

BRAZIL TRAVEL COURSE

TRVL 300

SPRING 2026

Dr. David Cupery

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Immerse yourself in the diverse traditions, varied rhythms, storied history and complex socioeconomic fabric of Brazil. Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts will offer a 3-credit Brazil travel course during the spring semester of 2026. Despite Brazil's enormous territory, abundant population, and immense global influence, most Americans know little of the country beyond surface level stereotypes or basic cultural reference points. This course will help students dig beneath the surface and develop a more nuanced understanding of the country's rich history, cultural diversity, natural beauty and socioeconomic challenges and opportunities. This will be done by combining several weeks of coursework with approximately ten days of travel to Brazil. The travel will be organized around visits to sites of historical and cultural significance and encounters with Brazilian experts, artists and everyday citizens.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will familiarize themselves with unique cultures and contrast their own values, opportunities and experiences with those of these groups.
2. Students will understand the historical evolution of Brazil politics and society, including the country's multifaceted relations with the United States.
3. Students will comprehend present-day Brazil's socioeconomic diversity.
4. Each student will obtain a deeper understanding of one aspect of Brazilian politics, economics or society through a research project that relies partly on in-country experiences and observations.
5. Students will situate the value of their travel within their larger college experience.

Assigned Readings: We will draw from the following books, whose citations appear in abbreviated form in the course schedule. You are only required to buy *The Brazil Reader*, although I recommend also buying or borrowing the second book for some helpful background reading. Aside from content from *The Brazil Reader*, all assigned chapters and articles are available in PDF form on Canvas. The remaining readings are freely available online. You are encouraged but not required to buy these two books.

- Green, J. N., Langland, V., & Schwarcz, L. M. (Eds.). 2019. *The Brazil Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Duke University Press.
- Green, James, and Thomas Skidmore. 2009. *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*, 2nd Edition." *Oxford University Press*.

For additional background information, see:

- Schwarcz, Lilia M. and Heloisa M. Starling. 2015. *Brazil: a Biography*. New York: Picador Books.
- Klein, Herbert S. and Francisco Vidal Luna. 2020. *Modern Brazil: A Social History*. Cambridge University Press.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The class will meet twice a week prior to the travel component of the course to study and discuss issues related to Brazilian history, politics, socioeconomics and culture. Students will have required readings and complete written assignments and presentations. During the trip, students will keep a journal, addressing their experiences and daily reflection questions. After returning to MCLA, students will complete a project based on their knowledge of Brazil and their experiences in the country. These projects – combining in-country experiences with additional research – will be presented to classmates and any other interested individuals during the final two class meetings.

GRADING AND EVALUATION

- Attendance to all class meetings is mandatory and only two excused absences (with prior instructor approval) will be permitted.
- Presentations (5%): each student will complete a short presentation, addressing a current event from within Brazil. They should describe what has occurred and attempt to contextualize it with what we have learned thus far about the country. A list of recommended sources will be provided to the class after the first meeting.
- Written reflections (10%): each student will choose 2 class days to write a paragraph reflection on the day's readings. The reflection will address what the student sees as the most important takeaways from one or more of the readings as well as the questions the reading prompted.
- Portuguese quiz (10%): I will not be teaching you Portuguese and you are not required to have taken Portuguese in order to take this trip. However, if each of you knows the most basic phrases and vocabulary you will get a lot more out of the travel. This can be done by using the Duolingo app and/or practicing with a Portuguese phrasebook. You are expected to be using these resources throughout the semester and will have to show a certain level of progress in the Duolingo app. More information will be provided in a handout.
- Reading journal (15%): each student will complete a daily, hand-written journal during our time in Brazil. The journal will reflect on the day's experiences, including what they found most interesting and the impressions and questions they were left with.
- Behavior while traveling (40% of final grade): every student must be a professional representative of the US, MCLA, and this course while in Brazil. This will require following **all** local laws, respecting all course rules, being sensitive to local cultural norms, having a positive attitude and being an engaged participant in all mandatory activities while in Brazil.

- Presentation (20%): each student will – individually or with a partner – pick a particular aspect of Brazilian history, culture or society that they will research before and during the trip. This could be the food, the colonial architecture, the music, the religious practices of particular Afro-Brazilian communities, or any other approved topic. Students will be tasked with producing a short – 2–3-page write-up – about the topic and presenting a short – 5-10 minute presentation to rest of the class after the trip. Both the written and spoken components should draw from first-hand experiences from the travel component of the course.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND CONTENT

Week 1: History, Part 1

- Green et al (Eds.), “Indigenous Experiences of Colonization”, “The Sugar Industry”, “Petition for Pedro 1 to Remain in Brazil”, “Cruelty to Slaves”, “Portraits: Emperor Dom Pedro II”, “Republican Brazil and the Onset of Modernization, 1889-1929”.
- Green and Skidmore, chapter 4.

