The teaching of Portuguese at a university in the state of Florida: The experience of a Brazilian Fulbright scholar

Fernanda Ribeiro
Pamela Cappas-Toro

Abstract: The present paper presents Fernanda Ribeiro’s experience as a professor of Portuguese as a foreign language at an American university by virtue of a Fulbright academic exchange scholarship named Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA). During the Fall and Spring semesters (respectively 2018-II and 2019-I), she was part of the languages department in the university, taught courses and promoted Brazil’s language and culture on campus. Her work, together with the three former Brazilian scholars’, was a determinant factor for the consolidation of the Portuguese program through the hiring of a permanent professor to teach the language, role that was then a sole attribution of the FLTAs. In this vein, the present paper is divided into three sections. The first one brings a general view of Stetson University; the second is centered on the history of the Portuguese program at the institution, and the last one focuses on the FLTAs’ work at the university, with special attention to Fernanda Ribeiro’s experience, also showing the result of four years of work produced by the Fulbright scholars. The paper finishes with the final considerations and references.

Keywords: Portuguese as a foreign language; Fulbright; Stetson University.

1 Fernanda Ribeiro holds a BA in Portuguese, English and their literatures from the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ) and an MA in Linguistics from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). During the academic year of 2018-2019, she taught Portuguese at Stetson University, located in DeLand, Florida, United States, through a scholarship grant from the Fulbright Program – Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA). Her interests are both the teaching of English and Portuguese as foreign languages and adult second language learning.

2 Pamela Cappas-Toro holds a PhD in Spanish language and culture from The University of Illinois at Urbana-Campaign and is an Associate Professor in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Stetson University.
**Resumo:** O presente artigo apresenta a experiência de Fernanda Ribeiro como professora de português como língua estrangeira em uma universidade americana por meio da bolsa de intercâmbio acadêmico da Fulbright na modalidade Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA). Durante os semestres de outono e primavera (respectivamente, 2018-II e 2019-I), ela integrou o departamento de línguas da universidade, ministrou disciplinas e promoveu a língua e a cultura do Brasil no campus. Esse trabalho, somado ao das três bolsistas brasileiras anteriores, foi determinante para a consolidação do programa de português por meio da contratação de um professor permanente para ensinar a língua, função antes atribuída somente às FLTAs. Nesse sentido, o presente artigo se divide em três seções. A primeira traz uma visão geral da Stetson University; a segunda trata da história do programa de português na instituição, e a última centra-se no trabalho desenvolvido pelas FLTAs na universidade, com o foco voltado para a experiência de Fernanda Ribeiro, mostrando também o resultado gerado por quatro anos de trabalho das bolsistas Fulbright. O artigo se encerra com as considerações finais e as referências.

**Palavras-chave:** português como língua estrangeira; Fulbright; Stetson University.

**Introduction**

The Fulbright Program is one of the several exchange programs whose aim is to improve cultural diplomacy, develop intercultural relations and competence between United States’ citizens and people across the globe, through the exchange of people, culture, language and many other skills. The program was founded by American senator William J. Fulbright in 1946 and is nowadays recognized as one of the most widely prestigious scholarships in the world, providing around eight thousand grants annually to people from over 160 countries (BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS, 2019). Because of the impact that Fulbright causes on the CV as well as the life-changing experiences it brings, there is a high level of competition for this scholarship. The Fulbright Program is administered by cooperating organizations such as the Institute of International Education and is sponsored by The Bureau of Educational
and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State, receiving funding from the United States Congress via annual appropriation bills.

Among the many scholarships that Fulbright offers is the Foreign Language Teaching Assistant, or FLTA, which is granted to young teachers or people who are passionate about learning new cultures and promoting their own. In this sense, an FLTA spends one academic year (nine months) at a host university teaching their language and organizing cultural events so as to promote respect, understanding and admiration across nations. Being in a foreign country, an FLTA becomes a cultural ambassador.

