

KWF Travel: A change of scenery changes lives

—By Amber Hunt '11

As he stood outside of the Afro-Brazil Museum in the heart of Sao Paulo, *Detroit Free Press* Fellow James Thomas felt something he never anticipated while 5,000 miles from his life-long Detroit home. He had never been this far away, yet felt like he fit in.

“We were walking across that covered concrete lot, and here are middle-aged skateboarders working on their kick-flips, clusters of smiling kids on what looked like a class field trip, and out on the pavement, seniors riding bikes and power-walking,” Thomas recalled. “I could’ve been any one of them.”

More than that, he envisioned uprooting himself and either finding or creating a job in Brazil. It was a revelation squarely in line with the Fellowship’s horizon-broadening goals. Travel has been a part of the Knight-Wallace experience for the past decade, and those who attended this fall’s trip to Brazil and Argentina—which included all Fellows and a handful of spouses and partners—said the excursion was about far more than sightseeing, seminars or bonding with their fellow Fellows.

It was about opening doors and shining light on opportunities most had never before considered.

“Seeing firsthand such an important and emerging nation like Brazil helped me reshape my perception of the world and its players,” said Nick Perry, higher-education reporter for the *Seattle Times*.

“It made me contemplate the importance of international news and how in the U.S. we need to avoid the tendency to become too inward-looking.”

The Paulistas’ habit of equipping their buildings with heliports and choppering to appointments around town to avoid truly astonishing traffic challenges impressed CNN.com producer Todd Leopold. “There was a moment when we stood on the helipad of

Folha de Sao Paulo headquarters and looked around and there were 360 degrees of skyscrapers,” he said. “There was an odd sense of being in the first and third world at the same time.”

The Fellows’ backgrounds range from travel newbies to world explorers. Matthew Power, contributing editor of *Harper’s Magazine* and the most traveled of the 2011 Fellows, had regaled us with tales of assignments in India, Afghanistan and the Amazon but came away struck by the design of the trip. “It

offered the rare chance to directly compare two fascinating and dynamic places,” he said, “and to hold them up to the light and understand them in a way that no ordinary assignment would afford.”

Elijah Van Benschoten, a Fellow’s partner and an artist who now hopes to pursue Fulbright opportunities in Argentina, was equally

impressed by the trip’s conception. “To me, it speaks to the program’s savviness in getting meetings and exposure with leaders that most people even in that country wouldn’t have access to.”

The trip abroad reassured Emily Richmond—education reporter with the *Las Vegas Sun*—that while she might be on sabbatical, that didn’t mean her professional skills had to rust. The group’s debates and probing questions of seminar guests carried over onto bus rides between site visits, after-dinner walks and even early morning jogs in Sao Paulo’s botanical park.

“Every day I learned something from my colleagues,” Richmond said. “I never failed to be grateful to be in such thoughtful company.”

Politico Fellow Harry Siegel and his wife stayed on for three weeks after the official trip, enough time to internalize some strong impressions. “Seeing how U.S. politics are viewed and reported in South America was a healthy reminder both of the impact our policies have, and the conspiracies—real and imagined—that they inspire,” he said. “The scale of Sao Paulo just blew



In Buenos Aires, '11 Fellows discuss Argentine civil law with Supreme Court Justice and Vice President of the Court Elena Highton de Nolasco (front row, middle).

Amber Hunt

From the Head Fellow

—By Charles R. Eisendrath '75

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING THERE

People notice when they're being watched. They act differently, particularly when it's by someone who knows what to look for. Somehow, however, the elemental part of journalism called presence got lost in the smoke of our decade-long professional sweat lodge on standards. I'm talking about actual, feet-on-ground presence. Not the virtual kind, as in the *Detroit Free Press* announcing atop page one, "On Guard for 179 years"—with the skeleton editorial staff permitted by the Gannett Company. I mean bearing witness by having reporters—that's right, reporters—in the police stations and substations, in the courtrooms, in the legislature, the statehouse, governmental agencies, the banks, even when there's no news that minute or hour...even entire days.

