

Nursing students visiting Brazil for transcultural experience

On Tuesday, May 13, six senior nursing students, one graduate family nurse practitioner student, and two faculty members (Wendy Woith, Ph.D., and Lynn Kennell, M.S.) from Illinois State University's Mennonite College of Nursing departed on the second transcultural trip to Londrina, Brazil, in the state of Paraná at the Universidade Estadual de Londrina (UEL). The students are staying with host families who are either nursing students or faculty.

This experience will offer students an opportunity to learn about Sistema Única de Saúde (SUS), Brazil's health care system, the UEL nursing curriculum, visit a variety of resource clinics, hospital and community-based centers available to the people of Brazil, learn about communicating in a country where we are the foreigners who don't speak the language, and immerse themselves in the culture of Brazil for two weeks.

The following journal entries, written by students, will offer a detailed glimpse into their experiences:

Day 1: Hiccups and home

Submitted by Kaitlin Ross and Sara Ferreri

What an adventure, and it has hardly begun! For sure, we are having a lesson in patience, which will greatly contribute to our learning experience in Brazil. Our first day was just spent traveling, though this was no small feat. Our first flight was delayed due to a fire in a radar control tower in Elgin, Illinois. Due to this, we would have missed our connecting flight in Atlanta, so we rebooked a direct flight to Sao Paulo with Dr. Woith. It was all well worth it. Upon our arrival we were pleased to find our host, Jessica, was extremely welcoming and friendly. Although she and her parents speak very little English, they have been able to make us feel very welcome and comfortable in their home in Londrina.



Left to right, nursing students Kaitlin Ross, Sara Ferreri, Kirsten Krauth, Diana Matusiak, Krista, Dirksen, Alyssa Sarrazine, faculty member Lynn Kennell, and Robin Shaffer.

The language barrier has proved to be the most difficult, but rewarding, hurdle we have to overcome. It has helped us to develop a stronger sense of empathy towards people who struggle with a language barrier to health care. It is truly difficult to communicate with people who do not speak or understand your own language. This can be extremely overwhelming and exhausting. Though this has been difficult, we are making more and more progress every day. Jessica is very bright and has already picked up a considerable amount of English. We are attempting to learn as much Portuguese as we can and try to meet Jessica halfway with our Spanish understanding.



A neighborhood in Brazil.

Upon our arrival at Jessica's home, we found it surrounded by a fence and locked gate. The rest of the community was similar with houses surrounded by fence, or even a cement wall with glass shards stuck across the top as makeshift barbed wire. The roads and sidewalks are all covered in a fine red dust, which stains shoes and clothing. Inside the house, the floors are all tiled, and the windows are barred with metal rods. Our host family has a very nice home that is well kept. We find ourselves feeling quite at home, even in such a different country. We are thankful and very excited to see what the rest of the week brings!

Day 2: Our first day in Londrina, Brazil

By Alyssa Sarrazine and Diana Matusiak

It is amazing how much of this country and culture we have been able to see in such a short amount of time. Our first morning was spent at the college of nursing at Londrina State University. We were welcomed with food, gifts, and presentations about Brazil's health care system, SUS, and the nursing program. SUS is the foundation to their healthcare system, and serves as a public service. It can be compared to the United States Affordable Healthcare Act. Some Brazilians use a private health care insurance but most Brazilians or those unemployed use this SUS system to access healthcare. Since switching to this system there has been a 75% reduction in infant mortality rate. It has also helped make it possible to make Brazil the largest breast milk bank in the world.



MCN students Diana Matusiak and Alyssa Sarrazine.

They also discussed different programs that are offered through their college of nursing. Most of them were similar to those at MCN, including taking four years to obtain a B.S.N. degree. However, they also have a program called "residency." This takes an additional two years after receiving their B.S.N. and allows them to have a specialized field. We also were able to tour the biology department and learned about many research projects that are taking place right now. One that we found really interesting was that they were using native plants to fight cancer cells. We stepped into a few different science and biology classes and were excited when we were able to recognize the material written on the board, even though it was in Portuguese. We heard that last year the group got to see a wide variety of insects in one of the biology labs, but this year we were disappointed when this was not included in our tour. Little did we know Day 3 had a very big surprise in store for us...

Day 3: Heads up – cockroaches can fly...

