



BRAZILIAN INSECURITY

Luiz Fernando Valente

Brown University

Marguerite Itamar Harrison

Smith College

Leila M. Lehnen

University of New Mexico

The position papers below formed the basis for a roundtable on “Brazilian Insecurity,” sponsored by the American Portuguese Studies Association at the Convention of the Modern Language Association of America, in New York City, January 4-7, 2018, in response to the presidential theme for the convention, “States of Insecurity.” The papers deal with such issues as the shape of undergraduate education, the training of graduate students, faculty hiring and promotion, and the future of the humanities in the American academy. The authors represent three different types of academic institutions in the United States: a private research university (Brown University), a private liberal arts college (Smith College) and a public research university (University of New Mexico).¹

Luiz Fernando Valente (Brown University)

Diana Taylor’s choice of “States of Insecurity” as the presidential theme for the 2018 MLA convention serendipitously connected with similar ideas that some of us had begun to develop at the 2017 convention for an APSA-sponsored panel focusing on concerns about the current challenges and prospects for our field in

¹ On July 1, 2018 Professor Leila M. Lehnen will join the faculty of Brown University as Associate Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies.

light of the succession of economic, political and social crises in Brazil over the past four or five years. As we know, problems leading to “Brazilian Insecurity” about the present state of and future prospects for the country have included irresponsible spending (e.g. questionable subsidies to big corporations that have had no measurable effect on reducing unemployment, inefficient populist programs such as Science without Borders, etc.) to rampant, institutionalized corruption at the highest levels of government and business to a growing disregard for the health and education needs of the population to increasing rates of crime and social strife. Sadly these series of crises have substituted disenchantment for the exhilaration of the first decade of this century, when the proverbial sleeping giant appeared to have awakened to an era of prosperity and social justice in the new millennium. As President Taylor explained, “this theme invites reflection on how our intellectual, artistic, and pedagogical work in the humanities offers strategies for navigating the crises of our time: political volatility, fluctuating financial markets, fear-mongering media and increasingly hateful acts and rhetoric that contribute to a general sense of malaise.”² As a preamble to our presentations and what I am sure will be a lively and fruitful discussion among all participants of this session, let me remind you what Robert Newcomb (UC-Davis) and I wrote in our proposal:

In keeping with Diana Taylor’s presidential theme for the 2018 convention, the American Portuguese Studies Association proposes a roundtable to consider how the current socio-economic upheavals and political polarization in Brazil have had immediate consequences for both Brazilian academics as well as for those of us who work in the field of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies in the United States, such as funding, enrollments, faculty positions, etc. At stake is not only the present but also the future of our profession. The current situation poses challenges to our intellectual enterprise: what and how we teach about Brazil (and by extension Portugal and Lusophone Africa) in our classrooms, the choice of topics for theses and dissertations, and our own research. What are the future prospects for our field? Where do we go from here?

Rob cannot be here and has asked me to moderate this session on his behalf. After my introductory remarks, I will turn the floor over to my two colleagues, Marguerite Harrison (of Smith College) and Leila Lehen (of the University of Mexico). In composing this panel, we selected speakers who represent different types of institutions: a liberal arts college, a large public research university, and a mid-size private research university, all of which are widely recognized as leaders in

² For the complete announcement of the 2018 MLA Presidential Theme, please see <https://www.mla.org/Convention/Convention-History/Past-Conventions/2018-Convention/2018-Presidential-Theme>

our field. What connects these institutions is a strong tradition of and commitment to the teaching of Brazil, the Portuguese language, and Afro-Luso-Brazilian culture over several decades. Our role is to set the table, as it were, for a conversation among all participants in this roundtable.

Of course our field, which encompasses the broad Portuguese-speaking world on five continents, is more than just about Brazil. Nevertheless, historically, at least in the United States, its engine has been Brazil. For better or worse our fortunes in the North American academy are intimately tied to what happens in Brazil as well as to how Brazil is perceived not only by the general public, which includes our potential students and their families, but also by university administrators, from presidents and deans to advancement officers, whose decisions have an immediate impact on what we do. Who can forget the famous cover of the November 14, 2009 edition of *The Economist*, which displayed an image of Rio's *Cristo Redentor* taking off like a rocket, a symbol of the worldwide optimism about Brazil in the first decade of this century? It is not by accident that enrollment in our courses increased substantially at that time. There is no question that the field remains intellectually strong, with cutting edge research being produced by faculty and graduate students, quality journals, vibrant professional associations, pedagogical innovation and so forth. Brazil continues to provide exciting research topics, which are reflected in articles, books, and dissertations. Interdisciplinarity, which is repeatedly hailed as the future of the academic profession, has been successfully practiced in our field for decades. And our students continue to demonstrate an unparalleled dedication and commitment to our field – if we can get them into the classroom.