Presence means covering not only Federal Reserve decisions, but the actions of its regional affiliates and the local banks, too. This would include why after fattening themselves with Federal cash, they prefer to starve their communities for loans. If you are a Somebody, it is more difficult to permit yourself indulgences if you know that in the next tennis game, scout meeting or cocktail party you risk being seen not as a Captain of the Universe but rather as a capital creep. Just ask unindicted but identified associates of Bernard Madoff. This includes children. Anyone's personal jury convenes in the back of the van.

Presence on the battlefield is the privilege of the few media companies willing to bear the cost. But presence also means regular visits to local reserve units and hospitals at home. Not just for feature-ready tales of sacrifice, but also the quality of their equipment and leadership. Above all, the effect that the economic drain of

the national, bipartisan policy of permanent warfare has on the local drain commission. Reports could start with how the budgeted \$428.5 million a day going to support the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan might instead help reduce the amount of the deficit owed by each one of us. The increased taxes and decreased services, after all, are local.



Presence means medical reporting that includes regular visits to hospitals with questions about the way care is delivered. It is far easier for administrators to continue inefficient, under-coordinated service without skeptical reporters on the case locally, quoting friends, neighbors, colleagues to health executives, themselves. This is an industry with the world's model system willing to share any of its practices and very, very few who bother to try emulating how the Mayo Clinic delivers brilliant, efficient medicine...at a profit. If you live near Detroit, the parallels to how GM ignored the lessons of Toyota are hair-tearing.

What to do about guns? As the coun-

try straps shoot'n iron mores of the Wild West, presence means tough-minded monitoring of gun shops and gun shows balanced by engaged coverage of how hunting contributes to the economy, the environment and the ethos of what it means to be part of the food chain, if only for a weekend. Yes, it's complicated. You can't disentangle it if you're not *there*.

We don't have much journalism about such things and it shows in the lack of public debate even as we prosecute two wars few understand.

The New York Times literally owned the Pentagon Papers story but its impact was amplified exponentially by hundreds of journalists elsewhere, exploring dozens of angles. *The Washington Post* broke what became "Watergate," but Nixon resigned because a huge pack of newshounds buying up and down Main Street threatened his local backers who had their own elections to win, beginning with coverage by the local media. Presence gave Dr. Martin Luther King and others a forum to explain the civil rights movement, even during the long lulls between news events. To varying degrees, presence enabled those dedicated to improving the environment and building rights for women and gays.

As I write this column, applications for the next class of Knight-Wallace Fellows are being sent in 27-pound boxes (they will be weightlessly online next year!) to our applications committee. In each person selected, we will invest everything we have to pay for stipends, tuition, health insurance and travel, betting on them to continue the best in journalism—including a dedication to presence. ▶

An education: Brazil baffles and delights Fellows

—Alec MacGillis '11

Ask the 2011 Fellows for their impressions of Sao Paulo and they will recall easily its boisterous energy, its chaotic sea of high-rises, the appealing openness of the locals. But inquire where they were in

goers and Elizabeth Bishop aficionados. We were happy to help correct that.

Before the Fellows could get down to sober study, a more sensory acclimation was in order. Within hours of arrival they



No rest for the Fellows: even pool time is seminar time; CNN Turk's Ferhat Boratav (seated on right) discusses Turkey and its relationship with Latin America.

Sao Paulo—that is, put a map in front of them and ask them to retrace their steps—and they will look at you in dumb terror. Even your humble correspondent, who is often less than humble about his sense of direction, found himself utterly disoriented in the amorphous, boundless mass of this archetypal mega-city.

This much was clear even before the group arrived in Sao Paulo: the 2010 addition of Brazil to the South America trip is looking more justified than ever. The fifth-most populated country in the world, Brazil is demanding to be reckoned with—joining Turkey in freelance negotiations with Iran, joining China and Germany in condemning the Fed's "quantitative easing," defying the global recession with its robust growth. Yet the country remains far from the minds of most Americans, with the exception of soccer fanatics, Carnival

were enjoying an all-choral program in the handsome Sala Sao Paulo, a concert hall converted from a train station. That evening, they visited the home of Helio

Schwartzman '09, star columnist for *Folha de Sao Paolo* and lead organizer of the Brazil trip, who with his wife Josiane and daughter Sophia laid out an extraordinary spread, an augur of culinary indulgences to come.