By Alyssa Sarrazine and Diana Matusiak

When the alarm went off at 6 a.m. this morning, we were extremely tired from the lack of sleep and our recent travels. We chugged some very strong Brazilian coffee (with about three spoonful of sugar in it!) but this is not what woke us up. Diana opened her suitcase, which was placed every so nicely next to the open window with no screen, to not only find her shorts for the day, but also a giant, brown, exotic cockroach. Fun fact: Brazilian cockroaches can fly! So this explains how our little friend made it up to the fifth floor and how scary it was when it took off from the suitcase, flew over our heads, and landed on the ceiling. This was the best wakeup call we could get.



Thankfully we feel extremely comfortable with our host family, who helped us shoo the bug out the window with a broom, and get us on our way to the falls. We sat down and got comfortable in the van for the 10 hour car ride we had ahead and realized that although we had a "traumatic" experience with Brazilian nature this morning, we were still able to enjoy the extreme beauty of its deep red soil, and bright green vegetation throughout the rest of our day. Our drive had so much beauty in itself, we cannot wait to see what one of the seven nature Wonders of the World will be like for us tomorrow.

Day 3: Quick visit to Argentina, then met more flying friends

By Krista Dirksen:

After only a few short days in Brazil, we made the long journey to a different place of the country. We took a 10-hour drive by van to Foz do Iguacu. It is known for its magnificent waterfalls and staggering heights. First to start off our full day of fun was a trip to Argentina. We worked with a tourist agent at our hotel to get tickets and a drive. We hopped in to the van after a wonderful Brazilian breakfast and headed towards the border. The Argentina side of the falls is known to be the most beautiful, and dry, which sparked our interest. Once our passports were checked by the patrol, we headed toward the last leg to get into Argentina, but were met with some terrible news. Our driver informed us that we needed a special visa in order to get into the country, which happened to be 100 U.S. dollars! We decided as a group that for the amount of money we would spend and the time in the park, that it wasn't worth it. So, we were in Argentina for 10 minutes, but can say we have spent time in that country!



Krista Dirksen at Park of the Birds.

The rejection from Argentina was not going to ruin our day, so we quickly changed plans and decided to visit the Parque das Aves (Park of the Birds). The park was filled with vibrant birds, animals, and even butterflies!

The trees, brush, and flowers in the sanctuary were so bright and lush it made the experience even more enjoyable. We saw macaws, emus, hummingbirds, and even peacocks! In many areas throughout the park were open spaces for visitors to touch and hold many of the birds. We were able to get close to the toucans, and even have a macaw sit on our arm! We finished with a little lunch and some souvenir shopping.

Our time in Brazil may have started out rough, but the weekend away at the falls was a nice way to relax and get to know each other a little better!

Day 4 – BBQ and waterfalls

By Kirsten Krauth



Boat ride on the Igauzu River:
L-R back row: Sara Ferreri, Kaitlin Ross, Kirsten Krauth, and Brazil student coordinator Juli Trevisan
L-R front row: Krista Dirksen, Diana Matusiak, and Alyssa Sarrazine

It is Day 4 here in the city of Londrina. We have experienced so many new things so far. In the United States, when we think of a barbeque we picture burgers, hotdogs and a beautiful summer day. Here in Brazil the meaning of a barbeque is very different. A churrasco, or barbeque is a place to eat with a buffet that includes tons of delicious Brazilian dishes. It also includes an all you can eat options for many different types of meats that are brought to your table on a skewer that is about two feet long! They offer the food and cut it for you right off the bone. During our time at the churrasco I had a new experience and ate a chicken heart. At first I was apprehensive but then I thought `when in Rome´ or Brazil that is and went for it. It was delicious! All in all, Brazilian cuisine definitely gets an A+ in my book!

Many of us have heard about the Seven Wonders of the World but do not get the wonderful opportunity to experience such sights. We visited Foz do Iguaçu, which is an all-natural conjoining of many gorgeous waterfalls on the river. This park includes a tour through the jungle and an amazing boat ride on the Igauzu River. The boat ride includes getting up close and personal with dozens of waterfalls, so needless to say we were drenched! The sight is absolutely breathtaking and an experience of a lifetime.