The Fulbright Commission in Brazil started their activities in 1957 and, since then, has granted scholarships to more than 3,500 Brazilians to study in the United States and has brought over 3,000 American citizens to teach their language and culture in Brazil (FULBRIGHT BRASIL, 2019). In addition, among the many kinds of scholarships that Fulbright Brazil offers, every year twenty young Brazilian teachers from all over the country are selected as FLTAs and, in order to be eligible for this specific grant, they must prove proficiency in English through either the TOEFL or the IELTS exam as well as hold a degree in Letras. Fernanda Ribeiro, one of the authors of the present paper, returned to Brazil in May 2019 after one academic year as an FLTA at a university in the state of Florida. Because of this, this paper will focus on her experience as a professor of Portuguese as a foreign language at Stetson University and, so as to achieve this goal, the paper is divided into three parts. The first part will give a general overview of Stetson University and its language teaching programs; Part two will be centered on the history of the Portuguese language program in the institution, and the last part’s goal is to give a detailed description of all the work done by Fernanda on campus as an FLTA. The paper ends with the final considerations and references.

1. Stetson University

Stetson University is located in Central Florida, more specifically in a small city called DeLand, with no more than 33 thousand inhabitants, one hour away from Orlando. The university offers a myriad of opportunities by means of the its language programs in which Portuguese took part from Fall 2015. The next section, hence, will briefly introduce Stetson University and the Department to which the Portuguese program belongs.
1.1. Stetson University: a brief overview

Stetson University is the oldest private university in the state of Florida, being founded in 1883 by Henry A. DeLand, whom the small city of DeLand, where the university’s main campus is located, was named after. The most popular majors at Stetson University include: Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services; Visual and Performing Arts; Psychology; Social Sciences and Biological and Biomedical Sciences. DeLand’s economy depends largely on the university and, because of that, students are offered discounts in most of the city’s trade, and visitors can clearly notice the strong influence the university has on the population when they enter hair salons, restaurants, stores and bars and see chandeliers, statues, tapestries and paintings, all of them somehow making connections to Stetson, and concomitantly showing the pride DeLand’s inhabitants have in hosting the university.

Stetson University became a college in 1885. First known as DeLand Academy, its name changed in 1889 in honor of John B. Stetson, a well-known hat manufacturer at the time who generously gave his time and financial resources to the building and expansion of the university. Also, since his remarkable hats were very famous all over Florida, the Stetson hat was chosen as the university mascot and this tradition continues to date. Before the Fall semester of 2019 started, a statue of John Stetson sitting on a bench holding his hat was installed on the main spot on campus in front of which the majority of the students pass between one class and another so that the “hatters” (so undergraduates are called) can always have pride in studying at Stetson University.
On DeLand campus, one of Stetson University’s trademarks is the Holler Fountain, built right in front of Sampson Hall, where the Creative Arts Department and the Department of World Languages and Cultures are located. Sampson Hall was once the university library, which justifies its beautiful architecture, and above its entrance, in the middle of the names of remarkable classic writers of Western literature, like Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare and Dante, the sentence “Education is Power” can be seen from a great distance by everyone who walks in the area:

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3 Available in: https://www.beacononlinenews.com/stetson---statue-jpg/image_8cc2f25e-da4e-11e9-bdc4-ab8d90481f04.html
The Department of World Languages and Cultures currently offers the following language classes with study abroad possibilities: Spanish, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, Italian and Portuguese. Moreover, students can obtain a major or minor in World Languages and Cultures and as well as in Translation, for instance.

2. Building Portuguese Language Study in a Small Liberal Arts College in Central Florida

When Dr. Pamela Cappas-Toro first moved to Central Florida to start her tenure-track assistant professor position at the World Languages and Cultures Department of Stetson University (2013), she was asked to primarily teach and develop new courses in Spanish language, Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino Studies. The position also came with the responsibility of establishing a center – La Casa Cultural Latina – to serve the adult English as a Second Language learning community while simultaneously creating service-learning and cultural exchange opportunities for our undergraduate students. Her secondary role was to develop and teach Portuguese language courses.

