

# International research and cultural exchange visit

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**Abstract:** This essay in one interdisciplinary research addresses how to understand and improve the pathways that lead to successful careers, especially through the lens of education and training. Furthermore, the idea contributes to the development of educational strategies that align with the needs of the labor market, ultimately promoting economic opportunities and empowerment for individuals.

**Key-words:** International Research. Cultural Exchange. Career.

**Resumo:** Este ensaio, inserido em uma pesquisa interdisciplinar, aborda como compreender e melhorar os caminhos que levam a carreiras de sucesso, especialmente através das lentes da educação e do treinamento. Além disso, a ideia contribui para o desenvolvimento de estratégias educativas que se alinham com as necessidades do mercado de trabalho, promovendo, em última análise, oportunidades econômicas e empoderamento dos indivíduos.

**Palavras-chave:** Pesquisa Internacional. Intercâmbio Cultural. Carreira.

**Resumen:** Este ensayo, parte de una investigación interdisciplinaria, aborda cómo comprender y mejorar los caminos que conducen a carreras exitosas, especialmente a través de los lentes de la educación y la capacitación. Además, la idea contribuye al desarrollo de estrategias educativas que se alineen con las necesidades del mercado laboral, promoviendo en última instancia oportunidades económicas y el empoderamiento de las personas.

**Palabras clave:** Investigación Internacional. Intercambio Cultural. Carrera profesional.

## Introduction

In my recent journey to São Paulo, Brazil, under the auspices of a prospective Fulbright research grant, I had the privilege of visiting Fatec Itaquaquetuba – a host institution renowned for its commitment to providing quality technical education to students poised for the labor market. This experience offered a unique window into the aspirations, challenges, and resilience of students deeply engaged in workforce development pathways.



In this case, this essay addresses how to understand and improve the pathways that lead to successful careers, especially through the lens of education and training. Furthermore, the idea contributes to the development of educational strategies that align with the needs of the labor market, ultimately promoting economic opportunities and empowerment for individuals. Therefore, this interdisciplinary research focuses on the intersection of education and workforce development.

## The visit in Sao Paulo, Brazil

The energetic atmosphere of Fatec Itaquaquecetuba was invigorating. Meeting with students there was more than just an academic engagement—it was an inspiring dialogue that revealed the human element behind higher education and career readiness. The students' enthusiasm was palpable as they shared their individual journeys, their studies, career ambitions, and the motivations that drove them to pursue technical education. Many students spoke passionately about their desire to contribute to Brazil's economic development, leveraging their specialized skills to make meaningful impacts in industries ranging from secretary education to information technology. The sense of purpose that guided these students was truly remarkable, highlighting the connection between education, opportunity, and the empowerment of individuals.

Through our conversations, I witnessed firsthand the power of education in shaping not just technical competencies, but also the students' confidence and determination. Despite the complexities they face—balancing studies, work, and personal lives—their stories reflected resilience, adaptability, and an unyielding drive to overcome obstacles. Their motivations were diverse: some were driven by the desire to support their families, others by the aspiration to break new ground in emerging industries, and many by a sense of collective responsibility to improve their communities.



This visit underscored the importance of understanding the cultural, social, and economic contexts in which students navigate their educational journeys. It also reminded me of the critical role that institutions like Fatec Itaquaquecetuba play in bridging the gap between education and the labor market, equipping students with the skills they need to thrive in an evolving economy. My discussions with the faculty and students left me with a deep appreciation for the transformative potential of education, and the role that global partnerships can play in fostering innovation and capacity-building across borders.

### **Brazil's education system**

However, it became evident that Brazil's education system poses significant barriers for many students. Public education, particularly at the primary level is compulsory and is often underfunded and struggles to remain competitive with private education's amenities, expansion of education access to students. This lack of adequate funding results in limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient infrastructure, which can hinder the quality of education that students receive. These challenges can create gaps in foundational knowledge, making it difficult for students to successfully transition to higher education institutions like Fatec Itaquaquecetuba. Despite these obstacles, the students I met were determined to persevere, motivated by the belief that obtaining a degree would significantly improve their prospects and opportunities in Brazil.