And there is the rub. For a decade and a half we had gotten used to steadily increasing enrollments in Portuguese language courses at the national level, from 8,325 in 2002 to 10,310 in 2006, to 11,273 in 2009, to 12,415 in 2013 (MLA, 2015, p. 28). Nevertheless the figures for 2016 will show a decline when they are published by the MLA.³ Of course language enrollments in general have been witnessing a downward trend nationwide but because our baseline numbers are so small relative

³ Indeed, the 2016 report, published in February 2018, showed a 20.8% decline in Portuguese language enrollments since 2013 to 9,827 (MLA, 2018, p. 13).

to other languages, any decline is bound to affect us more drastically, particularly in terms of faculty positions and graduate student slots. Although the expectation was that many new jobs would open up as faculty members who had entered the profession in the late 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s moved into retirement, these anticipated positions have not materialized as retiring faculty members have not always been replaced. Combined with a growing number of faculty who stay active beyond the traditional retirement age of seventy, we are facing a glut of extraordinarily qualified recent PhDs who cannot secure a job commensurate with their qualifications, which, in turn, discourages other exceptional young people from making the long term commitment to pursuing a doctoral degree. Some may say that it is encouraging that positions in Portuguese and Brazilian literature have been filled or are in the process of being filled at prestigious universities such as Harvard, Brown, Yale and Berkeley, but a word of caution is necessary: three of these positions are at the senior level (Associate or Full Professor), and the question remains whether the senior positions that have been or will be vacated as individuals move from their current institutions to Harvard, Brown and Yale, will come back into the market, and if they do, whether they will be at the junior level. There is a danger that we may be playing musical chairs with senior positions without beginning to resolve the problem of the dearth of junior positions over the past few years.

At the same time, because of the precarious situation of most Brazilian public universities, many scholars trained in Brazil are now competing with our own graduate students for the few positions available at US institutions, a situation with crucial implications for the future of our graduate programs. I am not proposing that we restrict applications to positions at US institutions to graduates of American universities, but we must consider that if our graduating PhDs cannot secure jobs, eventually we will have few if any graduate students, and doctoral programs will decline or simply disappear. We also need to clear the misconception among many scholars from Brazilian institutions who apply for positions in Portuguese and Brazilian literature at US universities that they will be hired to teach advanced graduate seminars. The reality of our field is very different. With a few exceptions, we teach primarily undergraduates. All of us have at some point taught

Portuguese language courses. Furthermore we must make a commitment to program and curriculum development, particularly at the undergraduate level, not to mention being available for the various responsibilities that account for the hectic pace of US institutions, such as advising and service. Teaching at a US institution is not the same as teaching in Brazil but with a higher salary.

But the future of our field is not hopeless. First of all, I believe that Brazil will rebound. The situation was never as rosy as painted by the political marketers in the early 2000s nor is it as bleak as portrayed by the doomsayers in the present. Despite its endemic problems such as poor wealth distribution, Brazil has enormous natural and human resources. In my opinion, what is missing is a renewed project for the country (“projeto de Brasil”) to substitute for what has become merely a project for retaining power (“projeto de poder”). Moreover, there is much that we can do from our end if we are willing to work creatively and to think outside the proverbial box. So, I am going to proceed by citing a few examples and making some concrete suggestions on three areas: increasing enrollments, the links between Portuguese and Brazilian Studies and comparative literature, and the preparation of our graduate students for a tight and changing job market.

Portuguese enrollments at Emory University have increased dramatically since Ana Catarina Teixeira, a friend and former graduate student, was hired a few years ago. While maintaining an active research program in Luso-African literature, Teixeira has managed, through outstanding teaching, co-curricular program development, cooperation with the Spanish section of her department and the Center for Latin American Studies, and, last but definitely not least, personal touch, to generate a new enthusiasm for the study of Brazil and the Portuguese language. This is a good example of how unwavering commitment to our students and, in turn, our students’ willingness to reciprocate and spread the word about effective and caring teaching is essential to our mission. What is happening at Emory mirrors how our program at Brown developed in its early years and to some extent continues to do so. Many of our undergraduate students in language, literature and cultural studies still come to us after having their interest in Brazil spurred by their participation in various activities and co-curricular programs, or after having taken courses dealing with Brazil in history and the social sciences. Their glowing course

evaluations, both through formal and informal channels, have been instrumental in solidifying the image of a department that is student-centered while remaining committed to research and the training of graduate students. We have also done well with students who have registered for our first-year seminars, and as a consequence have developed a deeper interest in our field. In my case I should mention my comparative literature seminars on the literatures of the Americas, whose focus is not specifically on Brazil – students might have chosen the seminar because they wanted to read García-Márquez, Faulkner, Cortázar and Morrison, but in the process became familiar with Lispector, Guimarães Rosa and Scliar. As at most universities, these first-year seminars are small general education courses, conducted in English, and allowing for close interaction between the instructor and the students, and among the students themselves. This brings us back to a point that I raised before: it is essential that we hire individuals who, regardless of their native language, have full command of English and are also able effectively to conduct courses in that language. It is also important that teachers be comfortable with actively involving students in class discussions, which is quite different from the top-down, lecture-based mode of teaching favored in Brazil and Europe.