The small private liberal arts institution had a robust Spanish major degree with course offerings ranging from introductory to advanced levels. It also had a well-established interdisciplinary Latin American and Latino Studies minor degree program, which, up to 2013, required language proficiency in Spanish. Therefore, when Cappas-Toro initially thought about developing a Portuguese language class for the department, she intentionally decided to target the many Spanish speakers who had inquired about the course via e-mails, office visits, and informal conversations. When she first taught Portuguese 203 in Spring 2015, 12 out of the 17 students (70%) enrolled were either native Spanish speakers or advanced learners. The remaining 5 students (30%) had limited previous experience with Spanish. At the onset, the course at Stetson had a greater number of Spanish speakers interested in Portuguese when compared with the national trend. Milleret (2012), in her article, “Portuguese Study in Higher Education in the United States,” establishes that “Spanish speakers together produced a rounded sum of 45%” of total enrollments (145). Although we do not have enough data to justify Stetson’s additional 25% enrollment above the national level, the number reveals that Spanish speaking learners on campus were a critical group for developing a Portuguese program. Cappas-Toro intentionally capitalized on their Spanish expertise by designing an accelerated course for this first group of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year offering the course(s)</th>
<th>Fall semester (August through December)</th>
<th>Spring semester (January through May)</th>
<th>Total students</th>
<th>Spanish speakers (as a second language or native)</th>
<th>Portuguese language and Brazilian culture activities on campus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2014- PORT 203 17 students</td>
<td>2015- PORT 203 17 students</td>
<td>17 students</td>
<td>12 students (70%)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2015- PORT 203 4 students</td>
<td>2016- PORT 203 3 students</td>
<td>4 students</td>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Stetson University is an undergraduate small liberal arts private institution in Central Florida with approximately 3,000 students. Very few graduate studies are offered at the DeLand campus.
6 Throughout this section, Spanish speakers are defined as native individuals or subjects who are second language learners with an advanced language proficiency level.
7 This accelerated 75 minutes introductory course met twice a week.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No course</th>
<th>PORT 201</th>
<th>PORT 202</th>
<th>No data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>3 students</td>
<td>6 students</td>
<td>9 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2016-101</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017-PORT 102</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>2017-101</td>
<td>2 students</td>
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<td>4 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2018-PORT 102</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>2018-101</td>
<td>7 students</td>
<td></td>
<td>12 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2019-PORT 102</td>
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<td>6th</td>
<td>2019-101</td>
<td>2 students</td>
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Table 1 – Portuguese class offerings and enrollments at Stetson University

In the second year, Portuguese 203 (Spring 2016) was offered and there was the hope that between 10 and 15 students would enroll in the class. During Fall 2015, the department welcomed a newly arrived Fulbright Scholar who did an outstanding job of promoting the language and Brazilian culture throughout activities, cultural credit events, talks at La Casa Cultural Latina, as well as the establishment of the first Portuguese language club. Despite her laudable efforts, enrollment dropped drastically from 17 to only 4 students. There is no data available to justify this significant difference. Nonetheless, the percentage of Spanish speaking students enrolled in the course raised from 70 to 75%, adding evidence as to the importance of attracting Spanish speaking students for emerging Portuguese language programs.

During the third year of the Portuguese language offering, a new sequence of two elementary courses was introduced to be offered during Fall 2016 (PORT 101) and Spring 2017 (PORT 102). The rationale for this shift was to expand the contact hours with students, as well as to reach out to a broader student population beyond Spanish speakers. The incoming Fulbright scholar and Cappas-Toro co-taught the first fall course,

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8 Both Portuguese 101 and 102 met Mondays and Wednesdays for 50 minutes, and Tuesdays and Thursdays for 75 minutes.
and, in the spring section, the Fulbright scholar was the sole instructor. As seen on Table 1, there was an increase of 5 students enrolled for that academic year when compared to 2015-2016. Moreover, there has been a drop on the total number of Spanish speakers taking the course when compared to the first two years of instruction. Nevertheless, Spanish speakers were still an overwhelming majority (55%) of the students who composed the two new classes. Lastly, Portuguese 102 section had a higher enrollment than Portuguese 101. This is because students who are Spanish speakers are given a waiver to start in 102. After many cultural credit events across campus and promotions of the program, Cappas-Toro was hopeful that the enrollment would raise steadily for the 2017-2018 academic year.