Waterfalls at Foz do Iguaçu

Day 4 – We are family

By Diana Matusiak and Alyssa Sarrazine

When we were first thinking about applying for this trip we had thought that part of our expenses would be paying for a hotel that all of the students and the professor would stay in together while in Brazil for two weeks. It was mentioned in our first meeting that we would actually be staying with Brazilian nursing students and their families in their homes. This was surprising for us to hear and we didn't know how to feel about it at first. It is scary to enter someone else's home who is a stranger to you, especially when you are in a different country with a different culture and there is somewhat of a language barrier present.

After going on the trip we are eager to say that staying with a host family in Brazil ended up being one of the best parts of the entire experience. All of the host families that our group stayed with were extremely welcoming and kind.

We never thought that we could feel so at home in such an unfamiliar and faraway place. We also think that living with a Brazilian family gave us many more opportunities to learn about and actually experience the culture, whether it was by trying homemade Brazilian food or just sitting around the dinner table talking and laughing with the family. We realize now that we would have missed out on great experiences and strong, lifelong friendships if we had stayed in a hotel like we usually do when we travel to another place. We are forever grateful for the hospitality that our host family showed us and can now say that we have family 5,000 miles away from home.



Diana Matusiak and Alyssa Sarrazine with their host

Day 6 – Maternity observation

By Krista Dirksen

One of our days at HU consisted of each person choosing two departments to observe in; one for the morning and one for the afternoon. When asked which department I would like to observe as my top choice, there was no doubt that maternity would take that spot. I was lucky enough to be the only one in the group interested in maternal nursing, so that increased my chances at getting that spot.



Once on the floor, I was able to see the delivery room and how it was set up. They showed me the table that laboring mothers rest on, which shocked me because it is a metal with no cushion. There are 2 delivery tables in the room, which means there can be 2 women delivering at once! The resident I followed also showed me the different instruments that are used for delivery. These included needles, speculums, sterile drapes, and medications. A pediatrician on the unit walked me through the neonatal cribette, where they take the newborn immediately after delivery to be assessed. He showed me the process for taking apart the sterile field for the baby, the oxygenation apparatus, and the medications that are given post-birth. They showed me the logarithm for neonatal CPR, which I recognized to be the same as the U.S.

I was also able to see the post-delivery areas, which housed six mothers per room! They are taught to bath their babies, breastfeed, and rest during their stay on the unit. HU strives very hard for all mothers to breastfeed and use kangaroo (skin to skin) care with their babies. The hospital also utilizes the Human Milk Bank, which allows qualified mothers to donate their milk to other babies that are in need. We learned about the donating and pasteurizing process and found it extremely fascinating! We all believe that it is a good idea that the U.S. should grab on to.

We also visited the Maternal Hospital, which is only for those women who have no complications and are 37+ weeks, compared to HU, where women with complications deliver. At this specialized clinic, women are encouraged to labor naturally and utilize many different methods such as the birthing ball, bar, and rocking horse. This clinic can also perform C-Sections for those women that choose that option. We learned that Brazil has a high rate of C-Sections, which public health nurses are striving to educate against.

In all, I really liked the maternal rotation! It made me realize I like this area of nursing even more than I thought. I liked learning the differences between Brazil and the U.S., but also the similarities in treatment, delivery, and medications.



Delivery room at HU.

Day 6 – Emergency Department observation

By: Kaitlin Ross and Sara Ferreri

On our trip to Londrina, Brazil, we had the opportunity to shadow two units of our choice at HU. In the afternoon, we chose to spend time in the Emergency Department. The unit was severely overcrowded, holding more than twice as many patients as there were beds for. Patients lined the hallways in stretchers with improvised equipment due to the shortage of supplies. There was very little space for the nurses to work in, let alone to walk through the hallway. The ratio of nurses was about one nurse to twenty patients on a good day, leaving very little time for the nurses to spend with each patient.

We learned that in contrast to a nurse's duties in the United States, a nurse in Brazil is responsible for assessing the patient and planning the patient's care, while the technicians are in charge of all of the bedside care. The residents expressed that although the funding for the department was less than desirable, they were able to do the best with what they had. We would have to agree that these nurses do an outstanding job of coping with their work environment! All in all, we thoroughly enjoyed our time shadowing the residents in the ER, and felt that we learned a lot about nursing in Brazil. We have definitely gained a better understanding and a great deal of respect for the work nurses do in a country that is less developed than ours.