The next day brought a visit to the Embu das Artes colonial-era street market outside the city, followed by an extended sojourn at Casa di Lica, a lovely inn nestled in the hills that offered an endless stream of delicacies as toucans looked on from the trees above. Luckily, the group—joined at this point by KWF board member Jill Abramson of the *New York Times*—was able to work off some of the calories that evening at the Escola de Samba Perola Negra. At first, only the boldest Fellows took part in the arresting spectacle of dozens of dancers shimmying around the warehouse-like hall to the relentless percussive din of the band. But finally even the laggards (i.e., the men) were coaxed onto the floor by the persuasive overtures of one of the house dancers. Even the representative of the Grey Lady was an enthusiastic participant in the decidedly un-grey scene.

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Matt Power and Alec MacGillis take a moment to enjoy the view from Folha de Sao Paulo's helipad.

KWF in Argentina: passion, politics & pampas

— Nick Perry '11

Some tragic street drama unfolded during our December 2010 visit to Argentina—making our meetings with key political players that much more fascinating.

The Knight-Wallace Fellowship seems to have a knack for this sort of thing. Nine years ago, the Fellows found themselves in the midst of riots and tear gas during the ouster of President Fernando de la Rúa. While nothing as dramatic happened this time, we soon realized we'd landed in a place where people are as passionate about politics as they are about soccer.

We arrived in Buenos Aires the same week two people were killed when police tried to remove a group of immigrant squatters from a city park, bringing the death toll to three. Day after day the situation escalated, as thousands more squatters arrived in solidarity, neighbors started to take the law into their own hands, and the military was called in.

The situation became a test for President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who blamed Buenos Aires mayor and potential rival presidential candidate Mauricio Macri for inflaming the situation for political ends. We got to meet with Macri in the midst of this and ask him about it ourselves.

Macri arrived at the meeting late and



Fellows learn about Argentina's history on the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires.

looking exhausted—understandable, given the circumstances. But he gamely answered our questions, taking a very different view than the president and hinting at his own political ambitions.

We met a second man with presidential aspirations: Francisco de Narváez, the national representative of the Buenos Aires Province. Narváez could have been a character from some action movie—Chinese characters tattooed on his neck; married to a model; working from ultra-hip, techie offices.

Even after our meetings, Argentine politics remained inscrutable compared to politics in the U.S. People who label them-

selves Peronists, for instance, seem to define the term in almost any way that suits.

Beyond politics, Argentina had much to offer. Buenos Aires was bustling and vibrant, a well-designed city with a riot of overlapping architectural styles. With the city's gleaming new buildings in the Puerto Madero neighborhood and the crush of commerce at the San Telmo street market, it was hard to imagine that Argentina's economy collapsed less than a decade ago.

Indeed, while serious financial problems remain—unofficial estimates put inflation as high as 30 percent—the economy has been robust in recent years.

Biglit Black



Laura Tillman '11S, discusses politics with Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri.

Fellow Chris Sherman, who taught English in Buenos Aires during the late 1990s, was surprised at the city's quick rebound: "I'd expected to see it in a more distressed state," he said.

Sherman was also impressed that Argentina had opened the doors to the notorious Buenos Aires ESMA facility, where the Argentine Navy imprisoned and tortured thousands of political opponents during the 1976 to 1983 Dirty War. Many prisoners were later killed, thrown from Navy planes into the ocean.

"I remember walking by when I lived there, when it was still in the hands of the Navy," Sherman said of ESMA. "They still had guards at the fence."

These days, ESMA serves as a museum and memorial to the Dirty War horror, a chilling place that had a profound impact on me and other Fellows when we visited. Sherman said Argentina is "finally confronting its past in a very public way."

Between seminars, Argentine Fellow Ana Laura Perez showed us around the city's cafes and bars and made us feel at home at her downtown apartment.

A highlight of the trip was a day at a ranch on the pampas northwest of Buenos Aires. Most of us had little horse-riding experience. Fellow Alec MacGillis was under strict instructions from his wife Rachel not to attempt such foolishness. Of course, he saddled up anyway. An hour into the

ride, he got separated from the more experienced group. So he set off after them—at a gallop, and managed to stay aboard.

