

During my eight weeks in Salvador, I absolutely fell in love with Brazilian—especially Afro-Brazilian—culture and the people who make Salvador what it is. The internship organization I worked with, The Educational and Cultural Association Didá, or Didá for short, serves to help young women in Salvador rise above the rampant impoverished class through the use of music. Its founder, Antonio Luiz Alves de Souza, established the organization with funds he received after recording his famous samba-reggae music with artists Paul Simon and Michael Jackson; he wanted a way to empower young women using his personal passion. Didá is the Yoruba word for “creation,” which denotes the significance the organization places on women, who are typically taken advantage of and repressed in Salvador’s society.

I spent most of my time in the historical district of Salvador called Pelourinho, which is highly influenced by descendants of the African slaves who came to the state of Bahia. Didá encompasses this Afro-Brazilian culture in its organization, through its all-female percussion band, drum making, Afro-ballet dance classes, hair braiding, and shirt and bag production with traditional designs. The passion that members of Didá put into their work was inspiring and really helped me gain insight into the culture as a whole, something that made me enthused to go to work every day.

Upon arrival I did not have a defined job, which was incredibly frustrating and a bit discouraging, but with this freedom I was able to create my own internship duties. I knew I wanted to combine my skills in business and journalism with direct interaction with the members of Didá, so my resulting jobs facilitated this involvement.

First I worked in the store where Didá sells its produced shirts, bags, and drums, as well as other free trade items from around the area. I noted the evident needs of the store: first was the issue that Didá sells CD’s and DVD’s of its concerts but did not have any way for customers to preview the

products; second was that the young women who worked there had no business experience prior to their placement in the store. After considering these problems, I decided to use my program funds to purchase a TV and DVD player for the store so customers could watch and listen to the products, a decision that immediately increased sales of both CD's and DVD's. Also, I began teaching the store employees, especially a particular girl named Luciene, basic business and vendor skills. After spending significant time with Luciene I was able to develop a sister-like closeness of friendship with her, as well as see her immense growth as a member of the small business community.

Once I saw the effectiveness of the teaching I had done with Luciene, I spoke with de Souza (known by most as Neguinho do Samba) about attending some of the other classes at Didá and teaching some brief business lessons. Upon his animated approval I joined several of the classes throughout the day and took 15 to 20 minutes at the end of class to do supplementary business lessons on entrepreneurship, sustainability, and simple business and accounting tactics.

The most apparent need at Didá, however, was the influx of funds. The organization has a two-year partnership with Wal-Mart that pays its bills and professors' salaries, but this contract is up at the end of this calendar year. Unfortunately, other than the Wal-Mart sponsorship, Didá only receives small donations from passing tourists taking drum or dance classes, or volunteers offering their services. I realized that Didá needed a way to capitalize on its tourist appeal as well as find a source for larger amounts of money if they were to have any hope of completing their intended projects for the future. For this reason, I drafted pamphlets in both Portuguese (there is a huge in-country tourist market) and English to put in the store that explained the mission of the organization; these pamphlets served to inform tourists about Didá and hopefully encourage purchases upon knowledge of their free-trade production. Next I contacted several tourist books and explained Didá, asking them to include information about the organization in their upcoming editions. I also put together a grant application for the Inter-American Foundation, a very involved process that made me really research the organization and forced Didá's board of directors to consider their business practices.

I felt that I was successful in the store with the pamphlets and TV/DVD player because I was able to see immediate results in the increase of sales as a result of more knowledgeable customers. The next step, though, is finding a way to teach English to the young women participating in Didá's projects, because I organized English classes for the Didá staff but could not manage to expand the program to include all of the girls. With the addition of consistent English classes, these young women will have a significant advantage in any endeavor they take on, and the store employees will have much more success with foreign tourists. I have not been able to determine my success as far as my contacts with the tourist books and grant application because both involve a long waiting period—at least three months until tour book writers are revisiting Salvador and at least six months before the grant will be further investigated.

Through my involvement in the organization, I think that Didá benefited from having someone come and establish more defined guidelines. As I was putting together the grant application I discovered that not only did the organization not have a business plan, but it did not have a planned budget for its projects or even written receipts for donations it receives. By sitting down with Didá's board of directors and forcing them to put their ideas into more structured plans, I think they will now be able to function more successfully in the future. I also think that the young women who work at the organization benefited from the cultural exchange and having an American work with them who could provide insight on what life is like in another part of the world that seems so far from their own.

I personally benefited from such a cultural exchange in the relationships I built through my involvement in Didá. Whether it was the girls fighting over who got to braid my hair in the eccentric Afro-Brazilian cornrows, Luciene greeting me as "negra" (the ultimate term of endearment between women in Salvador), or developing a father-daughter connection with Nequinho, I felt like I made some essential links at Didá. I also benefited by creating independent plans without any sort of guidance or feedback, and new skills such as writing a business plan or grant proposal.

Although it was frustrating at times to deal with the laid back Brazilian culture where nothing

gets done until it is deemed absolutely necessary, this way of life taught me patience and I learned to take advantage of cultural opportunities along the way. I will never forget Salvador, and my experiences there are not just contacts and data for my résumé, but part of a new life and family that I would return to in a heartbeat.