Indeed, I believe that comparative literature provides not only opportunities for attracting undergraduates to classes on the Portuguese-speaking world but also offers a not fully tapped vehicle for revitalizing our research at the graduate and professional level. Having been trained in the field, I hereby disclose my bias, but I truly believe that the emphasis on the international circulation of texts and the translatability among cultures that has always characterized comparative literature is of immense value for making our object of study broader and less insular. This is essential in the contemporary American university.

Finally, a quick word about the training of our graduate students. Most of my words do not apply exclusively to students in Portuguese programs, but are particularly important in a small field like ours. We continue to make two grave mistakes. First, we need to prepare our graduate students for the reality of a job market where most positions are not on the tenure track at top-notch research universities. Graduate students should be guided to an understanding that it is possible to have a fulfilling career at a non-doctoral institution such as a liberal arts

college, a master's level university or a two-year college. We also need to train our students for possible positions in university administration and at non-profits. This is something that cannot be accomplished by individual departments or programs but must be led by our graduate schools. A few years ago the Mellon Foundation pioneered such a training program at Brown with relative success but the effort fizzled out and has not been resumed. Second, we need to do a better job professionalizing our graduate students. A fundamental problem with graduate education in the Humanities is that we have failed to *professionalize* it the way other professions, such as law, medicine and business, have done. We often treat graduate education as if it were a mere extension of undergraduate education, with courses, term papers, and exams. On the contrary, we must conceive of graduate education as the *professional* development of our graduate students, which includes not only their mastery of a certain body of knowledge *but* also their effective preparation to become active members of our *profession*. To begin to remedy this situation I propose that, just as first-year law students are required to take a course on "lawyering," our graduate curricula should include early on a course —perhaps team-taught — on, for lack of a better word, "professing." In such a course, designed to prepare graduate students to become *professionals* in the languages and literatures, students would not only familiarize themselves with the major journals and research resources in their areas, as it has been traditionally done in the so-called graduate pro-seminars, but also with the history of our fields, the functioning of our professional associations, the protocols for submitting grant proposals, delivering papers at conferences, and preparing articles for publication, the daily life of a faculty member, including the balancing act among research, teaching and service, the current debates in the profession, etc. Of course this kind of training cannot be exhausted within the confines of a single introductory course but must continue in different venues throughout the students' career.

Marguerite Itamar Harrison (Smith College)

This short essay is in response to the overall theme of the 2018 MLA conference and its presidential topic, "States of Insecurity," namely, the role of the academy as a place of critical and historical reflection, inquiry and intervention.

Professors and colleagues in the field of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, Luiz F. Valente and Robert Newcomb, extended an invitation to participate in a roundtable discussion on “Brazilian Insecurity,” which would address “how the current socio-economic upheavals and political polarization in Brazil have had immediate consequences both for Brazilian academics as well as for those of us who work in the field of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies in the United States.” They asked me to respond to this theme from my position at a liberal arts college and its role in serving undergraduates. My perspective is intended to draw parallels to other liberal arts colleges that now offer Portuguese, and, moreover, I hope my comments may also relate to undergraduate programs at universities and larger research institutions.

Before I describe some of the particular issues we are facing at Smith College and some of the strategies we are implementing specific to our program in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies, I would like to begin with a quote, a rather somber one, in keeping with this conference’s overall theme. In the Humanities, “no department is experiencing growth, and no department is experiencing high enrollments” [...]. I extracted this reference from Smith’s Strategic Planning document and its 2017 reaccreditation self-study report (27). I highlight this sentence as a way of indicating that a broader stroke of insecurity extends to the Humanities in general, and is reverberating at my institution. In fact, at the end of January 2018, Department Chairs and Program directors at Smith have been summoned to participate in a Humanities strategic planning session, which will address ways in which departments and programs might better collaborate at the curricular level.

With this overall insecurity occurring in the realm of the Humanities at large, it is important to note two parallel characteristics: the first having to do with Smith’s current hiring procedures and the other having to do with its present direction in student admission. Smith’s current procedure for hiring new faculty is as follows: as colleagues retire across the disciplines, their positions are placed in a campus-wide competitive pool⁴ whereby many positions in the Humanities are

⁴ Smith’s self-study report states: “When a faculty member retires, the line returns to the general faculty pool. CAP (the Committee on Academic Priorities) members evaluate position requests each year and make recommendations of new lines to the president and provost” (Smith College, 2017, p. 47).

being converted or transferred to fields that are experiencing growth and expansion, such as Chemistry, Psychology and Computer Science, while new positions in the Humanities are denied.

In terms of trends in student admission, Smith's current drive to recruit women in the STEM fields is very strong (as is a parallel push to recruit international students, mainly from Asia, who are equipped to pay full tuition, to offset Smith's firm commitment to financial aid for first generation students and minorities). This goal toward STEM (and, by the way, I am personally very much in favor of incentives for women in sciences) is altering the profile of the liberal arts at Smith at the expense of, and in detriment to, the Humanities, as is the faculty hiring policy mentioned previously.