In Brazil, earning a degree is a key determinant in accessing better job opportunities and higher salaries. Higher education graduates are more likely to secure stable employment and command better wages compared to those without a degree. This economic incentive drives many students to overcome the barriers within the public education system, as they recognize that a degree can be a powerful tool for social mobility and financial stability. Through our conversations, I witnessed firsthand the power of education in shaping not just technical competencies, but also the students' confidence and determination. Despite the complexities they face—balancing studies, work, and personal lives—their stories reflected resilience, adaptability, and an unyielding drive to overcome obstacles. Their motivations were diverse: some were driven by the desire to support their families, others by the aspiration to break new ground in emerging industries, and many by a sense of collective responsibility to improve their communities.



Brazil's education system is structured into various stages, each presenting unique challenges and opportunities for students. Primary education, which is compulsory for children between the ages of 7 and 14, is provided free of charge at state schools. Children under the age of 6 may attend optional educação infantil before enrolling in elementary school, known as ensino fundamental – 1, which lasts for five years. Following an initial year focused on literacy, students turn their attention to subjects including Portuguese, geography, history, mathematics, science, arts, and physical education. While the core curriculum may



be adapted to meet local needs and the abilities of individual students, the lack of sufficient funding often impedes the delivery of a well-rounded education (Scholaro Database, 2024).

Middle education, or ensino fundamental – 2, extends for an additional four years, with a similar curriculum to the earlier phase but with the addition of two foreign languages—usually English and Spanish. Each class is typically served by a single teacher, and 800 hours of activities are prescribed annually. This phase of education also suffers from limited resources and overcrowded classrooms, which can restrict students' ability to develop the skills needed to succeed in secondary education (Scholaro Database, 2024).

Secondary education, known as ensino médio, requires the completion of both phases of ensino fundamental. During this phase, students study core subjects such as Portuguese, Brazilian history, and a third language—typically English—along with a diverse range of academic subjects. In addition, professional training courses, such as those focused on agriculture, may be added during the second and third years. Despite the challenges inherent in the public education system, secondary education remains a critical stepping stone for students aspiring to enter higher education and access better career opportunities (Scholaro Database, 2024).

Vocational education plays a crucial role in Brazil's efforts to enhance its economic competitiveness. In April 2011, the government announced an ambitious plan to create eight million additional vocational training opportunities by 2014, recognizing the importance of equipping the workforce with practical, job-ready skills. This emphasis on vocational education is vital for students who seek to enter the labor market directly or complement their academic studies with specialized training (Scholaro Database, 2024).

Tertiary education in Brazil requires the completion of high school education, as well as success in the competitive vestibular entrance examination. Undergraduate degrees, known as bacharelado, typically require four years of study, while those seeking to become school teachers must pursue a separate four-year licenciatura. Other students may choose to undertake two to four years of technology training. Brazil offers a comprehensive range of graduate education, supported by a network of over 2,600 state and private universities and colleges. The country's oldest institution in continuous operation is the Academia de Artilharia, Fortificação e Desenho, founded in 1699 (Scholaro Database, 2024).

## Testing in Brazil for college

In response to these challenges, Brazil's private education sector has played a crucial role in expanding access to higher education. For students who do not achieve desirable scores on the vestibular exam, private universities offer an alternative pathway to pursue a degree. While these institutions require tuition payments, they often provide flexible admission processes and a wide range of programs that cater to diverse student needs.

The proliferation of private universities and colleges have increased the overall capacity of the higher education system, allowing more students to continue their studies even if they do not secure a spot at a public university. Additionally, many private institutions offer better amenities, infrastructures, smaller classes, and financial options to students to help them afford the financial burden of paying for college education, thereby contributing to greater educational access and equity.

