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UMass Boston – Brazilian Immigrant Center Partnership

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UMass Boston – Brazilian Immigrant Center Partnership

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Summary/Abstract

Faculty and staff at UMass Boston, and more widely in the UMass system have a long history of partnership with the Brazilian Immigrant Center (BIC) of Boston.

The current Executive Director, *Natalicia Tracy*, is a BA and MA graduate of UMB, and in her third year as a UMass Boston Lecturer in Sociology and Criminal Justice. She is a Sociology PhD candidate at Boston University.

Dr. Eduardo Siqueira is Associate Director for Research of the Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development & Public Policy. Between 2004 and 2009 he was a member of the BIC board of directors, and for three years, President, and from his then post as Assistant Professor of Work Environments at UMass Lowell, carried out the five-year COBWEB Project (Collaboration for Better Work Environments for Brazilians), in partnership with BIC and the Lowell Community Health Center. Dr. Siqueira presently serves as a senior advisor to BIC, and is on its OSHA Training Advisory Board.

Dr. Tim Sieber, Professor of Anthropology, has been a member of BIC's Board of Directors since late 2009, was board secretary during 2010-2011, and is actively engaged as a volunteer in fundraising, writing, and coalition building.

In 2009, BIC recognized the Gaston Institute with a special prize as Outstanding Partner in the Fight for Immigrant Rights, and in 2011, UMB's Labor Resource Center for Outstanding Labor Support.

Goals and Objectives

The Brazilian Immigrant Center does organizing, advocacy and training to reduce marginalization of Brazilian immigrants, promoting their engagement as workers & civic participants. A worker's center, BIC supports and defends workers' rights under current state & US labor laws. BIC helps workers mediate complaints with employers, and refers others for class action suits, or intervention by the Mass. Attorney General or US Dept of Labor. A special focus at present is organizing mostly women domestic workers, and BIC has a new Law and Policy Clinic, a Domestic Worker Mediation Program, and an Immigration Justice Project staffed by two full-time public interest attorneys.

The UMass faculty and staff mentioned above, and collaborating units such as the Labor Resource Center, UMass Labor Extension, the Anthropology Department, the Applied Linguistics Department, the Department of Community Relations, the Chancellor's Office, and the Gaston Institute have all lent their support to Brazilian Immigrant Center activities on and off campus. The campus has made some of its spaces, such as the Campus Center ballroom, and the Ryan Lounge, available for BIC partnership activities such as fundraisers, gala anniversary celebrations, and an art show benefit for Haitian orphans. Under Dr. Siqueira's and Dr. Maria Idalí Torres' leadership, the Gaston Institute has recently begun a new Brazilian Initiative, involving outreach to Brazilian community organizations like BIC, as well as universities in Brazil.

Results/Impacts

- Through partnerships with the U. S. Department of Labor, Wage & Hour Division since 2009, for example, BIC has helped recoup over \$1.9 million dollars in stolen wages for immigrant workers. BIC has won hundreds of thousands more in settlements where BIC supported workers in direct mediation with employers, and on cases referred to the Massachusetts Attorney General's Fair Labor Division.
- BIC has become a lead organization in the current efforts to organize domestic workers and build a movement to achieve a Massachusetts Domestic Worker Bill of Rights. BIC recently joined the National Alliance of Domestic Workers (NDWA), and is a key organizing unit for NDWA, and lead organization in forming the new Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers.
- BIC has established the first Domestic Worker Law & Policy Clinic in the United States, as well as the nation's first Domestic Worker Mediation Program, staffed by two full-time attorneys.
- BIC has built partnerships with many foundations that support its work, including the Hyams Foundation, the Herman and Frieda L. Miller Foundation, the Lenny Zakim Fund, the Clipper Ship Foundation, the Burgess Urban Fund of the Episcopal City Mission, the Boston Women's Fund, the Unitarian Universalist Association Foundation, the Boston Bar Foundation, the Berkeley Law Foundation, the New York University Law Foundation, English for New Bostonians, the Foley Hoag Foundation, and the Jewish Funds for Justice. Last year Centro Presente named BIC Outstanding Partner in the Fight for Immigrant's Rights. Also in 2011, Brazilian Magazine named BIC as the Best Community Organization in the Brazilian Community. In 2011, BIC became one of two organizations in the Northeast to receive federal OSHA funding for workplace safety training. These accomplishments and accolades demonstrate that after many years of organizing and working with the community, BIC is the most trusted resource for Brazilians seeking social, legal and economic justice.
- With UMass personnel, at UMass Boston and at UMass Lowell, UMass-BIC partnerships have contributed to improvement of health knowledge and conditions in the Brazilian and wider immigrant communities. These partnerships, especially COBWEB, have contributed substantially to increasing the health literacy of community members and service providers regarding the occupational health issues facing immigrant workers. Currently, a new partnership initiative is being pioneered on the issue of sleep deprivation, through the work of Dr. Eduardo Siqueira with the Brazilian Immigrant Center and other partners.

Approaches and Methods

UMass Boston faculty, staff, and administrators have:

- 1) *Shared individual expertise*
 - through board membership and leadership;
 - assisting with grant development, writing and editing;
 - participating in long-range, strategic planning processes;
 - engaging in coalition meetings and work with other partner organizations
- 2) *Assumed staff roles*
 - BIC's current Executive Director is a UMB faculty member
- 3) *Shared campus resources*
 - by providing public forums for BIC staff to speak on issues of concern
 - by offering attractive campus space for BIC events;
 - welcoming attendance of community members at campus events;
 - contributing financially to sponsor BIC events on campus
- 4) *Conducted community-engaged research, which involves*
 - engaging in participatory action research that serves community needs;
 - building the capacity of the community to direct research on its own issues;
 - building on community experiences to raise critical issues in immigration and labor policy

Conclusion/Next Steps

- The UMass Boston/Brazilian Immigrant Center partnership has been a vital and long-term one, that has engaged many individuals and units of the university, and that has benefited the community in many productive ways, as well as the university.
- An important new development is the new programming and outreach initiative of the Gaston Institute, the Provost's Office of International and Transnational Affairs (OITA), and the campus in general, toward the Brazilian community.
- We anticipate increased research activity by UMass Boston personnel in partnership with the Brazilian Immigrant Center in the near future, and expect this research to serve the mutual needs of the university as well as the community.
- The goal is to draw ever more faculty, students, and staff into partnership activities, through establishment of a formal internship program for UMass Boston students, and more campus outreach to the Brazilian and wider Portuguese-speaking community.

References and Resources

Go to the BIC website at www.braziliancenter.org, "Resources" tab, for BIC 2010 and 2011 annual reports, and for the Final Report of the COBWEB project: [Collaboration for Better Work Environment for Brazilians Historic Report \(pdf\)](#) A Report on Brazilian Immigrant Workers in Massachusetts by Dr. Carlos Eduardo Siqueira and Dr. Andrea Barbosa

UMass Boston at BIC

