address world issues; ○ Promote public welfare; ○ Serve the nation and world; ○ Pursue the betterment of humankind. • Develop knowledge in specialized areas of research, push the edge of modern technology, and disseminate knowledge to youth and the public. • Promote diversity among students and faculty. • Maintain a strong inter-disciplinary core curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service to society and community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve quality of life for all Brazilians; ○ Encourage regional and national development; ○ Exercise citizenship. • Promote scientific research and discover new knowledge in order to distribute to greater society. • Pursue ideals of ethics, patriotism, diversity, and freedom. • Train students professionally with a commitment to vocational progress.

Since three of the four overall themes are similar, it proves that the two educational systems can have the same missions but may not execute these goals in the same manner. This is the point that Rapaille argued in his book *The Culture Code*, that “education,” just like “food” or “cars” can have different meaning in different cultures. The fourth contrasting point between the two nations is a clear explanation for why Brazilian schools offer only one area of vocational focus per student and American schools encourage multiple areas of education available to any single student.

Another example of the culture of education between the two nations is the far-reaching diversity among American higher education institutions. While Brazilian institutions mainly fall under the private or public sector and at one time were forced to comply with standardization in the 1968 reform, American institutions vary greatly, ranging from for-profit universities such as Kaplan University, private religious schools such as Notre Dame, public universities such as UNI, Ivy League schools such as Harvard, beauty schools such as La’ James, and more. This promotion of diversity fits into the American culture of striving for unique success. Just as there is no regret in obtaining individual accomplishments, institutions are fully encouraged to discover their niche in the American demand for higher education. Bok states that

“There is nothing surprising about the variety of aims and philosophies represented in contemporary American colleges...the traditional hallmark of higher education in this country has been its variety...many foreign educators look upon the diversity of [American] colleges as a strength rather than a weakness” (24).

Finally, it is appropriate to address the culture of education itself for each Brazil and the United States. Take, for example, former President Lula of Brazil, who left office in 2010 and was widely popular and successful in office. He never received even a high school diploma. Meanwhile, every American president since Andrew Johnson (1865—1869) graduated from college (Strock 151). This information demonstrates that, while a college education is not a constitutional requirement to be an American president, there is a higher societal and cultural demand for presidents to be formally educated as compared to Brazil.

Current Relations between Brazil and the United States

Numerous authors and economists designate Brazil as an up-and-coming nation worthy of positive relations with the United States. *The Economist* even argued that Brazil is of higher importance than the other BRIC nations:

“...Unlike China, [Brazil] is a democracy. Unlike India, it has no insurgents, no ethnic and religious conflicts nor hostile neighbors. Unlike Russia, it exports more than oil and arms, and treats foreign investors with respect. . . . Indeed, when it comes to smart social policy and boosting consumption at home, the developing world has much more to learn from Brazil than from China” (Einaudi 8).

Additionally, Brazil is extraordinary in its rapid transformation in the past two decades from a suppressed debtor to a substantial creditor of the International Monetary Fund (Einaudi 8); “punctuating that shift was Brazil’s 2009 offer to purchase \$10 billion in bonds the IMF was issuing to help developing countries deal with the types of problems Brazil used to have” (Rohter 139). Its previous national debt, weak economy, authoritarian government, and indisputable third-world status have evolved into a nation of “Order and Progress,” with a true international

presence as demonstrated by its hosting of the World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympics in 2016.

Despite this reality, there have been conflicts between the U.S. and Brazil in the last fifty years. Following the Allied victory of World War II, the nations remained friendly with one another for some years. However, the Brazilian government's turbulent shift of power through the 1960s and 70s caused tension and disputes with the American government. According to Einaudi, "the 1964 military coup, human rights issues, trade, and nuclear concerns became sources of tension with successive U.S. administrations" (9). Throughout the Cold War, Brazilian-U.S. relations were particularly strained by the American government's attempt to prevent Brazil from fabricating nuclear weapons:

"Brazil's military leaders were deeply offended at the idea that the United States and other major powers could maintain nuclear arsenals, but their country could not. Brazilian diplomats played a major role in supporting the regional denuclearization of South America through the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco, and Brazil was later to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but relations with the United States were never to be the same" (Einaudi 9).

