

Partners in Liberal Arts Education

Through the American Academy, Kent State University and the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná collaborate to connect Brazilian students to an American liberal arts education.

BY JILLIAN KRAMER, BA '06

For three weeks at the end of the Spring Semester 2022, Stefanie Moore, BS '97, MS '07, a professor in Kent State's School of Media and Journalism, began each morning with a cup of Brazilian coffee. She sipped it in the furnished apartment she was staying at in Curitiba, the capital and largest city in the state of Paraná in southern Brazil.

After getting ready for the day, Moore shared an Uber with a colleague, riding past historical churches and colorful murals during their 15-minute commute to Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná. There, she walked under a replica of Kent State University's brick arch and along well-manicured gardens to meet 59

Brazilian students eager to learn about social media strategies—and about the United States.

Each semester, as many as 20 Kent State professors travel to Curitiba to teach in the American Academy, a collaboration between the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná (PUCPR, pronounced Poo-key) and Kent State University. Some teach their classes online from Kent State, which was the only way to collaborate during pandemic travel restrictions.

The American Academy, which launched in July 2018, offers a one-of-a-kind, dual-enrollment program for Brazilian students. For two years, they can study Kent State's liberal arts curriculum and earn an associate degree without leaving their native Brazil. Kent State professors teach classes in English at the PUCPR campus, and students earn academic credits toward a bachelor's degree from both universities simultaneously.

As Kent State's vice president for global education, Marcello Fantoni, PhD, describes the partnership, "It is as if Kent State and PUCPR got together and had a baby. And that's the American Academy."

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option to complete a bachelor's degree at PUCPR or at the Kent Campus, says Valerie Reed, MEd '15, associate director of international partnerships at Kent State's Office of Global Education and the American Academy's interim program coordinator. (She's also a doctoral student in higher education administration at Kent State.)

So far, 301 students have enrolled in the program, growing from an initial cohort of 15 young men and women. (Currently, 151 students are participating.)

More than 160 students have graduated with an associate degree, Reed says, and one—Alvacir Wesley Kalatai Alberti, AS '20, BS '22—earned a bachelor's degree at Kent State in May 2022 (see page 38). Three more earned four-year degrees this December, Reed says, including Mariana Freitas de Macedo, AS '20, BBA '22 (see page 39).

THE AMERICAN ACADEMY'S ORIGIN STORY

The idea for the American Academy grew from an existing relationship with PUCPR that began in 2012 when the two universities partnered on several programs and student and faculty exchanges. That led to hope for an even deeper relationship, Fantoni says. "We thought, what about exploring the concept of a liberal arts education outside of the United States?"

In America, students may explore diverse classes before settling into coursework centered on a chosen major. But in many other countries, students are asked to select a major before they enter college with no option to change programs after admission.

"We were well aware that for many students, that was a limitation," says Fantoni. So, he and PUCPR staff members envisioned a solution. Kent State professors would teach a liberal arts curriculum in Curitiba, which Fantoni says is an "absolutely innovative program in Brazil," one that offers students the "American educational experience at its fullest."

On March 31, 2016, Kent State and PUCPR formally recognized their elevated relationship as strategic partners with a signing ceremony on the Kent Campus. And two years later, on May 3, 2018, the presidents of the universities formally agreed to form the American Academy in a special ceremony on the Kent Campus. The American Academy began educating students in Curitiba in July 2018.

Although modern liberal arts curriculums allow students to study a much larger range of subjects, they still retain the core goals of traditional liberal arts curricula: to develop well-rounded individuals with general knowledge of a wide range of subjects and with mastery of a range of transferable skills.

Paulo Otávio Mussi Augusto, DBA, the American Academy's director in Brazil, says he has watched the program transform students who enter it, helping them build confidence and mature as they carve

their own educational paths. Through the academy, "they find their own purpose and they know how to pursue that," Mussi Augusto explains. "And that's the main reason we do it."

INTENSE EDUCATION

The American Academy's semesters look a little different than Kent State's. The first and second semester, students take six classes, including mandatory College Writing that is spread through 14 weeks, Mussi Augusto says. But most of the classes are taught in three-to-five-week blocks, with students taking only one class at a time.

With that kind of deep dive, assignments also look a little different, Fantoni says. Students don't write long-form research papers, for example, but otherwise adjustments are "minimal."

While it's an intense pace, Mussi Augusto says, it also has many benefits. Not only do the shorter class schedules allow more Kent State professors to teach in Brazil, but students are fully immersed in a single subject at a time—and their grades tend to be higher because of it.

"Some of the professors who came to Brazil said, 'This is the best class I ever taught,'" Mussi Augusto says. "And that's not because the Brazilian students we selected are better students." Instead, he thinks the American Academy's model promotes better learning.

EAGER TO TEACH

For the first year or so, Fantoni says he had to scramble to get professors to join the American Academy's ranks, because they were unsure about participating. That's no longer the case. According to Reed, 78 Kent State professors have taught in the program, including online courses.