Unfortunately, the next Fulbright scholar (2017-2018) was faced with the biggest challenge recruiting students that the Portuguese program had encountered since its inception. Regardless of the countless efforts of recruitment, highly attended campus-wide cultural activities, tertulias, and other strategies which were established to promote the study of Portuguese language at Stetson, all of these fell short. There was only a total of 4 students enrolled throughout the entire academic year. Nevertheless, Cappas-Toro was hopeful that all the recruitment efforts that were done throughout 2017-2018 would yield into a more positive outcome for Fall 2018 and Spring 2019.

During the summer of 2018, Cappas-Toro started early planning with the incoming Fulbright, Fernanda Ribeiro. Throughout Skype sessions, they were able to brainstorm new strategies to promote the study of Portuguese at Stetson. Fernanda’s new initiatives included opening a Facebook page, re-establishing the Brazilian Portuguese language club, and inviting different Brazilian Fulbright scholars to Stetson, among others. She also led many cultural credit campus events, as well as organized tertulias at La Casa Cultural Latina. Her efforts brought the enrollment above the 10 student benchmark for the first time since 2015. Nonetheless, regardless of her tremendous efforts to recruit new students for Fall 2019, the current enrollment is only of two students. This deserves a larger analysis that is not part of this section discussion. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that what is happening this year at the campus could reflect a larger national problem in the “decline in the number of students signing up for foreign-language courses” (JOHNSON, 2019). Stetson University’s Portuguese language program could be mirroring the growing disinterest in foreign language study that is currently increasing in the United States. Adding to the challenges, Stetson University recently eliminated the
general education language requirement, which could also contribute to the challenges in recruiting students.

In addition to the broader concerns outlined above, at the programmatic level, the department may consider re-designing and/or changing their current courses. Whether it is: a) offering Brazilian culture courses taught in English b) Portuguese language classes for Spanish speakers c) expanding the offering to the next 201 and 202 sequence level (intermediate levels), or d) teaching Portuguese for Business, there are many options left to be explored as to how to grow a program at a small liberal arts institution. In terms of staffing, the university just recently hired a permanent instructor whose primary role will be to teach Portuguese. This new hire will be critical for the development of the language program, as it will provide continuity, depth, and evolution to the many of Cappas-Toro’s efforts alongside four Fulbright scholars over the past four years. As a recently promoted tenured professor, she is eager to support any new endeavor that will help solidify the Portuguese language program at Stetson and beyond.

After this general view of the history of the Portuguese program and the work of the Fulbright scholars at Stetson University, the following section and the next ones will delve into the work of Fernanda Ribeiro as a Portuguese instructor during the academic year of 2018-2019, being awarded a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) scholarship.

3. The attributions of the Portuguese FLTA at Stetson University

Although the Fulbright FLTA scholarship entails the role of a teaching assistant, whose attributions are, therefore, to attend all the instructor’s classes, clear students’ doubts, advertise the language program on campus, have office hours as a language tutor and, as a cultural ambassador of their country, facilitate cultural events so as to promote their language and culture in American universities – in other words, do everything except working as a primary instructor –, at Stetson University, however, the Brazilian Fulbright scholar’s role was above and beyond. They had not only to be responsible for all the teaching assistant tasks but also be a primary instructor and, as such, had all the autonomy to design the course syllabus, decide on the contents to be taught, prepare and grade exams and assign and correct extra activities, as does any faculty in the university.
As already exposed in previous sections, the FLTA at Stetson needed to take on the role of a professor given that the Portuguese Language program was still being developed and also due to the fact that there was not anyone who spoke Portuguese fluently – preferably a native speaker of the language –, had language teaching formation and held a PhD to be able to become a permanent professor. The four Brazilian FLTAs at Stetson University were an exception to the rule in this case because of two reasons: they were not permanent faculty, having to go back to their home country after a nine-month period in the United States and, in the case of Brazil, those who are interested in being chosen as a Fulbright FLTA have to hold at least a degree in Letras in order to be eligible to apply for the scholarship. This was a great advantage for the department, in which the Portuguese language program was starting to be implemented, contrary to the Arabic language program, which has a permanent professor and, for this reason, the Arabic FLTA works as a teaching assistant.