More recently, distrust from previous relations and distraction with higher-threat wars have inhibited the construction of a formal partnership between Brazil and the United States. However, because of Brazil's rising significance, Einaudi argues that the two nations will need to recognize and act upon their "overlapping interests:"

"Mutually beneficial engagement requires the United States to welcome Brazil's emergence as a global power. Brazil is more than a tropical China; it is culturally and politically close to the United States and Europe. Brazil, in turn, needs to

realize that the United States accepts its rise. Brazil also needs to recognize that the United States still matters greatly to Brasilia and that more can be achieved working with Washington than against it” (10).

Amidst these obstacles, there have been some distinct efforts to unify the nations. One effort, for example, was the trigger for this thesis and the reason the author ever went to Brazil: the U.S.-Brazil Higher Education Consortia Program, jointly administered and funded by the U.S. Department of Education and the Brazilian Ministry of Education. The program’s mission is to improve education for undergraduate and graduate students from both nations and to foster exposure, understanding, and cooperation between American and Brazilian educational institutions (“US-Brazil Higher Education Consortia Program – Purpose”).

Another glimmer of hope for closer relations between Brazil and the United States is that Brazil is being considered to join the Visa Waiver Program. The United States currently participates in this program with thirty-six countries and Brazil is one of the nineteen “roadmap” countries that are under consideration (Siskin 13, Geromel). According to the Congressional Research Service, “membership in the program is often perceived as evidence of close ties with the United States,” but more importantly, the economies of both nations benefit from the increased commerce and tourism due to fewer restrictions and costs for tourists (Siskin 13). However, since nearly half of all Brazilian emigrants have settled in the United States, legally or otherwise, there is not a strong motivation for the United States to promote even more flow of Brazilian immigrants. As Forbes Magazine sarcastically concluded, “Brazil may be included in the Visa Waiver Program soon, but if that causes a flow of illegal Brazilian immigrants, Brazil will be excluded...before its illegal immigrants learn how to celebrate Thanksgiving” (Geromel).

With more bridging programs focused on student exchanges and tourism promotion, Brazil and the United States can reach a constructive understanding of one another's intricate histories, unique politics, eccentric cultures, and fluctuating economies and diminish some of the misconceptions. They can learn from each other's struggles in higher education and gain perspective of how social and political factors can affect educational priorities. The United States, in particular, should recognize that the educational missions of G7 and BRIC nations differ greatly from the liberal arts model that has persevered in American education. Building a strong understanding of other nations' historical, political, cultural, and economic influence on education benefits not just international relations, but international education.

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Appendix A: Selected Institution Mission Statements and their Websites

Selected Brazilian Institutions

1. University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ)
http://www.ufrj.br/pr/conteudo_pr.php?sigla=AUFRJ
MISSAO
2. University of Minas Gerais (UFMG)
https://www.ufmg.br/proplan_site_antigo/relatorios_a_nuais/relatorio_anual_2004/missao_ufmg.htm
3. University of Sao Paulo (USP)
<http://www5.usp.br/institucional/a-usp/>
4. Sao Paulo State University (UNESP)
<https://ape.unesp.br/pdi/execucao/index.php>
5. Pontificia Universidade Catolica Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RIO)
<http://www.puc-rio.br/sobrepuc/historia/>
6. University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS)
<http://www.ufrgs.br/ufrgs/a-ufrgs/apresentacao>
7. Federal University of Lavras (UFLA)
<http://www.ufla.br/index.php/video-institucional/>
8. University of Campinas (UNICAMP)
<http://www.prgg.unicamp.br/regimentogeralunicamp.pdf>
9. University of Brasilia (UnB)*
<http://www.unb.br/unb/missao.php>
10. Federal University of Goiania (UFG)*
http://www.ufg.br/page.php?menu_id=109&pos=esq

Selected American Institutions

1. Harvard University
<http://www.harvard.edu/faqs/mission-statement>
2. Princeton University
<http://www.princeton.edu/campuslife/mission/>
3. Yale University
<http://www.yale.edu/about/mission.html>
4. California Institute of Technology
<http://www.caltech.edu/content/glance>
5. Massachusetts Institute of Technology
<http://web.mit.edu/facts/mission.html>
6. Stanford University
<http://www.stanford.edu/about/>
7. University of Chicago
<http://www.uchicago.edu/about/>
8. University of Pennsylvania
<http://www.upenn.edu/about/welcome.php>
9. University of Texas at Austin
<http://www.utexas.edu/about-ut>
10. University of Northern Iowa*
<http://www.uni.edu/policies/102>

*Universities involved in the *FIPSE Iowa-Midwest Brazil Exchange on Business and Agriculture* program in which the author participated

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