

*Dreams,
Deferred*

WHY A GIFTED
STUDENT FACES AN
UNCERTAIN FUTURE

*Cuba
in View*

IMAGES OF
OUR COLORFUL
NEIGHBOR

*Queens
in Rio*

STUDENTS
LOOK FOR
GOLD IN RIO

QUEENS

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QUEENS IN



Nineteen Queens students spend two weeks at the Olympic Summer Games looking for heroes in the streets of Rio—and find them.

By Bob Page

Sunrise at Ipanema is like hope set on fire. I didn't write that line, and neither did Antônio Jobim, whose song, *The Girl from Ipanema*, so embodies the romance of Rio de Janeiro that they named the airport after him. That line was written by Caroline Henry '17 after feeling similar inspiration in exactly the same place.

Henry is one of 19 Queens students who spent two weeks at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games as part of the John Belk International Program. Queens ranks in the top 10 nationally for the number of students who study abroad—almost 80 percent—where the national average is about 10 percent.

After competing against dozens of applicants to join the trip, these 19 students studied the Olympic movement and digital media production in a spring semester course. Their goal was to join the legion of Olympic storytellers in Rio. Ten thousand athletes competed in these Olympics. More than 30,000 journalists, photographers and other media producers also supported the event. Like the athletes, they were at the top of their game.

Most of these storytellers focus on competition, but Queens students turned their lenses away from athletes and toward the *cariocas*—the residents of Rio. What is the impact of the games on the city? What is it like for taxi drivers, volunteers and teachers? Does the reality match the billions of dollars in infrastructure investment and seven years of preparation?

GETTING READY

Rio received more than the usual share of “city-unprepared-chaos-looming” coverage. Zika caused physicians and researchers to recommend rescheduling. Political instability eroded confidence in Brazil's ability to manage the event. Intelligence agencies worldwide pooled resources to prevent terrorist attacks. Protests by Rio city police and worries about street crime gave tourists second thoughts.

As a corporate communicator for former Olympic technology partners IBM and Lenovo, I had supported four editions of the games before Rio. We were fortunate to have Professor Joe Cornelius, an award-winning filmmaker trained at Wake Forest and the North Carolina School of the Arts, sign on for this adventure with Queens.



More than 10,000 athletes competed at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Another 30,000 journalists, photographers and other storytellers covered the Olympics. They, too, are at the top of their game. Austin Huddy '17 was one of 19 Queens students who spent two weeks in Rio on a journey to join this legion of Olympic storytellers. Photo by DeVlin Taylor '16

We placed students in three-member production teams, consisting of producer, creative director and videographer. The teams worked independently, producing multimedia packages of internet-friendly, two-minute videos; 500-word stories; and still photography.

It's one thing to produce Charlotte-based stories about Brazilian bakeries, *capoeira* martial arts studios, and samba dance festivals. But it's another to navigate Rio de Janeiro, speaking little Portuguese, amid the usual *carioca* exuberance amplified by Olympic crowds. So Angie Edwards, director of the Myrta Pulliam Center for International Education, and Daniel

Amgarten, founder of Campus Brasil, a foreign study organization, developed a brilliant idea.

Capitalizing on the desire of journalism students at Brazilian universities to support the Rio Olympics, we invited students from Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo to apply to join us. Sixty did so. After conducting Skype video interviews, we invited six. These Portuguese- and English-speaking students contributed priceless expertise, serving as navigators, field producers and translators.

On the ground in Rio, we created four unbreakable protocols. Morning

production meetings. Staying in groups of three or more. Shooting a selfie of the entire group, with itinerary details, upon departure from our hostel. And every team carried smartphones.

The system worked. No assaults, no sprained ankles, no thefts, and all 25 students and two faculty members made it home safely.

CHANGING LIVES

We were wary about visits to *favelas*, the brightly colored neighborhoods of economically disadvantaged *cariocas*, often perched on steep hillsides. But when one of our six student teams produced a story about city intersections



Photo: Jordan Borrosh '16

1



2



Photo: Kelsey McCormick '17

3



Photo: DeVin Taylor '16

4



Photo: Joe Cornelius

5



Photo: Austin Huddy '18

6

between *favelas* and nearby communities, a visit proved irresistible for young storytellers.