The effect of the push toward STEM on the languages, for example, is creating a conflict on as basic a level as scheduling classes. What we are finding is that intensive language classes compete with science labs for time and space in students' schedules. Consequently, with the exception of Chinese, language enrollments have begun to drop (that said, Portuguese still represents a gradual decline, occurring only in the past year or two⁵). Beyond the issue of language class time blocks increasingly conflicting with core requirements, labs, and the tight rigors of STEM courses, another source of concern is the growing curricular conflicts and demands placed on students who double major in a language and STEM fields, a frequent occurrence as most of the students who major in a foreign language double major in another discipline. There is little flexibility in Smith's Engineering program, for instance, or in Computer Science or Pre-Med, to allow for a full major in Portuguese & Brazilian Studies. We are witnessing a growing trend of these students opting for a minor in a language, if at all.

Another concern affecting enrollments and majors in the languages is study abroad. Fewer students are taking time for a full year or even a semester of study abroad, choosing to stay on campus or commit to shorter January-term or summer programs. Smith's four Europe-based study abroad programs have made changes to

⁵ The CIBS 2015 "Survey of Portuguese Language Instruction at New England Institutions of Higher Education" showed undergraduate enrollments in Portuguese had fallen 14.8%. At Smith the decline was 8.3%.

draw non-majors. For instance, the Smith program in Hamburg, Germany now has a heavy emphasis on the sciences, and Smith's Geneva program has softened its language requirements, allowing for more students from the social sciences to attend. This toll on study abroad is directly impacting small programs such as Smith's in Portuguese & Brazilian Studies, which I direct. The Portuguese & Brazilian Studies (SPB) major, for instance, has mostly relied up till now on the fact that students will spend at least a semester of study abroad.

As the theme of this panel indicates, our SPB program is currently suffering as well from Brazil's current political and economic problems. Just a few years ago, we observed a general increase in students wishing to take Portuguese, and within the overall pool, there was an increase in non-European students, from China and Russia, for instance, in our Portuguese classes. Studying abroad in Brazil was popular in comparison to studying in Portugal (whereas the reverse is beginning to occur in small numbers). Brazil's hosting of the World Cup in 2014 and the Olympics in 2016 significantly drew the attention of our students. But the economic crisis and political turmoil of late have halted that momentum. As my colleague Malcolm McNee has said: "Brazil bouncing back again sometime soon as a rising geopolitical and economic powerhouse is not really something we can count on as a draw for students."

Paradoxically, Smith College's mission statement seems to set the tone of worldly outreach and internationalization when it comes to its undergraduate education:

Smith College educates women of promise for lives of distinction and purpose. A college of and for the world, Smith links the power of the liberal arts to excellence in research and scholarship, thereby developing engaged global citizens and leaders to address society's challenges. (Smith College, 2017, p. 2)

So there seems to be a contradiction between Smith's mission statement and current patterns, unless we interpret the goal toward "developing engaged global citizens" as relevant to the international students from Asia now on campus.

What I have stated so far are some of the challenges we face in Portuguese & Brazilian Studies at Smith College. Now I would like to turn to some of the strategies and remedying efforts we have made. Our aim has been to build and sustain student interest through other sorts of narratives and frameworks.

Ironically, the push toward STEM at Smith has also brought Brazilians and Brazilian heritage learners to the College, albeit perhaps temporarily due to funding cuts from the Brazilian government. These students, in turn, have brought renewed interest in our program, despite the fact that most of them do not enroll in our courses. It has resulted, for instance, in the revival of the Luso-Brazilian student club, an initiative jointly spearheaded by a Latina and a Brazilian.

It is important to note that Smith College has an open curriculum with no distribution requirements. As a liberal arts college it does recommend that students take courses in seven major fields of knowledge, Foreign Languages being one of them. Smith is furthermore a college that values interdisciplinarity and cross-disciplinarity; Smith's Portuguese and Brazilian Studies program was established in the 1970s, with an interdisciplinary major and minor. The program is part of the Spanish and Portuguese department, Portuguese having become a longstanding part of the curriculum at Smith in the 1950s and 60s.⁶ For this reason, those of us who teach in Portuguese (currently two fully tenured faculty members and one part-time Lecturer, who also teaches in the Italian Department) have been able to count on the collaboration of our colleagues in Spanish who often include Brazil in their courses on Latin America, for instance in courses on film, on Afro-Latin representations, and in topics courses centered on domestic workers, to name a few. Portuguese & Brazilian Studies has also cross-listed courses with Comparative Literature, Environmental Science & Policy, Latin American Studies, and the Study of Women and Gender.

