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First impressions in Goiânia, Brazil....

(7/11/10 – 8/2/10)

1. What are your first impressions? Overall? What do you like the most of your experience so far?

During my first three weeks in Brazil, I've most enjoyed interacting with other Brazilian students and professors in the geography department. I was very excited to meet other students in Brazil also pursuing the same field – urban planning. (However, at Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), planning is actually housed inside the geography department. Regardless of the distinction I feel that geography and urban planning are very interlinked.) The students I've met so far are very passionate about social issues and sustainability. I was thrilled to communicate, in a very basic way, my interests in coming here and learning about their plans for the future.

I also really enjoyed my language immersion classes. It was refreshing to get to know other foreign students in my class who came from United States, Spain, Holland and France. I was impressed by my Portuguese teacher who was only 19 years old! Well, I suppose because we were only learning intermediate level Portuguese we did not need an expert Portuguese teacher. The classes were full of fun activities and games such as “Batata Quente”(Hot Potato). The games were a fun way to learn Portuguese!

Apart from meeting people, I enjoyed my Professor's tour of Goiania. Whenever we came across a plant he would tell us the name of the plant, its origin and its benefits. I loved observing all the beautiful trees which exist in Brazil's Cerrada (Savanna) biome. Trees in Goiania are an integral part of their city planning -- plants help control the climate and prevent water runoff. He also showed us the city center, the low income areas, the parks and explained the significance of the city's plaza.

2. How's the language process been? Do you like Portuguese?

The Language process... When I stepped foot into Brazil I was eager to start using the Portuguese I learned in the United States. I was extremely thankful for what I've learned in United States because it was essential to surviving my first day in Brazil. While some people here know English, everyone speaks in Portuguese. Learning Portuguese was especially important to communicate with my professor here, Professor Joao Batista, Director of Instituto de Estudos Socio Ambientais (IESA) program. He has a lot to share with us and teach us about the

city; therefore it's important to learn the language. We requested for him to speak slowly so we can understand him and as the days went by I found that I was able to understand more and more. At first it was difficult getting used to everyone speaking in Portuguese and at times it would exhaust my mind, but each day, I found myself progressing along.

3. What are you looking forward to?

Future expectations I am looking forward to learning more about the urban planning process in Goiania, environmental planning, creating a community development plan for local community in Goiania, learning about the culture and progressing along with my Portuguese.

4. Do you have any advice for future students?

Advice for future students.... The student exchange experience is a great opportunity to widen your world view. As a student you get the opportunity to live in the country and not be trapped in the tourist bubble. It's simply fascinating to immerse yourself in another culture and learn by experiencing.

If you decide to pursue the student exchange program, think of yourself as more than just a student. You are also representing the United States its culture and values. Brazilians here like to hear first-hand our experiences in America, as we likewise would like to learn about their culture.