GEOSCIENCE STUDENTS CONVENE IN BRAZIL
UMass Boston Scientist Leads Investigation of Coastal Systems of Brazil

BOSTON, MA, July 13, 2016 – In December 2015, Allen Gontz, University of Massachusetts Boston Professor of Geology and Geophysics, and Chancellor J. Keith Motley flew to Washington, D.C., where they were joined by Matheus Batalha Moreira Nery, Dean of International Relations at Universidade Tiradentes in Brazil, to accept a Partners of the Americas 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund grant at an award ceremony hosted by the White House. The 100,000 Strong in the Americas program supports international field experiences for college students in an effort to foster intra-hemisphere collaborations. Their White House host, Vice President Joe Biden, spoke to grant recipients about the critical role that Western Hemisphere countries can have on finding solutions to address the world’s most pressing issues. The Vice President noted that collaboration begins on college campuses. Biden stated, “Exposure to culture, language and politics of other countries is how we’re going to build close ties that will cement the economic growth and stability of this hemisphere.”

“It is critical that U.S. students become more aware and engaged with their student counterparts in other regions of the Americas and develop relationships to solve common problems. We are thrilled to leverage our expertise in coastal systems, led by Prof. Gontz, to launch the Tiradentes Institute at UMass Boston, a joint institute between UMass Boston and Universidade Tiradentes and offer students this exceptional learning and research experience,” Schuyler Korban, University of Massachusetts Boston Vice Provost for Global Programs, said. “Study abroad and international experiences can change lives,” Matheus Batalha, Universidade Tiradentes Dean of International Relations, said. “Which is why we encourage cultural experiences and study abroad initiatives such as this opportunity made possible through the Tiradentes Institute and the 100,000 Strong in the Americas grant.”

This week, Gontz is in Aracaju, Brazil initiating the field-based phase of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund project entitled, ‘Comparative Coastal Systems of Sergipe, Brazil’. An international group of seven Brazilian undergraduate students from Universidade Tiradentes in Sergipe and seven U.S. undergraduate students from the University of Massachusetts Boston and San Diego State University will join Gontz for two weeks of exploratory field research where they will learn and investigate ancient and contemporary coastal systems of Brazil. Gontz said, “As we advance through the 21st century, geoscientists will be called upon to help address natural and societal issues that impact society such as climate change, energy production, and food security. This initiative will prepare students to find solutions and innovations while building long-lasting international collaborations.”

While in Brazil, students will investigate the coastal zone of Sergipe near the Rio Vaza-Barris for evidence of past sea level storms and changes in climate using a ground penetrating radar (GPR) and extracting sediment cores. They will explore the geology of the oil-rich Alagoas Basin, and investigate coastal dune fields. They will also visit sites of significant societal and cultural importance in Aracaju and in Canion Xingo.

"My passion for learning peaks when I'm outside the classroom. Brazil is not only geologically diverse, but has a wonderful culture woven throughout," said Bryan McCormack, a Quincy native, and a sophomore
Environmental Science major at the University of Massachusetts Boston. McCormack’s sentiment is shared by his peer Erika Welch, a Medford native, and sophomore Environmental Science major at UMass Boston, “Brazal is giving me a unique opportunity to use the perspectives of others to help relate geologic processes. I hope to gain not only an educational experience but also a cultural relationship and friendship with my peers” said Welch.

Partners of the Americas was founded in 1964 and was inspired by President John F. Kennedy as the people-to-people component of the Alliance for Progress. The goal is to connect people across the hemisphere to solve problems. Partners brings the right mix of players – volunteers, development professionals, governments, businesses, and higher education institutions – to the table in order to match resources, knowledge and passion to need. By connecting local organizations to broader funding opportunities and empowering citizens to become agents of change, Partners develops lasting solutions to our hemisphere’s toughest challenges, together.

“The comparative field work on the coastal zone of Sergipe, Brazil, conducted by students and faculty from UMass Boston and Universidade Tiradentes, is a best practice example of what President Obama envisioned when he announced this initiative,” said Lee Tablewski, Director of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund. “Partners of the Americas, NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the U.S. Department of State are proud to support this important work through the Innovation Fund.”

MALA Geosciences USA is the US office of the Swedish-based geophysical company that specializes development of shallow earth systems, specifically ground penetrating radar. The company has donated their newly released Ground Explorer ground penetrating radar system for use during the project. Other project partners include Petrobras and Embrapa. Petrobras, Brazil’s largest integrated energy company, is active in exploration, refining, natural gas, electricity, chemical gas and biofuels. Embrapa is an agricultural research organization affiliated with the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food Supply. Embrapa is developing innovative models of tropical agriculture and livestock management to overcome barriers that limit the country’s production of food, fiber, and fuel. Both organizations are providing the project logistical support, expertise, and access to their staff and facilities.

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