“Week 2: History, Part 2

- Green et al (Eds.), Vargas and the Estado Novo” (pp. 349-352), “Institutional Act No. 1” (pp. 435-438), “The U.S. Government and the 1964 Coup d’Etat” (pp. 416-419), “Portraits: Oscar Niemeyer” (pp. 420-425), “The Myth of Racial Democracy (pp. 445-448), “Lula’s May Day Speech to Brazilian Workers (pp. 489-491).
- Green & Skidmore, chapter 10.

Week 3: Contemporary Politics

- Gómez Ramírez, Enrique. 2021. “Brazil’s Parliament and other political institutions.” *European Parliamentary Research Services* [Canvas].
- Lloyd, Ryan, and Carolos Oliveira. 2016. “How Brazil’s electoral system led the country into political crisis.” *Good Authority*, May 25 [online].
- Huang, Christine, Moira Fagan, and Sofia Hernandez Ramones. 2024. “Brazilians Mostly Optimistic About Country’s Global Standing Ahead of G20 Summit.” *Pew Research Center*, September 23 [online].
- Nicas, Jack. 2024. “Is Elon Musk’s Brazilian Nemesis Saving Democracy or Hurting It?” *The New York Times*, October 16 [online].

Week 4: Contemporary Socioeconomics

- Green et al (Eds.), “A Young Voice from the MST (pp. 514-518), “The Bolsa Família Program”.
- Central Intelligence Agency. 2024. “Brazil: Economy”. In *The World Factbook* [online].
- Winter, Brian. 2024. “The Problem-Solving Entrepreneurs in Brazil’s Favelas.” *Americas Quarterly*, March 7 [Online].
- Muendler, Marc-Andreas, and Carlos Goés. 2023. “Brazil’s economic challenges are again Lula’s to tackle – this time around they’re more daunting.” *The Conversation*, January 30 [Online].

Week 5: Identity

- Central Intelligence Agency. 2024. "Brazil: People and Society". In *The World Factbook* [online].
- Green et al (Eds.), "What Color are You" (pp. 474-478).
- Kugel, Seth. 2024. "Exploring the Brazil Where Schnapps and Grappa Flow." *The New York Times*, December 13 [Online].
- Malleret, Constance. 2024. "Brazil has struggled to elect women to political office. Upcoming elections could change that." *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 3 [Online].
- Nicas, Jack. 2024. "How to Start the New Year? Keep the Sea Goddess Happy." *The New York Times*, January 1 [Online].

Week 6: Popular and Artistic Culture

- WATCH Salles, Walter. 1998. *Central do Brasil* [Central Station]. Sony Pictures.
- Valente, Simao. 2016. "The 10 Best Brazilian Writers." *Culture Trip*, November 11 [Online].
- Green et al (Eds.), "Portraits Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil" (pp. 492-496).
- Langlois, Jill. 2024. "A Brazilian Artist Movement That Uses Paintings to Save Indigenous Culture." *The New York Times*, December 4 [Online].
- The Economist. 2024. "Brazilian football looks like the next Premier League." *The Economist*, December 5 [Canvas].

Week 7: Week 7: The Natural Environment

- Ariav et al. 2022. "Deforestation in the Amazon Infoguide." *The Council on Foreign Relations* [Online].
- Bearak, Max. 2024. "Brazil's Clashing Goals: Protect the Amazon and Pump Lots More Oil." *The New York Times*, March 13 [Online].
- Andreoni, Manuela. 2024. "An 'Elegant' Idea Could Pay Billions to Protect Trees." *The New York Times*, October 3 [Online].
- Salisbury, David S. "Indigenous defenders stand between illegal roads and survival of the Amazon rainforest – Brazil's election could be a turning point." *The Conversation*, September 29 [Online].

TRAVEL TO BRAZIL

Our group will spend approximately ten days in Brazil around MCLA's March, 2026 spring break. The travel will be organized and led by course instructor Dr. David Cupery while relying heavily on a mix of local partners for transportation, guides, presentations, and other educational activities. The students in the class will also be joined by Dr. Kailai Huang, Professor of History at MCLA, and his wife, Youlin Shi.