In the summer of 2014, nine MSU students traveled to Salvador and Belém, Brazil as a part of the FIPSE/CAPES cultural exchange program. First, the group spent four weeks in Salvador living on the beach in the Barra neighborhood. There they studied Brazilian policy and culture at UFBA. They got to experience the Afro-Brazilian culture that resulted from the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in a variety of ways. They went to museums (and explored Pelourinho, the historic district named after the slave whipping post located in the central plaza. They also experienced Afro-Brazilian culture by watching a capoeira performance and participating in a traditional candomblé ceremony. Also, they visited Bahia Street, a non-profit whose mission was to help educate and create a safe place for underprivileged Black girls in the community. They got a tour of the location and played and talked to the participating children. Lastly, in Salvador they visited Projeto Tamar, another non-profit that strives to conserve Brazilian marine life. The students got to interact with the sea turtles there and learn about the group’s sustainable development programs in coastal fishing communities. The group then left for Belém where they studied environmental policy and geography at UFPA. They spent their first day in the city exploring the Ver-O-Peso market, and while there they got to try the traditional food acai. Traditional food and local fish were also tasted when the group went to Combú Island. There they also got to see the Mother of All Trees, a large Amazonian tree in the forest and take their first steps into the Amazon. They went to the Bosque Rodrigues Alves, a preserved section of the rainforest in Belém. They saw a variety of species including monkeys and macaws. Next, they spent a week in Bragança, a smaller town in Brazil. They learned about the environmental concerns and research happening in the mangroves. They also got to see the beautiful never ending coastal beaches. Finally, they saw how local communities were producing bricks, but replanting trees to maintain sustainability.
The next stop was Marajó Island, the world’s largest river island that is less developed and working mostly in the agricultural sector.

Back in Belém, the group went hiking in the forest. One of the best parts of being in Brazil in the summer of 2014 was being there when they hosted the World Cup. It was incredible to see the hype of the cup and feel the roar of the city every time they scored.

The best part though was all the friends they made. Since it was an exchange program, they went to class with Brazilian students in both Belém and Salvador and they got to meet their family and friends! And now, the Brazilians students are here in Brazil for the fall semester sharing their culture with the MSU community!

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