In this respect, Fernanda Ribeiro also had a teaching assistant, Aiyanna Maciel, who was an undergrad and spoke Portuguese as her second language. She volunteered to help Fernanda during two semesters at Stetson, receiving, in return, a certain number of credits which she needed in order to graduate. Her role was to attend Fernanda’s classes, give office hours as a tutor, during which students had opportunity to practice Portuguese and do oral exercises which Fernanda graded. Aiyanna could not replace Fernanda and teach a class under no circumstances nor should she grade any activity. Besides, although she spoke Portuguese, she was a student and was not allowed to organize any cultural event on Brazilian culture or the Portuguese language, which were exclusive roles of the FLTA.

During the academic year of 2018-2019, Fernanda taught two courses. In the Fall semester, she started with Elementary Portuguese and Lusophone Cultures I (PORT 101) and, in the first half of 2019, the Spring semester, she was responsible for Elementary Portuguese and Lusophone Cultures II (PORT 102). Each one of the next two following sections will focus separately on a different semester, describing everything Fernanda Ribeiro did at Stetson University as a Fulbright scholar.

3.1 Elementary Portuguese and Lusophone Cultures I
Prior to Fernanda’s arrival at Stetson University, she had a Skype session meeting with her supervisor, Dr. Pamela Cappas-Toro, and, together, they established the goals Fernanda needed to achieve. Being everything outlined and defined, on the 8th of August of 2018 the Fulbright scholar arrived in DeLand.

The class meetings were on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 1:30pm to 2:20pm, fifty minutes per day. During the first semester, the Port 101 course had a total of 8 students who were either freshmen (first university year) or sophomores (second university year) coming from different linguistic backgrounds: three students were Spanish and English bilinguals; two were English monolinguals; two were heritage speakers of Portuguese, who could understand the language very well, but showed limited performance in the other skills. One student came from Germany to study one semester at Stetson and spoke German, French and English fluently. The reasons why students chose to learn Portuguese were very interesting, encompassing not only good job opportunities after graduation or the similarities between Portuguese and Spanish, but also a strong wish to develop better communication skills in order to interact with friends and relatives from Brazil. One student was working at a convenience store in Orlando at the time, and enrolled in the course so as to be able communicate well with customers.

The book adopted for the course was *Ponto de Encontro: Portuguese as a World Language* (second edition, published by Pearson). Each book came with an access code to MyPortugueseLab, an online component that was adopted by the instructor as the resource for online activities and homework. Many students opted to buy only the access code, since it also provided the electronic version of the textbook.

Fernanda designed the course syllabus bearing in mind an integration of the grammar content with the Brazilian culture, which helped meet the instructor’s expectation: teaching her language through her culture during her short stay at Stetson University. To illustrate this integration, one of the lessons covered vocabulary related to Brazilian celebrations; since the day of Saint Cosme and Saint Damião was drawing near, she included the topic in the lesson, explaining that religious holidays and celebrations are a strong part of Brazilian culture. At the end of the class, she gave each student and her teaching assistant a handmade bag of Cosme and Damião which she prepared with

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9 Every FLTA of any nationality has a supervisor at the host university, irrespective of whether the scholar’s role is that of a primary instructor or assistant.
10 This book is adopted by most universities which host Portuguese language teaching programs.
candies brought from Brazil and taught each candy name to students. A register of this day can be seen below:

![Students holding candies](image)

Fig. 3 – Cultural class: celebrating saints Cosme and Damião’s Day

Along the Fall semester, students did well on the assignments, exams and had a satisfactory performance during the oral practice sessions with Aiyanna, which contributed to their good grades in the oral exams. In addition to the written and oral exams, they also had to write a total of five short compositions in Portuguese on a topic brought by the instructor. They also made individual oral presentations in front of the whole class, in Portuguese, talking about a topic decided previously and approved by Fernanda. Reading exams were also part of the course curriculum. It was a very productive semester, full of mutual learning and partnership between students and professor.