## Visting public museums to learn the history, people, and culture of Brazilians

During my visit to São Paulo, I also took the opportunity to explore some of the city's public museums, each offering profound insights into the history, people, and culture of Brazil. These museums are more than just repositories of artifacts; they are spaces that capture the collective memory of a nation and narrate the lived experiences of its people. Among the museums I visited, the one that made the most indelible impression on me was the Museu Afro Brasil, which highlights the history and contributions of African-descended Brazilians, including the harrowing legacy of enslaved people in Brazil.



The Museu Afro Brasil provides an unflinching look at the history of slavery, a dark chapter that shaped Brazil's social, cultural, and economic development. Walking through its halls, I encountered powerful exhibits that depicted the brutal conditions endured by enslaved Africans, the resilience of their communities, and their enduring cultural influence on Brazilian society. The museum's collection includes artifacts, photographs, and artworks that honor the memory of those who were enslaved, while also celebrating the vibrancy and creativity of Afro-Brazilian culture. The stories told through these exhibits offered a poignant reminder of the injustices of the past, as well as the ongoing struggle for equality and recognition faced by Afro-Brazilians today.

Visiting the Museu Afro Brasil was a deeply moving experience, one that enriched my understanding of the complexities of Brazilian identity. It highlighted the ways in which the legacy of slavery continues to shape contemporary social dynamics and underscored the importance of acknowledging this history in order to address present-day inequalities. The resilience and cultural contributions of Afro-Brazilians are an integral part of Brazil's national narrative, and the museum's commitment to preserving and sharing these stories is a testament to the power of education in fostering awareness, empathy, and social justice.

### **My desire to work with Fatec Itaquaquetuba students**

As I envision my future work under the Fulbright research when I am awarded the grant to Brazil in the 2025-2026 cycle, one of my key goals is to engage directly with students by hiring them as research assistants and collaborators. I believe that involving student workers in my projects will provide them with invaluable hands-on experience, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application.





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By working alongside me, these students will have the opportunity to develop research skills, contribute to impactful projects, and gain insights into global perspectives that will enrich their own academic and professional journeys. This collaborative approach will not only benefit my research but also empower the students by enhancing their career readiness and exposing them to international research methodologies. The experience will serve as a catalyst for their personal growth and help them build the competencies required to excel in a dynamic workforce.



## International exchange opportunity for Fatec students

Additionally, my Fulbright research experience at Fatec will serve as an international exchange opportunity, enabling Fatec students to visit Texas State University in the United States to collaborate on research studies. This exchange will create a reciprocal relationship that fosters cross-cultural understanding and allows students from both institutions to share ideas, methodologies, and insights.



By participating in this international collaboration, students from Fatec will not only expand their academic horizons but also gain exposure to different research environments and practices. Such an exchange will enhance their adaptability and global awareness, which are crucial attributes in an interconnected world. It will also provide Texas State University students with the opportunity to engage with their peers from Brazil, enriching their educational experience through diverse perspectives and shared learning. This cross-border partnership has the potential to strengthen academic and professional networks, encouraging innovation and building lasting relationships that transcend geographical boundaries.

### **Live cultural on empowerment**

On October 24th (Thursday), 2024, in the afternoon, the *Live Cultural on Empowerment* took place, with Prof. Dr. Felix Quayson [Texas State University], from the United States. Using the Zoom platform, it was an opportunity to discuss employability strategies in North America and Brazil. This was an activity of the #LABTEC Communication and Technology Laboratory at Fatec Itaquaquetuba – Centro Paula Souza, with the support of the São Paulo State Research Support Foundation – Fapesp. Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKLUGSonyU8&t=35s>

**quinta-feira 24/10 14h**

 **#Labtec\_**

**Live**

**cultural\_**  **Felix Quayson**

**Tema: *Empoderamento***



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