

Elena Dimitri

Project Overview Narrative

Project Title: Brasil; Dança e Relações

Project Description

This grant proposal is a continuation of my third-year arts award. In this project description, I will give a summary of my project as well as address the progress I have made:

With assistance from the Arts Award, from May 21st through July 3rd I will travel to Brazil to research Brazilian dance culture and explore its role as both an art form and a social practice. To keep my research focused and in dialogue with my current studies, I have decided to investigate dance's impact on race relations and individuals' interactions with diversity. Through travel, study of Afro-Brazilian culture, conversations with citizens involved in dance or social reforms, and participation in dance forms, I will observe the state and complex understandings of diversity in Brazil. From an outsider's point of view, I hope to examine how Brazilians today interact with the question of diversity and whether or not dance provides a shared space for some of these questions to be addressed non-verbally. What is dance's role in an individual's self-identification? How does dance as an art form requiring the body as its medium affect an audience's perception, and expectations of *who* is performing?

It is also important to note that I will be traveling in Brazil during the World Cup, a time when the country will be hosting a half-million tourists from around the world. It will be intriguing to observe how Brazilian culture presents itself and interacts with the influx of visitors. How does Brazilian culture and dance get commodified, packaged and sold to visitors? What type of Brazilian are they "selling"? Because I am traveling to Brazil during such an exciting time, I think it would be dishonest to conduct my research without considering the influence of the World Cup on Brazilian culture and dance.

The third year arts award provided me with funds to purchase my plane tickets to and from Brazil. My flights are booked and I will be departing from Miami on May 21st.

From May 22nd to June 21st, I will participate in University of Southern Florida's study abroad program in Salvador, Bahia. The program's theme revolves around Afro-Brazilian Culture and Society, which will undoubtedly inform my research. The course will touch on Brazilian colonization, slavery, and contemporary race and ethnic relations. The course readings and my professor will be valuable resources that will help guide my research. In addition to the cultural course, I am enrolled in an intermediate Portuguese language through the local university, Faculdade Social da Bahia (FSBA). The language instruction will improve my ability to communicate with Brazilians, which will also strengthen the quality of my research. During the study abroad program and my time in Bahia, I will make work to immerse myself in cultural events involving dance. I also

intend to take advantage of the dance connections in Brazil introduced by my faculty mentor, Katie Schetlick, and the director of Brazil Cultural, Javier Escudero. After the study abroad program ends, I plan to travel around Brazil (specifically Rio de Janeiro) for another week to continue to my research.

Most of my concerns still revolve around my research. I have read about Brazil, its race relations, and dance culture. One book, *Samba: resistance in motion*, written by Barbara Browning connects the national dance to social and political efforts in Brazil. I have also brainstormed preliminary research questions I hope to answer. How do most Brazilians view dance and the dancing body? What main purpose does dance serve for the people? Does this differ from the United States? How do audiences, especially foreigners perceive the forms? While I have many questions, I want to be sure to remain open to new influences and ideas that arise during my time in Brazil. I anticipate that the direction of my research will become clearer when I arrive and begin the fieldwork. It is important to enter the field and my research without any preconceived notions of the society.

While in Brazil, I want to ensure that the quality of my documentation is high. This is why I am requesting funds for additional equipment. I intend to purchase a higher quality lens for my Nikon D5000 digital camera. I have selected a lens that has a larger aperture, enabling me to capture more light in low-light settings. This setting is also ideal for portrait shots. The lens is also fixed (not zoom) which warrants higher quality photographs and video. I am also requesting a larger memory card and attachable microphone.

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

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

I have always admired Brazil: its culture, diversity, natural wonders, and music. The 4th year Arts Award will enrich my time in Brazil and enable me to collect high quality research. Although I know this project will be challenging, I have no doubt that this onsite experience will be exciting, educational, and inspirational.

Timeline

Spring 2014

- Finish VISA application and receive proper documents
- Finalize itinerary of traveling after study abroad ends
- April 27th – Present progress at Arts Scholars event

May 21st

- Depart Miami

May 22nd arrive in Salvador, Bahia (meet group in airport)

May 22nd-June 21st

- Participate in study abroad program
- Collect material for project

June 21st-July 3rd

- Travel to Rio De Janeiro to continue research

July 3rd

- Depart Brazil to United States

Remainder of Summer 2014

- Sort materials and begin preparation for independent study

Fall 2014

- Complete project
- Present at Fall Dance Concert

Spring 2015

- Outcome presentation

Budget

SanDisk Ultra SDXC 128GB	110.00
AF-S NIKKOR 50mm f/1.4G	484.95
ME-1 Stereo Microphone	179.95
Flight from Salvador, Bahia to Rio de Janeiro	250.00
Travel Expenses	300.00
Miscellaneous dance-related events	100.00

Total: \$1424.90

Evidence of Participation in the Arts

Participation in the Arts at UVA

- Course Work: In the process of completing all dance minor requirements
- Performed in Fall Experimental Concerts (2011, 2012, 2013) and Spring Experimental Concerts (2012, 2013, 2014)
- Choreographed for Spring Experimental Concert (2013) and Fall Dance Concert (2013)
- Interned for Professor Claude Wampler and traveled to NYC to help produce her show entitled “N’a pas un gramme de charisma”
- Performed in Final Fridays at the Fralin Art Museum
- Participated in workshops and guest residencies with Susan Weisner, Christopher K. Morgan, members of Pilobolus, members of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company
- Leadership Roles: Publicity Chair of Dance Committee at UVA
- Performed at the Mid-Atlantic American College Dance Festival Gala at George Mason University (2014)
- Had choreography performed at the Mid-Atlantic ACDFFA Informal Concert

Participation in the Arts Scholars program

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

Examples of Work

<https://vimeo.com/65193039>

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

<https://vimeo.com/76707071>

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