As for Aiyanna, having her in class as a teaching assistant was very important. She aided Fernanda by observing students’ main difficulties in class during the exercises and by listening to their concerns when they met for the oral practice activities. Aiyanna frequently wrote down observations on individual reports and later on updated Fernanda

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11 Source: Fernanda Ribeiro’s personal records.
during weekly meetings on what should be done to help students advance in their communicative skills in Portuguese. This was fundamental, as also were the consultations Fernanda had with Dr. Cappas-Toro whenever she needed advice or approval concerning class management or event organization. In relation to the latter point, the Fall semester of 2018 was very productive in terms of events on Brazil and the Portuguese language.

As part of her duties as a Fulbright scholar at Stetson, Fernanda had to advertise the Portuguese language program by placing a table on the main spot on campus, decorated with materials such as comics, CDs, food, flags, among other Brazilian items, and giving out flyers to announce events or registration in Portuguese 101 and also 102, considering the upcoming semester. The tabling was done twice per semester.

![Promoting Brazil on campus](image)

Fig. 4 – Promoting Brazil on campus

On top of that, by request of Dr. Cappas-Toro, each semester Fernanda had to throw at least one big cultural party. For the Fall semester, the theme was “festas juninas” and, since she came from Brazil still during these celebrations in the country, she could bring many decorations and food to bring to La Casa Cultural Latina for this event. The party was a success: more than forty people, among students, faculty, staff and DeLand citizens were present. There were not only music, dance, games and typical food but also

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12 Source: Fernanda Ribeiro’s personal records.
a lecture in which Fernanda presented the history of “festas juninas” and taught the audience how to make a paper balloon as the next figure shows.

Fig. 5 - Festa junina

Throughout the Fall semester of 2018, the Fulbright scholar volunteered to continue making her language and culture known in the university by means of many other events and gatherings: monthly Brazilian clubs, Brazilian cultural dance, and was also invited to cook brigadeiros and cheese breads for Taste of the World, a cultural credit event in which undergraduates from different nations wore typical clothes of their home countries and showed a bit of their traditional cuisine. It was a very productive semester.

### 3.2. Elementary Portuguese and Lusophone Cultures II

Differently to the previous semester, in the Spring Semester there were five students enrolled in PORT 102, and three of them had been Fernanda’s students in PORT 101: a heritage speaker of Portuguese, an English and Spanish bilingual and an English monolingual. From the two new students, one was an English and Spanish bilingual and

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13 Source: Fernanda Ribeiro’s personal records.
the other was a polyglot who spoke English, Russian, Spanish, German and French fluently, which helped him attain a high level of Portuguese skills at the end of the semester. Among the five other students who did not enroll in PORT 102, although they had been successful in PORT 101, one of them returned to her home country (Germany), the other spent one semester studying at a British university, another one changed major, which made her reorganize the class schedule in which the Portuguese class overlapped with another course. The two other students did not give any reasons for not enrolling in PORT 102.

The textbook was the same adopted for PORT 101\textsuperscript{14} and the syllabus kept the same style of the first academic semester: written and oral exams, short compositions, reading exams and presentations in Portuguese. Aiyanna was Fernanda’s teaching assistant again having the same roles of the previous semester.

One of the remarkable moments instructor and students had together was an indoor picnic, since it was raining. Students were very engaged communicating with each other in Portuguese and eating Brazilian snacks and other food they had brought. While they ate, Fernanda taught the lesson about food and it was a very productive moment. The figure below shows a register of this day:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{picnic.png}
\caption{Lesson about food\textsuperscript{15}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ponto de Encontro} is a single volume book containing 15 lessons. The first half of it was used in PORT 101 and the second half in PORT 102.

\textsuperscript{15} Source: Fernanda Ribeiro’s personal records.
In addition to the Portuguese course, Fernanda also kept promoting her language and culture on campus through tablings, Brazilian clubs and other cultural events. At the end of the semester, she was invited to be a panelist at the forum called “Latin America Forum: Crisis in South America”, which focused on the economic and political issues of Brazil and Venezuela. Also, Fernanda organized an event called “Spanish and Portuguese: how similar are they?”, whose primary aim was to recruit students to enroll in PORT 101 in Fall 2019. She invited her Brazilian friend Gabriel Dangió, who was an FLTA at Florida International University, to give a lecture at the event in which there were over twenty people participating and asking questions. In the same style of the festas juninas party, Fernanda also facilitated a Brazilian Carnival party, in which there were rice, feijoada, refreshments and brigadeiros. She talked about the carnival celebrations in Brazil to over thirty people and invited a local musician to give a short demonstration of some music styles that are played in Brazil during the Carnival festivities, such as carimbó, samba, forró and baião.