Day 7 – Shadowing and smiling

By Alyssa Sarrazine and Diana Matusiak

Yesterday we spent the entire day touring the university hospital here in Londrina and learning about how the hospital runs and more about how the health care system works here in Brazil. We were told to keep in mind which units stuck out to us most because we would be able to shadow residents on certain units the following day. Both Diana and I have always had a passion for pediatric nursing, so we were really hoping to get the opportunity to spend time on the unidade pediátrica. The next morning we got to go to this unit together and were able to follow a resident in her second year that spoke some English and was very eager to help us learn. We were amazed at both the differences and similarities between the United States and Brazilian pediatric units, procedures, and patients.

First we will discuss the differences we saw. One was that each room had at least two children in it and sometimes up to four. The role of the nurse is also much different when compared to the U.S. because they are much less involved in direct care and more involved in documenting and care planning. The technicians are responsible for medication administration and peripheral IV insertion which is a huge part of the job of a nurse in the U.S. We also saw a difference in the way medications are handled because nothing is computerized and no medications are locked up, including psychotropic medications.



MCN students Diana Matusiak and Alyssa Sarrazine

Even though we experienced many differences, we also noticed similarities which were nice to see. Children are admitted for many of the same reasons in both countries including bacterial meningitis, influenza, GI issues, and heart problems due to Down syndrome.

The resident's assessment was much like one that we would perform on our pediatric patients and she always tried to keep the child calm and in control as much as possible. Even though we could not talk with the children due to the language

barrier, we realized it is very true that a smile can go a long way. We are so grateful for this experience and truly believe that it will have a positive impact on our future nursing care in this area.

Day 7 – Playing outside and walking to patients' homes

By: Sara Ferreri

About one week into our trip to Londrina, we spent one day learning about the public health services in Brazil. The first half of the day, we toured two different community health centers. We were impressed by the wide variety of services offered at these centers, from dental health to diabetic counseling. One thing that was particularly different from the United States, was the implementation of outdoor exercise equipment throughout the city.

At first glance, these outdoor exercise facilities resembled playgrounds. However, upon closer inspection, you can see that they are actually made up of brightly painted gym equipment. Our group had quite a bit of fun trying out all of the different exercise equipment, and following the

instructions posted on signs for various muscle stretches. We all agreed that the use of these outdoor exercise facilities is an excellent idea to promote good physical health and prevent the occurrence of obesity and cardiovascular disease.

The second half of our day was spent doing home health visits. Our group broke up into pairs and joined nursing students in their visits to patients' homes. Initially, we all met in a local church, and then split into our groups and traveled to the patients' homes by foot. It was different walking to patients' homes rather than driving, like we would have in the United States. This gave us the opportunity to gain a better perspective of the neighborhoods these patients were living in.



Sara Ferreri and Kaitlin Ross on the outdoor exercise equipment

During the first visit, the nursing students conducted a genogram on the patient to gain a better understanding of her social relationships and the effect of these relationships on her illness. Unfortunately, it was uncovered that the patient was extremely isolated from the rest of her family and friends. This emphasized to us the importance of these home visits. For someone like this patient, who is nearly immobile due to her physical condition, and has very few social supports to help her access care, home visits serve as an excellent source for health care. In all, we were very impressed by the public health care system of Brazil, and felt that many of their practices would be helpful if used in the United States.

Day 7 – Still debating on career choice

By: Kirsten Krauth

Something new that we all got to do this year on our trip was being able to observe in a specific unit of the hospital. I was able to observe in the operating room and on the pediatric floor, and I loved every minute of it! Being an OR nurse is one of my potential career paths and it was so awesome to be able to see how Brazil goes about their care.

I was able to watch a spinal cement and a knee debridement. The spinal tap was so cool, they had an x-ray machine that they used to make sure the placement was right and placed this liquid cement in-between a vertebrae to correct a fracture. I thought that, that was a really neat way to repair a spine fracture, I had never heard of something like that before. Usually rods are used to fix this type of injury.

The pediatric floor was so fun, I love kids! I was able to observe a dressing change which I was able to see before and after pictures of the wound and the results were astonishing. The wound had improved so much. I also got to see a PICC be placed in a newborn. In Brazil, the nurses can take a course on how to insert PICC lines and so then they are the ones placing them. Overall, my experience on the different units, definitely made my choice between working in the OR or Peds more difficult, but I loved both opportunities and the staff on all the units were so nice and welcoming!

