

**“BRIDGES: Twenty Years as a Department
and Nearly Fifty of Portuguese & Brazilian Studies at Brown”**

Nelson H. Vieira

In anticipation of Brown University’s 250th anniversary in 2014, a look at the experience of Portuguese & Brazilian Studies (POBS) at Brown can serve as an interesting reference point for appreciating the evolution of the University as an innovative, bridge-building and yet unwavering research institution committed to the best of teaching and learning. This year POBS is celebrating its 20th anniversary as a Department with thriving BA, MAs (3) and PhD programs. The Department has an annual average of 15 PhD graduate students in the pipeline, plus approximately 15-20 MA candidates. The path traveled by POBS toward Department status exemplifies Brown’s dynamic academic spirit, its struggle to foster connections among areas of study and the increasing openness of the curriculum. In his recent editorial in the Providence Journal, April 2, 2012, Dean of the Faculty, Kevin McLaughlin discusses the new Humanities Initiative, and the need for the humanities to strike a balance with the “science boom.” He stresses that “for the university of the future the humanities must remain a critical part.” To my mind, this balance also takes into consideration how the social sciences can work in tandem with the humanities, particularly in stimulating a network of bridges and projects that may be viewed as disciplinary-linked initiatives.

While the history of the teaching of Portuguese language at Brown reveals some trickling level of interest prior to the second half of the twentieth century, it was not until the late sixties and early seventies, with more national attention placed upon stronger foreign language awareness and teaching, that cross-cultural sensitivity emerged in course materials, anticipating today’s globalization and new world order. Since the 1960s, diverse immigrations, international conflicts, the need to address “critical languages” as well as the new focus upon bilingual-bicultural perspectives led to new funding opportunities from the US Office of Education. Additionally, due to immigration patterns, funding for Portuguese as a second/foreign language in the Providence Public Schools also stimulated increased teaching of Portuguese at Brown via the University’s

collaborative project with Providence's bilingual/ESL/bicultural 1970s programs. Providing teacher training and curricular innovations for local schools, Portuguese at Brown became associated with these educational initiatives which at the time were controversial, given the public's ignorance about the enrichment of FL pedagogy as an academically powerful conduit to introduce cognitive objectives via a foreign language in the primary school classroom. This collaborative effort pedagogically and intellectually enriched Portuguese initiatives at Brown which were given new impetus with Brown's other academic initiatives in the mid-1970s. Many of these academic initiatives developed into new organizational units under the rubrics of program, center and institute. The administrative motivations behind these units were many but one of the more obvious results led to making units and Departments more porous to enable faculty to cross disciplinary lines.

POBS became one of the first two centers to house faculty, adjuncts and staff in a less traditional venue, combining scholars and teachers from History, Afro-American Studies, Sociology, Foreign Languages and Literature. The methodology and curriculum of Brown University's burgeoning Portuguese foreign language/literature program was revitalized when it incorporated the concept of foreign language teaching as a bridge to cognitive learning. This basic pedagogical concept/approach stimulated a university program to foster official and unofficial linkages with other units with the aim of enriching students' knowledge of the Portuguese-speaking world while also building a program with collaborative activities in history, anthropology, sociology, and race, gender and ethnic relations. This endeavor eventually led to an undergraduate interdisciplinary concentration in Portuguese as well as an uncommon sequence of foreign language courses from rapid fluency via intensive Portuguese directly to upper levels. At the same time, the teacher training experiences led to a Brown Bilingual Institute and an MA in Bilingual/ESL/Cross-Cultural Studies sponsored alone by POBS since no other department had the second language expertise or the ideological/educational commitment to sponsor this new MA program.

This discussion of foreign language pedagogy as an integral part of an undergraduate language and literature program with multiple disciplinary links illustrates how in the 1970s and 1980s Brown University's initiative toward a university-wide

disciplinary “bridging” endeavor sparked new programs/concentrations with unusual combinations that further enhanced the New Curriculum’s objectives. Today, these bridging efforts are recognized as part of Brown’s legacy of openness in the curriculum, now being extended to the Graduate School with the new Open Graduate Doctoral Program.

This legacy of connections across disciplines is also reflected in our other MA(s) and particularly our PhD degree programs which prepare national and international students to become scholars of the Portuguese-speaking World, as Luso-Afro-Brazilianists. At the beginning of the 1990s, POBS officially became a language and literature Department with a doctoral program but always with collaborative links to the above disciplines, including Comparative Literature and Judaic Studies. Stimulated by intellectual growth, active grantsmanship, and prolific scholarship, our faculty gained scholarly prominence and worked to develop this initially small program into the nation’s largest Portuguese curriculum. As a result, we have been fortunate to draw the best American and foreign students. Moreover, the program’s academic rigor, its intellectual mentoring and foreign-language pedagogical bent prepare graduate students to be strong scholars and teachers via their TA training. Now it is evermore clear how our undergraduate and graduate programs have been deeply informed and shaped by earlier pedagogical experiences of Portuguese at Brown. In this vein, we proudly have one of the lead authors of the most methodologically-innovative Portuguese-teaching texts, adopted by universities across the nation. With all these “bridges,” Brown University has become the leading higher institution for training in Portuguese & Brazilian Studies with a track-record of 100% placement of its graduated PhDs.

The evolution of POBS at Brown into a top graduate research program is built upon the invaluable and significant contributions of its individual scholars who are not profiled here only because the focus of this essay is designed to underscore the role of language as an integral, bridging component of POBS’s development and its recognition of the increasing local and national significance of foreign/second language teaching. Today the Modern Language Association is affording new emphasis upon the significance of an informed relationship between foreign/second languages and literature as an insightful pathway to discovering deeply-entrenched behaviors existing beneath and

beyond the world's daily social contract. As part of the Humanities Initiative, POBS sees these pathways leading to future bridge-crossings at Brown University.

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