“This guy near the entrance to the Santa Marta *favela* was saying he could give us a tour,” says videographer Austin Huddy ’17. “A security officer nearby said he was safe. Our Brazilian field producer thought it looked okay, so we paid a tour fee and went up into the *favela*.”

Huddy’s team was proud of the *favela* package, and producers at the NBC Olympics website agreed. The site published the story, along with eight other Queens pieces. *USA Today* published two stories by other teams, including one on Thawan Lucas, the 8-year-old samba dancer of opening ceremonies. Through a relationship established with WCNC, all student pieces were published online by NBC Charlotte. The *Charlotte Observer* published three.

The experience was life-changing for Huddy, who now plans to become a documentary filmmaker.

In addition to the 25 Queens and Mackenzie students, a recent Queens graduate, Mary Stringini ’16, served as Olympic digital media intern at NBC Charlotte in August. After serving as liaison to the Rio team, she is now a full-time WCNC employee. And all 25 stories and 20 personal journal entries live on *QueensinRio.org*, a site constructed by Hiwot Hailu ’16.

WHAT STUDENTS LEARNED

Within 24 hours of landing in Rio, students were producing complex multimedia stories in bilingual teams,

and two weeks of interviews with residents gave students a nuanced view of the city.

“I think the *cariocas* view the Olympics as something that has infiltrated their city,” one student wrote at the close of the trip. “They enjoy the Olympics, but wish that the money had been for something else that mattered in their country. Something like education and infrastructure.”

Professor Cornelius worked passionately to ensure that the mythical shape of the hero’s journey was reflected in student stories. The journey resonates well with the Olympic movement, where participants pick themselves up after defeat and invest daily in becoming better versions of themselves.

One student described how working in the same team for six months built trust: “There was one day in Rio where everything that could have gone wrong, went wrong,” she wrote. “We had three stories completely fall through, and in the midst of it all, we stuck together and found solutions to the problem without getting mad at each other. At the end of the day we laughed it off, thanked God for each other and ate some *churros*.”

LASTING LESSONS

Supporting a global event like the Olympics typically means months of preparation and attention to mind-numbing detail, followed by three weeks of 16-hour days, with mitigation to protect against failure. Our goals were to prepare students to contribute stories with high standards, to build confidence by successfully competing in the environment and to become better

versions of ourselves. Validation by national media indicates that we passed the first goal. The stories, now part of the portfolios of 25 students, helped clear the second.

The third goal is difficult to quantify, but two stories speak to it.

One is a story about a student who almost didn’t go. Pre-games media coverage of Rio crises raised concerns for her and her parents, and two weeks before opening ceremonies, her mother called to cancel. Three days later, the student changed her mind. After spending a quiet semester in the classroom, she transformed into a fearless, confident explorer, energizing the entire team and producing visually stimulating stories. She also burned a candle at both ends, cheering on USA and Brazil at soccer and beach volleyball matches and leading joyous afternoon excursions to the beach at Ipanema.

The other story is about a visible change in all students, between the first day of class in January and the last day in August. On the first day, students talked about *enjoying* the magic of the Olympics. On the last day, students acted like producers, talking about *creating* the magic of the Olympics, about what story elements are essential, about how sparks and shadows fall on residents and storytellers alike—people working behind the curtain to show what excellence truly looks like, after we leave the beach and return to the path of our daily lives.

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1. Sunrise at Ipanema, with Vincent Schneider ’17 at lower right.
2. Hiwot Hailu ’16 displays her Olympic credentials, issued by the city of Rio and by Queens.
3. DeVin Taylor ’16 strikes a *Christ the Redeemer* statue pose.
4. Elias Duarte, a guide in the Santa Marta *favela*, conducts an interview with Queens students.
5. Left to right, Caroline Henry ’17, Ella Fox ’17, Ashley Osiecki ’17 and Alex Bruder ’17 in the Botafogo area of Rio.
6. Tyler Greene ’17 shooting images en route to see the *Christ the Redeemer*.