The collaborative spirit in evidence from our Spanish colleagues includes, for instance, the fact that for almost twenty years, the Spanish (SPN) major has included one course in Portuguese as a requirement. This has not only yielded us students in our beginning Portuguese classes (especially in our intensive *Portuguese for Spanish Speakers* course, first offered in 2003), but has also resulted in the participation of Spanish heritage speakers and Latina students in our intermediate and upper-level Portuguese courses. Because we have had significant Latina presence in our Portuguese courses, we have seen a growing constituency of students dedicated to being trilingual in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Just

⁶ "Smith boasts strong Portuguese & Brazilian Studies Program" (Smith College, 2014, p. 41).

recently, the Latina student organization on campus welcomed more participation by Brazilians and Brazilian heritage speakers, going so far as to change its name to LASO (Latin American Student Organization) from *Nosotras*. In Fall 2017, for the first time, LASO's *Taste of Latin America* had a strong showing of Brazilian dishes in its student-made culinary line-up. As another example of student-centered collaboration, for the past three years the foreign languages at Smith have joined forces to establish an International Poetry Day for students, an event supported by the Poetry Center and the Translation Studies concentration.

In addition to drawing in Spanish speakers and Latina students, since my arrival at Smith seventeen years ago, we have been attuned to creating interdisciplinary topics courses. By doing so, our program has been able to tap into student interest stemming from a variety of disciplines. As I previously noted, our SPB majors are most often double majors, spanning the Humanities (Art, Comparative Literature, Education, English, History), Social Sciences (Anthropology, Economics, Political Science, Sociology) and increasingly, the Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Engineering, Environmental Science & Policy, Mathematics, Neuroscience). Our SPB majors also participate in concentrations such as Translation Studies and Museum Studies, which include professional training in conjunction with academics. Similarly, our students who embark on honors theses tend to reflect these cross-disciplinary interests. For example, recent honors theses have spanned connections between Spanish and Portuguese (the student translated a Cuban writer's work into Portuguese); Russian Studies (the student focused on Brazil/Russian relations and Jorge Amado's work); and Education (the student examined Paulo Freire's influence on educational changes in Brazil and the U.S.). Among our graduating students there has been strong participation in the Fulbright program in Brazil, yielding students who have become researchers or ETAs post-graduation, with research interests in Agro-Forestry, grassroots Journalism, prison reform, water management, Poetry translation, and Horror Film, to name a few.

In terms of the curriculum in Portuguese & Brazilian Studies, we have focused recent topics courses on Film & Media Studies, Environmental Studies, and Translation Studies, for instance, which represent, among others, emerging areas of

curricular priority at Smith. We have also begun to balance our immersion courses taught in Portuguese with a few courses taught in English, and we intend to offer a first-year seminar in the near future, if staffing constraints will allow it. In Spring 2017 I taught for the first time a Brazilian art course in English that was dual-designated in Art History and Portuguese. *Brazilian Art Inside and Out* served as an elective requirement for the Art History major. It reached an enrollment of 30 students and boosted our overall enrollments in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for academic year 2016-2017. Due to its success in reaching a range of students in Art History, Studio Art, Latin American Studies and Portuguese & Brazilian Studies, this course will be taught again in Fall 2018. Another example of curricular collaboration on our campus is a course offered to undergraduates interested in Education, entitled *Teaching of Romance Languages*, which will be offered in Spring 2019. This new course will be taught by our colleague who teaches Portuguese and Italian at Smith, who is finishing a PhD at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in Language, Literacy and Culture.

Smith's Department of Spanish & Portuguese, furthermore, has designed a course in English to be offered in the Spring of 2019 that will be team-taught. It will have a focus on Cities and Urban Spaces in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking world. These examples of curricular initiatives are designed to highlight collaboration between disciplines, departments and programs. Smith's curriculum is also enhanced by colleagues who regretfully fill temporary, non-tenure-track positions, but whose areas of expertise fortunately often fall within the scope of the Portuguese-speaking world. We currently have two Brazilianists on campus for the academic year 2017-2018 (and both non-tenure track positions will be renewed for 2018-2019), one whose specialization is Afro-Brazilian culture, within the field of Africana Studies, and a Cultural Geographer in Latin American and Latino/a Studies.

At Smith the key for the survival of the Humanities is cross-disciplinary collaboration, flexibility and a penchant for innovation. We have recently renewed our collaborative connections beyond our campus to work more closely with the University of Massachusetts Amherst, in its commitment to restructuring the Portuguese program. The University has established a new Lusophone network

within the Five Colleges in our area of Western Massachusetts, which will generate greater exchange and connections between us, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Leila Lehnert (University of New Mexico)

As stated by the 2018 Modern Languages Presidential theme and by the panel description that Luiz Fernando Valente (Brown University) and Robert Newcomb (University of California, Davis) composed, the panel on “Brazilian Insecurity” proposed to inquire into what the consequences of contemporary “states of insecurity” (both in Brazil and the US) could be for Portuguese and Brazilian studies in the United States. As we know these states of insecurity have arisen from a variety of global or national factors such as political instability, economic uncertainty or crisis, and not least a strengthening of conservative ideologies that bleed into the cultural realm. Other factors are more localized. State legislatures, boards of regents, university administrators and fluctuating (or declining) student enrollments can also affect academic programs.

In this brief essay, I will first outline the dynamics that have impacted the program I am most familiar with: that of my home department at the University of New Mexico. From there, I hope to offer some suggestions on how we as faculty, mentors and, in some cases, as administrators, can address the present state of insecurity in Portuguese and Brazilian studies. My suggestions are invariably informed by my own academic experiences and cannot, therefore, be generalized. More than suggestions my ideas are, then, observations.