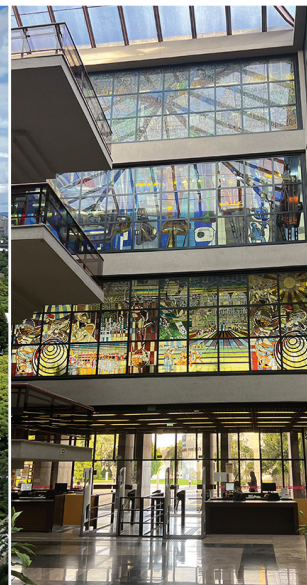
Stefanie Moore joined the program in spring 2022, teaching a social media strategies course from April 22 to May 11. "I was a little nervous about leaving my family for that long," she says, "but they were supportive of me going." And it was a decision she didn't regret.

She found the students to be "respectful and kind," and "eager to learn not only about the topic, but about Kent State and America." They also were happy to share their culture.

Each day, her students would take her to experience a new kind of Brazilian food. "My students would write down things I should ask for," she says. "They took us to the outdoor farmers' market and artisan fair in the old city center. It was such a fun experience."

Mussi Augusto says the unique engagement, even off campus, between Kent State professors and Brazilian students enriches the experience for both groups. "The interaction we see between the faculty members who are teaching [in Brazil] and ➤

Left: American Academy graduates throw their caps in the air at the culmination of the commencement ceremony at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná in December 2022. Photo by Gustavo Queiroz



Above: The atrium of the library at Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná is crowned by a glass pyramid. During the day, light passes through a set of artistic stained-glass windows distributed over three floors. *Courtesy Stefanie Moore*

Left: A view of the chapel and library (red building) on the PUCPR campus with the city of Curitiba beyond. *Photo by Noall Reid*



Top left: One of the sculpture gardens near the front gate of Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná. *Photo by Noall Reid*

Top right: Stefanie Moore, BS '97, MS '07, professor in Kent State's School of Media and Journalism, poses with some of the American Academy students on the last day of classes. *Courtesy Stefanie Moore*

Bottom left: Stefanie Moore, BS '97, MS '07, professor in Kent State's School of Media and Journalism, and Jeff Child, PhD, associate professor in the School of Communication Studies, join American Academy students to explore different foods at Curitiba's old city center. *Courtesy Stefanie Moore*

Bottom right: Paulo Otávio Mussi Augusto, DBA, director of the American Academy, and Marcello Fantoni, PhD, vice president of global education, stand at the entrance to the Japanese garden on the campus of Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná. *Photo by Gustavo Queiroz*

our students is different from the one that happens at Kent State," he says. "They are more connected. They exchange more impressions. They go out to lunch together. So, they form different bonds that help the students to see different perspectives and to mature during the process."

PATHWAY TO THE UNITED STATES

Once students successfully complete an associate degree at the American Academy, "they have two big choices to make," Mussi Augusto says. They must choose their major and where they will earn it. Students have the option to finish a bachelor's degree in Curitiba or in Kent. "They are already enrolled at both institutions so it's a smooth process," he says.

Of the more than 300 students who have enrolled in the program, 92 have chosen to complete a bachelor's degree at the Kent Campus, including those who just graduated with an associate degree at PUCPR on Dec. 12, 2022. That's more than Fantoni says he'd ever imagined would come to the United States. But, in retrospect, he says it makes sense.

"Students may be interested in going abroad, but at the age of 18, they don't feel confident," Fantoni says. "They are still young; their English is not good enough. But after two years, studying in English and developing more experience, they are a lot more ready to come to the United States."

PANDEMIC PAUSE

The pandemic scrambled some of the American Academy's best-laid plans. Students scheduled to come to the Kent Campus to pursue a bachelor's degree in 2020 were asked to pause their travel for a year, although they could continue taking classes online.

Moving the American Academy classes online was the easy part, Fantoni says. "What was not as easy is that doing so was defeating the purpose a bit." In-person education can be richer and more interactive, he says. "We also saw the American Academy as an opportunity to internationalize our faculty by having them teach all over the world. Instead, they had to teach classes from their living room for a long time."

After a year and a half, the American Academy resumed sending Kent State professors to PUCPR and

welcoming Brazilian students to Kent State. "It's better with the faculty teaching in person," Fantoni says. "And dozens of Kent State faculty now know how to teach abroad and want to go again."

Every June, American Academy students have the option to take their regular courses in Curitiba or to study abroad in Florence, Italy, at Kent State's Florence Center. "Because of the pandemic, this summer was the first time our Brazilian students came to Florence," Mussi Augusto says. "It's a great opportunity for them to live this educational experience in more depth."

FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY

Just as the American Academy has helped its students grow, its creators want the program to grow. "I think the American Academy is a good idea, period," says Fantoni as he ticks off the program's advantages for students: It offers them the opportunity to study in English. It gives them a chance to experience American culture before coming to the United States. Its tuition is more affordable than many other study abroad options available to them.

The program transforms students who enter it, helping them build confidence and mature as they carve their own educational paths.