After a seminar in Ann Arbor which traced how dance has reflected and influenced the cultures in both Brazil and Argentina, Fellow Emily Richmond became an enthusiastic dancer on the trip



Justin Pope's first foray into Argentina's asado-heaven.

where, she said, "it all came alive. Samba is about community and expressing joy; Tango is about embracing a heritage."

Then there was the food. Nobody could figure out where Justin Pope, a classic human beanpole with mysterious inner dimensions, was putting all the steaks. "They elevated the entire Fellowship experience," he said. ▶



Fellows prepare for the River vs. Estudiante match by playing a soccer game of their own: U.S. against the world (including the dogs at the Estancia).



Argentine Alumni and Fellows meet (from left to right): Carlos Prieto '02, Patricia Kolesnicov '09, Ricardo Braginski '09, Taos Turner '07, and Matilde Sanchez '04.

Justin Pope

Biglit Black

Amber Hunt

2011 Knight-Wallace Fellows



Front Row, left to right:

Liu Tianzhao, commentator-in-chief, *Southern Metropolis Daily* (Guangzhou); The Influence of Media- and Internet Activism on Social Movements.

Laura Daverio, China correspondent, La 7 (Italy) and RSI Swiss Italian TV; The Appeal of Authoritarianism.

Juseung Lee, senior reporter, MBC-TV (Seoul); Climate Change—Crisis or Chance?

Ana Laura Perez, reporter, *Viva Magazine, Clarin* (Buenos Aires); The Role of Traitors in the Context of Argentina in the 70s.

Justin Pope, national higher education reporter, *The Associated Press*; Challenges of Mass-Scale Higher Education.

Emily Richmond, education reporter, *Las Vegas Sun*; Evaluating Single Sex Education.

Middle Row, left to right:

Matthew Power, contributing editor, *Harper's*; Transportation and Other Urban Issues in the 21st Century.

Amber Hunt, reporter, *Detroit Free Press*; Embracing Empathy in Urban Crime Reporting.

Antonio Gois, reporter, *Folha de Sao Paulo*; School Evaluations: What They Really Tell Us about Schools and Teachers.

Charles R. Eisendrath, director, Knight-Wallace Fellows at Michigan.

Birgit Rieck, assistant director, Knight-Wallace Fellows at Michigan.

William Foreman, South China chief, *The Associated Press*; The Transformation of North Korea.

James Thomas, web editor, *Detroit Free Press*; Improving Technical Know-How in the Newsroom.

Top Row, left to right:

Ted Mellnik, database editor, *The Charlotte Observer*; Using Hyper-Local Data to Evaluate Neighborhood Public Services.

Todd Leopold, producer, CNN.com; Increasing the Social Merit of Entertainment News.

John Walton, senior broadcast journalist, BBC (London); Data-Driven Journalism and its Uses in Interactive Storytelling.

Christopher Sherman, Rio Grande Valley correspondent, *The Associated Press*; The Psychological, Physical and Economical Effects of Armed Conflict on Local Populations.

Nick Perry, higher education reporter, *The Seattle Times*; Are American Colleges Failing their Students?

Harry Siegel, contributing editor, *Politico*; The Impact of the Internet on Social Discourse.

Alec MacGillis, national staff reporter, *The Washington Post*; America's Political Agenda.

—KWF Travel, continued from page 1

me away; it was the biggest thing I'd ever seen. Buenos Aires left me with something different, an insight into a strange, neurotic and incredibly fascinating alternative Europe. Finally, I understand (Jorge) Borges."

The impact of the KWF trips lasts long after the Fellowship year ends. Memories linger of schedules packed with seminars and social events, a cultural

—An Education, continued from page 3

Ears were still ringing the next morning, but it was time to get down to business with the week's string of informative seminars on Brazilian society. Fellows engaged with experts over the country's racial landscape, the complexity of which is vividly displayed in the pages-long list of terms that Brazilians use to describe their racial identity; its efforts to broaden educational access and reduce inequality (with some apparent success, thanks to former



After a day of intense seminars, the Fellows let loose at night, mingling with Brazilian dancers and learning how to Samba.

president Lula da Silva's expansion of cash transfers to poor families); its perpetually fraught but ultimately pragmatic relations with the U.S.; its growing evangelical population; and its push to profit from its early move into the business of converting sugar cane to ethanol fuel.