I have been at the University of New Mexico for approximately fourteen years. I arrived in 2004 as an Assistant Professor of Portuguese. With my hire, the Portuguese program at the University of New Mexico counted two faculty members – myself and my colleague Margo Milleret. The University of New Mexico has one of the oldest Portuguese programs in the nation (it was established in the 1940s). We offer a Bachelors in Portuguese, as well as a Masters of Art degree in Brazilian literature and culture. More recently, we have also developed a dual Portuguese and Spanish Masters of Art, which has proven to be quite successful. Several students who have completed this program have been admitted into

prestigious doctoral program in the United States. Also at the graduate level, students currently have the option to work on a combined Portuguese and Spanish PhD.

During my time at the University of New Mexico, enrollments in Portuguese classes have, as in most other Portuguese programs in the United States, shown variations. These changes can be attributed to a variety of reasons, not least Brazil's fortunes nationally and on the global stage.

It is therefore no coincidence that around 2013-2014 enrollments in most of the Portuguese classes at the University of New Mexico saw a marked upsurge. One must remember Brazil's popularity on the world stage at this particular historical moment. The country's economy was still showing signs of strength and Brazil was poised to host both the 2014 FIFA World Cup soccer championship and the 2016 summer Olympics. Publications such as Larry Rohter's *Brazil on the Rise* (2012) and Alfred P. Montero's *Brazil. Reversal of Fortune* (2014) speak of the country's economic and political ascendancy during that time. This same optimism was also evident on the November 14, 2009 cover of *The Economist*. The image that accompanies the headline "Brazil Takes Off" shows the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro literally "taking off" like a rocket into space. The future of Brazil, and, in tandem with the country, of Brazilian studies in the United States, seemed promising indeed.

Capitalizing on Brazil's trendiness and on the country's best known sports modality, in the spring of 2014 one of our Portuguese faculty members offered a class on soccer in Brazilian culture. The class was quite popular with an enrollment of twenty-three students and another two students who were unofficially auditing the course. The University of New Mexico's robust numbers in Portuguese were echoed in the 2015 Modern Languages Association report on enrollments in foreign languages. The report shows that though enrollments in most languages declined between 2009-2013, Portuguese bucked the trend and numbers of students enrolled in Portuguese classes actually grew by 10.1% (MLA, 2015, p. 28). A 2012 article on Portuguese programs at North American universities shows enrollments in Portuguese programs had seen significant growth since 1998 (Milleret, 2012).

But then things changed. Not only did Brazil's economic and political

fortunes began to falter around 2013, but the University of New Mexico changed its language requirements from two semesters, twelve credit hours, to three credits. The change came about abruptly, as the state legislature put pressure on the university to graduate students in four years (the university's graduation is usually longer than four years. Academics play a part, but so do other factors). Around the same time, also in an effort to comply with the university's push to improve four-year graduation rates, the science programs began to limit the number of courses that students could take outside their majors. This further curtailed the number of students in the language classrooms more generally since, for example, biology is one of primary concentrations with which our Spanish and Portuguese students double major and minor. Because of changes to funding and financial incentives put in place to graduate students quicker, the number of science students started to decline in our language classes, as they had neither the exposure nor the incentive to study languages. Finally, in an attempt to respond to financial duress caused by decreasing state revenues and declining student numbers, the University of New Mexico has also repeatedly increased the minimum number of students that must be enrolled in undergraduate and graduate classes over the last few years. Classes that do not meet minimum capacity can, and at times, are cancelled. As one can imagine, this requisite puts undue strain on smaller language programs such as Italian, Russian and Portuguese.

The different changes that the university implemented had a pronounced impact on enrollments in foreign language courses. Portuguese was no exception. Since 2014 we have seen a decline in our numbers, especially at the 200 level (beginning and intermediate intensive Portuguese and Accelerated Portuguese for Spanish Speakers). These courses are six credit hours and therefore surpass the minimum credit hours that students are required to take in a foreign language in the College of Arts and Sciences. Numbers have remained more stable at the 100 level (beginning Portuguese), since these courses fit easily into the university's three-credit language requirement. The decline at the 200 level in turn, has had a direct impact on the 300 and 400 level courses (Intermediate-Advanced and Advanced Portuguese). The 300 and 400 level Portuguese classes focus on cultural issues and are required for our majors and minors. With lower enrollments at the 200 level,

there are simply less students entering into the pool of potential students for the advanced courses. This is to say, lower enrollments at the 200 level has also meant a decline in the number of students continuing on to the 300 and 400 level courses.

On the other hand, enrollments in our graduate classes have remained fairly stable, perhaps reflecting a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity, transnationalism and the program's stress on teaching literature and culture vis-à-vis social issues. The latter is an approach that is also used in the 300 and 400 level courses, though the 300 and 400 level courses do not cover transnational issues. They concentrate instead on Brazilian society and culture, providing the students with a broad panorama of the country.