"And it opens their minds," Fantoni says. So, when it comes to growing the program, "The first thing we need to understand is not only how we replicate it quantitatively, but how we expand it qualitatively. And I think if we can do that, then we can create stronger bridges between international universities."

He and Mussi Augusto are exploring new university partnerships in Jordan and South Korea. And Fantoni envisions creating a network of American Academies throughout the world: "I think we are outgrowing just one location." ⚡

Learn more about the American Academy at www.kent.edu/KSU/AA.

Scan the QR code to watch a TikTok of Stefanie Moore sharing a day in her life while teaching at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná in Brazil.



A Change of Plans

A computer science major is the first Brazilian student to graduate with a bachelor's degree from Kent State's American Academy.

BY APRIL MCCLELLAN-COPELAND

As a student in mechatronics at a Brazilian university, Alvair Wesley Kalatai Alberti, AS '20, BS '22, had never considered studying abroad until he read a roadside billboard in 2018 advertising Kent State's new American Academy program. However, the prospect of studying in the United States intrigued him enough to call the Brazilian office and find out more.

Until then, studying abroad had “felt so out of reach and so difficult that I really never had given it any thought,” says 25-year-old Kalatai Alberti, who is from Imbituva, a municipality in the state of Paraná in southern Brazil. But the American Academy's pathway to Kent State made a study abroad program seem possible—and, although he was a good student, he wasn't sure he wanted to continue in engineering.

As long as he felt he could improve himself through the program, his parents supported him fully, seeing it as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He became one of the first 15 students to enroll in the American Academy, which launched in July 2018.

SUCCESS DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

But the road to Kalatai Alberti's study abroad program didn't go exactly as planned. By 2020, when he was able to attend Kent State in person, the pandemic had shuttered college campuses across the United States. He decided to major in computer science and took all his courses online for a year before arriving at the Kent Campus in August 2021.

Once there, Kalatai Alberti fell in love with the campus. He made friends with students from countries around the world, including Nigeria, China, Italy, Lebanon and India. An avid rock climber, he scaled the Warren Student Recreation and Wellness Center's rock-climbing wall, connected with other outdoor enthusiasts and explored the hiking trails of Northeast Ohio.



He saw snow for the first time, and he and his friends had snowball fights on campus. And speaking Portuguese with his two Brazilian roommates in their off-campus apartment kept him feeling connected to his home country.

Kalatai Alberti had planned to graduate at the end of 2022 until he learned of an opportunity to do a master's degree program in computer software engineering at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, beginning in fall 2022. His advisors at Kent State supported his plans, explaining that if he focused his concentration he could graduate earlier.

So, in May 2022, Kalatai Alberti became the first student to graduate from the American Academy with a four-year degree, earning a bachelor's in computer science, with a concentration in robotics and embedded systems.

“I did a lot of the program remotely,” Kalatai Alberti says, “but being at Kent State and talking to people—and being able to interact and do stuff together—that's a whole different thing. I've met such amazing people.” ⚡

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A Dream Come True

An opportunity to explore the liberal arts through the American Academy helped an uncertain Brazilian student commit to a career path and study in the United States.

BY JILLIAN KRAMER, BA '06



As a child in Brazil, Mariana Freitas de Macedo, AS '20, BBA '22, dreamed of studying in the United States. Attending Kent State University's American Academy at the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná in Curitiba, Brazil, did more than help that dream come true—it helped her decide on a career.

When she entered the program three years ago, de Macedo, now 21, had no idea what she wanted to do for a living. The American Academy offered her an opportunity unique to an American education—the chance to explore the liberal arts for two years before committing to a career path.

In Brazil and around the world, many students must select their majors before they enroll at a university. Then they exclusively study that subject until they earn a four-year degree.

“Having to decide my major only the semester before I came to Kent State was very helpful,” says de Macedo. She ultimately chose to major in business management and graduated in December 2022. Back in Brazil now, she is applying for jobs in her field.

A WARM WELCOME

When de Macedo came to the Kent Campus in August 2021, she found it charming. “It reminds me of those cute little cities in movies,” she says, adding, “everything is so well organized.”

She noticed differences from universities in her native Brazil. There, she says, most students choose to live at home, rendering dormitories largely unnecessary. At Kent State, she enjoyed the chance to meet and mingle with students who are studying different majors.

“What I most love about the program are the many possibilities open to me,” de Macedo says. “Getting to know new people from different places and cultures is amazing.”

Coming to a new country without her family, de Macedo admits, is “very hard.” But when she arrived at Kent State, she says staff members and her professors welcomed her warmly and “gave me a lot of support and opportunities to meet new people.”

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Having three American roommates helped her make friends quickly, too. And in her student job, she calculated GPAs for international students for a senior international admissions counselor in the Office of Global Education, where she also made connections with other students through events and programs.

Her favorite professor, Nichole Egbert, PhD, who teaches courses in health and relational communication in the School of Communication Studies, even gave students “tips about what to do in Kent and places to visit,” de Macedo says. “[Egbert] was an amazing, responsible, caring and dedicated professor. I wish I had another class with her!” ⚡