

## **TCD Practitioner Grant Report: Collaborative Research with IPÊ in Brazil – An MDP**

### **Field Practicum Experience**

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Before commencing my graduate studies at the University of Florida, I had the opportunity to work in São Paulo. The expansive Brazilian metropolis was the complete opposite of my previous reality as a Conservation Biology undergrad, since concepts of the natural world rarely seemed to be on anyone's mind. This all changed, however, when a prolonged drought in southeastern Brazil provoked a water crisis in 2014, causing many residents to realize that certain resources are actually quite limited. New focus was placed on the 2012 update to Brazil's Forest Code, which mandated all rural properties to maintain stands of trees around resources like springs and streams that support water production for urban consumption.

With all this in mind, I traveled to Gainesville to begin my new life within UF's Master of Sustainable Development Practice (MDP) program and soon discovered TCD and the amazing group of researchers interested in Brazil. Marianne Schmink, who now serves as my MDP committee chair, introduced me to two TCD alumni that now run an ecological research NGO in the state of São Paulo. Suzanna and Claudio Padua, founders of IPÊ—Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas, were kind enough to explain their many projects, some of which centered around protecting the Cantareira Reservoir System, São Paulo's main water source. More research on this topic led me to develop my MDP field practicum around rural producers' role in the protection of springs and streams on their lands by participating in reforestation programs. Specifically, I wanted to understand if elements of Community-based Social Marketing (CBSM) could help IPÊ design better environmental education and extension programs.

Community-based Social Marketing is all about identifying barriers and benefits to behavior changes. Within the context of my research, I wanted to know what rural producers needed in order to effectively participate in reforestation programs, or what might prevent them from doing so. The TCD Practitioner Grant and FLAS funding, along with the limitless comprehension of my professors, allowed me to extend my field practicum to over seven months. This opened a new realm of possibilities for my stay at IPÊ, and I was able to truly integrate into the organization through participation in various activities. This allowed me to not only better understand IPÊ's culture and that of the surrounding region, but also reevaluate my research methods side-by-side with my new colleagues. I was fortunate enough to collaborate with Ryan Richards, a PhD candidate from George Mason University, and together we recruited a dynamic team of researchers that would assist with data collection.

To identify key barriers and benefits important to the CBSM process, we developed a semi-structured interview to be conducted in three cities around the Cantareira: Nazaré Paulista, Piracaia, and Joanópolis. For several months, we spent countless hours driving through the rural neighborhoods of these cities, learning more and more about the realities of the producers there. In total, we conducted 190 interviews and gleaned important socioeconomic data that will surely lend to IPÊ's delivery of future projects. To round out our research, I planned two focus groups in the city of Joanópolis where I hoped to tease out contextual information and more detailed perceptions of barriers and benefits to participation in reforestation programs.

Although in-depth data analysis is still underway, I feel our collaborative efforts have yielded three important results. First, IPÊ has had great success in developing programs that focus on conservation, but Community-based Social Marketing could provide a dependable framework to keep such programs in touch with the needs and limitations of the surrounding

community. Second, the TCD Practitioner Grant provided us the opportunity to expand our research efforts and render an important service for IPÊ: spread the organization's brand name to some of the most rural neighborhoods of São Paulo. Finally, I feel my stay at IPÊ symbolizes what organizations can accomplish when emphasis is placed on collaboration, providing an effective space for exchanging knowledge and ideas. It is my sincere hope that other TCD students have the opportunity for similar experiences working so closely with research organizations around the world.