In sum, like many other foreign languages programs, including recently Spanish, Portuguese at the University of New Mexico faces the challenge of enrollments, which even at their most robust, are small in comparison to our sister language, Spanish. And, like many fields in the humanities, we also face the challenge of showing our relevance in an academic environment that is increasingly focused on the STEM fields (often to the detriment of the humanities).

I think that the 2018 Modern Languages Association presidential theme provides a clear and compelling rationale for why the studies of the humanities matter. The 2018 presidential theme states that: "our intellectual, artistic, and pedagogical work in the humanities offers strategies for navigating the crises of our time: political volatility, fluctuating financial markets, fear-mongering media, and increasingly hateful acts and rhetoric that contribute to a general sense of malaise." Complementing this assessment of the value of the humanities Gerald Greenberg, senior associate dean of academic affairs, humanities and curriculum, instruction and programs in the College of Arts and Sciences at Syracuse University maintains that: "Through studying the humanities, one has the opportunity to get to know oneself and others better, the opportunity to become better able to understand and grapple with complex moral issues, the complexities and intricacies of humanity" (Greenberg, 2017). In sum, beyond having practical applications, such as improving writing skills and analytical abilities, the humanities also have moral value in a world in which cross-cultural understanding is at the same time more important and less valued by certain social sectors that have pigeonholed entire groups of people as

undesirable others.

To this I would like to add that the study of foreign languages and the cultures that these languages express, in this case Portuguese, adds a supplementary bonus to the ability to “navigate the crises of our times.” Foreign languages also augment our opportunities to “get to know oneself and others better.”

Several studies have shown that learning a foreign language is beneficial in a purely material sense. But, in these times of insecurity (provoked or not by hash tags), learning a foreign language continues to have immaterial benefits as well. If we are to recruit and retain students into our programs, I believe that we must emphasize both the material and the immaterial. This point was made over ten years ago in the 2007 Modern Languages Association report on “Foreign Languages and Higher Education.” The report cited Harvard social scientist Daniel Yankelovich to highlight the relevance of foreign languages in a political conjecture that was still reeling from the 9/11 attacks. According to Yankelovich, our culture “must become less ethnocentric, less patronizing, less ignorant of others, less Manichaeic in judging other cultures, and more at home with the rest of the world. Higher education can do a lot to meet that important challenge” (2). Since the present context is no less ethnocentric and Manichean than that of eleven years ago, the study of languages has, in my opinion, become even more vital.

But how do we convey this necessity to students and administrators or even colleagues who do not see Portuguese as a so-called strategic language (as for example Russian, Chinese or Arabic)? At the University of New Mexico we have taken different paths to make our program more visible to undergraduate students, as well as graduate students in different fields. The curricular revisions that define our program presently have their beginning with my now emerita colleague, Dr. Margo Milleret.

Milleret, who taught at the University of New Mexico from 1996-2015, tirelessly strived to improve the Portuguese program at the university. Though a specialist in Brazilian theater, Milleret also conducted extensive research on Portuguese programs in the United States. In 2017 she published the critical anthology *A Handbook for Portuguese Instructors in the US*, which focuses on best practices for Portuguese programs in the United States.

Dr. Milleret's research on Portuguese programs in the United States informed the innovations she brought to the Portuguese program at the University of New Mexico. She redesigned parts of the curriculum to better serve the needs and interests of the undergraduate population at the university. Her courses covered innovative topics such as Lusophone speakers in the United States and language learning through speech acts. Milleret also included curricular innovations such as service learning in her courses. Though fairly common in some Spanish language programs, this pedagogical approach is not widespread in Portuguese language curricula, especially not in parts of the country that lack a significant Portuguese speaking population.

The contemporary configuration of the Portuguese program at the University of New Mexico owes much to Dr. Milleret's labor, upon which the current faculty has built. At the undergraduate level, we offer classes that deal with socially engaged themes such as resistance in Brazilian literature and culture. Courses that are a set part of the curriculum approach said topics vis-à-vis more canonical texts. In one course, for example, I teach Pero Vaz de Caminha's "Carta de Achamento" (1500) in conjunction with the "Carta Guarani Kaiowá" (2012). Or we will read Gregório de Matos' poem "Triste Bahia" along excerpts from Ana Maria Gonçalves' novel *Um defeito de cor* (2006). The juxtaposition of literary manifestations from different periods conveys a diachronic perspective of Brazilian literature and society and helps students "understand and grapple with complex moral issues, (and) the complexities and intricacies of humanity" (Greenberg 2017).

Many of the current course offerings at the University of New Mexico expose students to multiple facets of Brazilian society, while also allowing them to draw comparisons between their lived experience and the materials that they are learning. Some recent courses deal with the dictatorship and post dictatorship in Brazil (a course originally developed by Margo Milleret), social justice in Brazilian culture or the culture of machismo in Brazil. Other staples of the undergraduate curriculum feature courses that engage the students' interest in cultural media beyond the written text. As part of our course rotation, we offer a class on Brazilian popular music (a legacy of Dr. Jon Tolman) and another on Brazilian film. The latter is an outreach class. It is taught in English and is cross-listed with Media Arts.

