

## Country Handbooks

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### Brazil | Education

The educational system of Brazil has been divided into three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary (higher education). Adult education and literacy programs play an important role in the supplementary educational system. The language of instruction, as required by law, is Portuguese. Brazil has a literacy rate of 88.6 percent. In Brazil, formal education is the responsibility of the government and all institutions, public and private, look to the central government for the final answer on educational questions. Educational programs must be approved by the appropriate government agencies; such approval is somewhat similar to the U.S. concept of accreditation.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION

The third level of education is composed of universities, federations and independent institutions. The length of the academic programs in institutions of higher education varies from two to six years. In most universities, students register for courses with a central agent, the General Secretariat of Programs, which resembles a U.S. institution's registrar's office.

Undergraduate degree programs last from two to six years, leading to a *bacharel* (non-teaching) degree, *licenciado* (teaching), or a professional title (*licenciado, medico, contador, etc.*). Graduate programs consist of two-year programs leading to a *mestre* (master's) degree and four-year programs leading to a *doutor* (doctorate) degree. There is also the *especialização* (certificate level), a professional graduate non-degree program usually completed prior to a full master's.

The Ministry of Education and Culture requires that all university students take a basic cycle of studies in either humanities or science. The basic cycle, taken in the first two years of higher education, is designed to fill in gaps of knowledge, give career information, teach basic knowledge for the proposed major field of study and provide general cultural background.

In the humanities area, all students must take courses in scientific methodology, Portuguese language, and physical education, in addition to the basic courses in the chosen field. Requirements in the science area include first-year calculus, introductory physics, general chemistry and physical education. This cycle also includes the required basic courses in the chosen field. Following the basic cycle, the student enters the professional cycle of undergraduate courses. This includes a number of required courses, plus the choice of certain optional courses in the field. Little time is allowed for electives in other fields, and diversified study is generally not encouraged.

The academic school year normally runs from March through November. The year is divided into two semesters with some institutions also offering courses during a summer term (January and February). Some institutions, especially those that have large enrollments and are located in urban areas, offer three "shifts" of classes each day - in the morning, afternoon and evening.

#### Classes

The Brazilian student traditionally spends approximately 20 or more hours in class per week. In the classroom, lectures are the most common teaching method used, and, in some institutions, the only approach followed. Brazilian students rely heavily on the professor as a resource as, at times, he is the only source available.

The traditional method of learning has been for the student to take down everything the professor says and then to repeat this on the examination. This approach is, however, undergoing rapid modification. The normal full-time course load per semester is six or seven courses; the minimum course load permitted is two. Each course carries a fixed number of credits and is completed in one semester.

There is little uniformity regarding the number of credits granted per course. The weight or credit attached to each class varies with the institution, as does the total number of credits required per semester. In most cases, courses are assessed for a higher number of credits than might be in other countries. Therefore, a full-time student will take between 25 and 35 credits per semester.

#### Grading

There is no uniform grading scale used in all Brazilian institutions. Many use a system based on a 0-10 scale (with 10 being the highest); others may use letter scales, similar to those found in the United States. Grading scales may even vary within each institution. Variance also occurs in regard to the grade point average required for graduation. The reform laws enacted in 1971 do, however, require that students attend at least 75 percent of the classes for a given course in order to take the final examination. Missing a final examination results in flunking the course.

Grading is fairly severe. The top grades are awarded to relatively few, and the failure rate in a given course can be high. Still, there is little stigma attached to failing. In the basic cycle, a failure rate of up to 50 percent is common; in the professional cycle, failure rates of up to 30 percent in individual courses are not uncommon. A student may repeat a course twice. The majority of students receive grades in the "average" range. What is considered most important is simply passing the course, not necessarily achieving a high grade.

#### PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

In 1971, the Brazilian government enacted legislation promoting massive reforms in the country's primary and secondary educational system. The first level, *primeiro grau*, represents grades one through eight. Education at this level is free and compulsory. Selective examinations after grade eight are not required but do regularly occur out of necessity and lack of space. The second level, *segundo grau*, includes three years (or the equivalent) of study, with the option of a fourth year in some disciplines. Study at the second level has a dual focus, providing students with both vocational and academic curricula.