Fig. 6 - Carnival

Source: Fernanda Ribeiro’s personal records.
Continuing and expanding the work of the three previous Brazilian Fulbright scholars, Fernanda’s nine-month period at Stetson University was fundamental for the solidification and recognition of the importance of the Portuguese language and the Brazilian culture on campus. Despite the low quantity of students in the Portuguese courses in both Fall and Spring semesters in comparison with the high number of enrollments in Spanish and French courses, for instance, Portuguese is now consolidated as one of the permanent languages offered by the World Languages and Cultures Department and new initiatives are equally being developed in order to make the language even more visible to the academic community. As the last Brazilian Fulbright scholar at Stetson, Fernanda Ribeiro helped prepare ground for a permanent Portuguese professor, presented in the next section.

3.3. A new prepared ground

Without a doubt the work of the four Brazilian Fulbright scholars over the last four years (2015-2019) has been a milestone when it comes to the consolidation of the Portuguese language program at Stetson University. Dr. Cappas-Toro has always envisioned Portuguese as a language that could benefit the university in numerous ways, especially providing students, mainly Spanish speakers, with a language that they could master at a fast pace and that became a door open to a new and powerful source of learning and cultural growth at the same time. In this respect, when Fernanda Ribeiro was chosen to come to Stetson as a cultural ambassador through the Fulbright Program, the department’s intention was that she were the last Brazilian Fulbright scholar so that a permanent Portuguese professor could be hired to integrate the World Languages and Cultures Department’s faculty the following academic year. Nevertheless, this decision had not been taken for granted yet, because everything would depend on the impact Fernanda’s work caused on the department and the university.

As the preceding sections showed, Fernanda’s work at Stetson exceeded all expectations, which was crucial for the next step. During the Spring semester of 2019, the university received three candidates for the position of permanent Portuguese professor. Each one of them came to the university on a different day, and Fernanda could share her experience and talk about the work she had done and the Portuguese program in general. Jamile Forcelini, from Passo Fundo, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil,
received a good evaluation from all the members of the committee in each step of the selection process, resulting in her hiring as Stetson University’s permanent Portuguese professor. Although the university does not receive Fulbright scholars from Brazil anymore, their value has been recognized and the World Languages and Cultures Department is very grateful to the four Brazilians for the legacy they left, the seeds they planted and the new ground they prepared. Now, by having Jamile as a permanent faculty, the Portuguese program became solidified.

**Final considerations**

This paper aimed at discussing the teaching of Portuguese as a foreign language at a small liberal arts college in the United States. For such, it described the work of the Fulbright scholars the institution received over the last four years, focusing on the experience of Fernanda Ribeiro during the fall semester of 2018 and the spring semester of 2019.

To begin with, a general view of Stetson University, the oldest private higher education institution in the state of Florida, as well as the language courses given by the World Languages and Cultures Department, was presented. Next, an explanation of how the Portuguese language course was implemented by Dr. Pamela Cappas-Toro in the department was expounded, followed by the description of the work carried out by each one of the four Brazilian Fulbright scholars that went to the university from 2015 to 2019. Finally, the last section started with the roles of an FLTA at Stetson, followed by the description of Fernanda Ribeiro’s experience during 2018-2019 as an FLTA. The paper finished restating the importance of the work of this last Fulbright scholar which, in addition to the efforts of the three former FLTAs, resulted in the hiring of a permanent Portuguese professor and the consolidation of the program at Stetson University.

Although this paper has shown a detailed experience report of an exchange professor in the United States instead of a solid research on foreign language teaching, it helps understand the view of Portuguese as a foreign language abroad. Clearly one needs a deep investigation and theoretical support in order to offer a solid description and general view of the teaching of this language at American universities. In spite of that, this paper also showed the importance of the Fulbright program for the professional
growth of Brazilian teachers who can use the experience in the United States to improve the English teaching in Brazil.
References