In the past we have also taught outreach courses in Spanish. Usually these classes are part of the Hispanic literature curriculum. The outreach component of the course are commonly materials about Brazilian literature and culture that are taught in either English or Spanish translation. Frequently, students who had taken such a class go on to take Portuguese classes and some of these same students have decided to pursue terminal degrees in Brazilian studies.

Several of our current courses offerings also propose to interrogate ethnocentrism and therefore to: “denaturalize the elements that contribute to states of insecurity” (MLA 2018 Presidential Theme). By emphasizing the social dimension of literature, courses can not only make literary production more relevant to students who do not necessarily come from literary studies (many of our undergraduates are either second majors or minors), but these classes can also offer students new critical tools to engage with the world.

Our graduate courses, which are often cross-listed with undergraduate topics courses, also broach the intersection between literature, cinema and society. However, seminars (i.e. courses taught solely at the graduate level) posit these themes within a truly Latin American context. Brazilian literary and cinematic production is taught vis-à-vis the output of its Spanish American neighbors such as Argentina, Chile and Colombia. The advantage of this comparative/contrastive approach is that it: a) Exposes graduate students in Brazilian literature and culture to a wider range of literary and cultural manifestations. This can come in handy when Master’s students apply to PhD programs and/or when doctoral students apply for teaching jobs. As some recent job postings indicate, many positions in Spanish and Portuguese departments implicitly or explicitly require that candidates be fluent in Spanish and Portuguese, and that they have a foot in both literary and cultural worlds.

The second advantage of a comparative/contrastive methodology is that it can serve as a recruitment tool for Latin American Studies students as well as graduate students in Spanish. Some of these students incorporate Brazil into their research, including doctoral theses. It was with these two aspects in mind that three and a half years ago we established a dual Masters of Art in Portuguese and Spanish. The program has been successful both in terms of recruitment and in placing

students into PhDs.

I believe that in the present conjecture of tightening budgets and the consequences of cost-saving measures, such as a decrease in tenure-track faculty positions, a dialogue across disciplinary and geographical borders is one (if not the only or even the easiest) possible way to deal with the state of insecurity in Brazilian studies. We should prepare our students to maintain an open mind toward otherness by, among other things, challenging them to probe into their disciplinary assumptions (as well as other assumptions). At the same time, for those of us directing doctoral theses in Lusophone literature and culture, I believe that it is increasingly important to prepare our students not only to be able to navigate Spanish and/or Foreign Languages departments. Additionally, to echo the recommendation of the 2007 MLA report on Foreign Languages and Higher Education, we need to better prepare our graduate students to take on positions that emphasize teaching over research.

Finally, ongoing exchanges amongst ourselves, scholars and teachers of Portuguese provide a forum to bounce ideas off of one another and provide peer support. Furthermore, the strengthening of existing academic networks such as the American Portuguese Studies Association and/or the Brazilian Studies Association is essential as we continue to face down the myriad of challenges to Lusophone studies today.

WORKS CITED

"Brazil Takes off." *The Economist*, November 14, 2009.

CAMBRIDGE INSTITUTE FOR BRAZILIAN STUDIES. "Survey of Portuguese Language Instruction at

FLAHERTY, Colleen. "Not a Small World After All." *Inside Higher Ed*. February 11, 2015.

GOLDBERG, David, Denis Looney, and Natalia Lusin. *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Learning, Fall 2013*. NY: MLA, 2013.

GREENBERG, Gerald. "Why we still need to study the humanities in a STEM world." *The Washington Post*. October 18, 2017.

https://www.mla.org/content/download/31180/1452509/EMB_enrllmnts_nonEngl_2013.pdf

LOONEY, Denis and Natalia Lusin. *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in United States Institutions of Higher Learning, Summer 2016 and Fall 2016*. NY: MLA, 2018.

<https://www.mla.org/content/download/83540/2197676/2016-Enrollments-Short-Report.pdf>

MILLERET, Margo, and Mary E. Risner. *A Handbook for Portuguese Instructors in the U.S.* Roosevelt, NJ: Boavista Press, 2016.

MILLERET, Margo. "Portuguese Study in Higher Education in the United States." *Hispania: A Journal Devoted to the Teaching of Spanish and Portuguese*. 95.1 (2012): 135-150.

MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION. 2018 Presidential Theme, "States of Insecurity." <https://www.mla.org/Convention/Convention-History/Past-Conventions/2018-Convention/2018-Presidential-Theme>

MONTERO, Alfred P. *Brazil: Reversal of Fortune*. Cambridge: Polity, 2014
New England Institutions of Higher Education." Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2015.

ROHTER, Larry. *Brazil on the Rise: The Story of a Country Transformed*. New York: Palgrave, 2012.

SMITH COLLEGE. "NEASC Reaccreditation 2017 Self-Study Report." ---. "Spanish and Portuguese Decennial Review," Appendix D, December 2014.

SMITH COLLEGE. *Mission of Smith College*. <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/smith-history/mission>