Interspersed with the seminars were further forays into the city's dense, heavily graffitied maze—to the Afro-Brazilian museum; to two big hospitals that displayed the big social divisions that remain post-Lula, the first privately-owned and exceed-

crash course many couldn't have envisioned on their own. Wayne Drehs, a 2010 Fellow and a writer with ESPN.com, said the experience was life-altering.

"To have my sense of the world completely blown up was a good thing," Drehs said. "For any journalist, the more experiences we have in our lives that we can draw on, the better storytellers and reporters we can be." ▶

ingly well-appointed, the second one, hard by some of the city's sprawling favelas, state-owned and far more Spartan; and, perhaps most memorably, to the roof of the *Folha* building, from which the Fellows enjoyed a panorama of the whole mind-blowing expanse, the closest they came to getting a handle on the concrete cacophony.

The Fellows got another high-rise perspective courtesy of the *New York Times*' man in Sao Paulo, Alexei

Barrionuevo, who received the group for a brief visit at his upper-floor perch. The Fellows then made their way to a reunion with KWF alumni in Brazil: Claudia Collucci and Mariana Lajolo '10; Marcelo Mendonca '92; Vitor Paolozzi '96; and Maria Tereza Gomes '00. The trip ended with a visit to *Folha's* gleaming production facility outside

the city, where presses running at full capacity offered vivid proof—like the fully-staffed newsroom downtown—that the Brazilian press is still in a growth phase that has long since passed us by in the States. At lunch with the paper's top brass, the group managed to avoid saying anything to implicate this year's *Folha* Fellow, Antonio Gois, whose wry insights into his country were appreciated all week.

The ensuing contrast with Buenos Aires only confirmed the dislocation the Fellows experienced in Sao Paulo. For all

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*Includes gender identity and gender expression

the talk of Argentina's malaise and turmoil when compared with Brazil's momentum and stability, Buenos Aires was for most Fellows a far more familiar sight, with its well-planned street grid, European aura, and more advanced stage of development. But the allure of the Sao Paulo labyrinth lingered. All agreed they had not been there nearly long enough to crack the code. 2014 World Cup, anyone? ▶



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Our Great Geniuses

Richard Lee Colvin '01 was named executive director of Education Sector, an independent think tank located in Washington, D.C. Colvin joined the organization after having directed the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Teachers College, Columbia University, since 2003.

Stephanie DeGroot '09 produced the Sky News documentary "Libya: the Stolen Children," which was shortlisted for a Royal Television Society Award in the Current Affairs—International category. The RTS is Britain's leading forum for television and related media.

Scott Elliott '05 joined the *Indianapolis Star* as education reform reporter. Elliott previously was an editorial writer at the *Dayton Daily News*, after serving ten years as the paper's education reporter.

Scott Huler '03 has been named the third Piedmont laureate, a position designed to promote the art of writing in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Huler, a former feature writer and reporter at *The News & Observer*, has written six nonfiction books.

Harris Meyer '91 penned a feature article published in the May 2010 issue of *Health Affairs*. The peer-reviewed publication is the leading journal of health policy thought and research.

Robin Pomeroy '09 moved to Tehran in April 2010 to serve as deputy bureau chief in Iran for Thomson Reuters. Previously, Pomeroy was senior sub-editor at Reuters World Desk in London.

Amy Resnick '07 left her position as editor-in-chief at *The Bond Buyer* to serve as

Americas editor for *International Finance Review*, a Thomson Reuters publication.

Sam Skolnik '08 has authored his first book, "High Stakes: The Rising Cost of America's Gambling Addiction." The publication is due July 2011 from Beacon Press.

Christine Tanaka '05 returned to XETV San Diego 6 in October 2010 as news director. Tanaka had been the station's managing editor before her Knight-Wallace Fellowship. Most recently, she served as manager of content presentation at WCMH in Columbus, Ohio. ▶

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