Day 9: HIV and TB clinics

By: Kirsten Krauth

Today was full of many learning experiences! We visited the HIV and Tuberculosis clinics located down town. I was very interested to see that these clinics looked nothing less than a doctor's office. We learned that all patients with a HIV or TB diagnosis come to this clinic to get all the medical care they need. This includes counseling, nutrition, seeing a general physician and medication. It was very interesting to see that the HIV clinic had its own dentistry office. This was something very different than in the U.S. It was cool to see the same anti-viral medications are used in Brazil as they are in the U.S. Under their health policy, all patients get 100% of their care and medication paid for by the government, which I think is absolutely amazing! Go Brazil!

After our visit to the HIV clinic, we went next door to the TB clinic. At this location, patients come in everyday to take their medications. They do this to not only ensure that the patient is compliant with their medication, but also to reduce the chance of spreading TB and cure the disease. The patients who come in were only allowed to enter one consultation room, to get their medications and then leave out a door in the same room. They do this to prevent spreading of the disease; however, as mentioned before, the risk is greatly reduced once the patient has started medication. Overall, it was so interesting to see the similarities in medications and the differences in how both countries control the disease.

Day 10: Psychology and pomegranates

By Kaitlin Ross

It is hard to believe that our time in Brazil is coming to a close. We have seen so very much during our time here, and learned a great deal. On Friday we had the opportunity to visit CAPS (Center for Psychological Assistance), which is a day center that people with any kind of mental disease can come and spend time in group sessions, doing crafts, or being counseled. Anyone can walk in for a consult, and not necessarily need to have a doctor's order to be there. Basically I saw it as adult day care. I was impressed with how receptive people seemed to be of those who have a mental disease. In the U.S. we tend to stereotype and attach a bad stigma to people with psychological disorders. In Brazil, it seems that those people are just accepted as any other person, but just needing more help with certain things.

After our time touring the inside of CAPS, I took a walk around the outside of the building with one of the nurses. She showed me their hibiscus trees, a guava tree, and a pomegranate tree. Before I realized what she was doing, she pulled a plum sized brown ball off the tree, cracked it open and I was surprised to see fully developed pomegranate seeds inside. A pomegranate is one of my favorite fruits, so I immediately accepted the gift and proceeded to taste the fruit. It was really good. Just for the record, I shared with the group!



Pomegranate

Conclusion: Lifelong friendships and life-changing experiences

By Lynn Kennell, Transcultural Faculty Advisor



Host family making a churrasco dinner

Our final days in Londrina were filled with interaction with our host families and nursing faculty of UEL. On Sunday, May 25, we had a real Brazilian “churrasco”/barbecue hosted by Flavia and Ludovico Pieri Neto, the hosts to Wendy Woith and myself. There were at least 30+ people and we feasted on grilled chicken, sausage, beef and various delicious salads, mandioca (cassava) with bacon, and some of the sweetest and most delicious desserts ever tasted. The warmth and hospitality of everyone was just heartwarming! Lifelong friendships were strengthened during this time together.

On Monday, another faculty member of UEL, Maria Elisa Wotzasek Cestari, invited us to her home for another incredible meal called “bobó do frago”—an amazing stew of mandioca with chicken and tomatoes and delicious flavors! Afterwards we debriefed with the faculty about the entire experience! Students from MCN were overwhelming in their praise of the efforts to make our stay a marvelous and life-changing experience. The shadowing of hospital nurses was definitely a highlight, as were the opportunities to visit the various clinics and resources in the SUS health care system.



Dinner with faculty of UEL

On our last evening, it was our turn to ‘give back’ a token of our appreciation and we cooked up a ‘typical American summertime picnic’ with ‘sloppy joes’, cole slaw, broccoli-cauliflower salad, guacamole with Brazilian ‘chips’, and watermelon and home-made cinnamon rolls for dessert. All our host families were present as well as UEL faculty and there was much laughter and a few tears as we thanked everyone for their most generous hospitality.

The next day we began our journey home with a great ‘send-off’ from the Brazilian hosts. Our desire is to welcome the faculty and nursing students to MCN-ISU next year. It was a marvelous exchange of thoughts and cultures that will be with us always.



Traveling back to the United States