

Cultural Exercise: Reassessing Rio

Christine Williams is frustrated. She's wondering whether a semester in Rio de Janeiro was such a good idea after all. It's all so disorganized here, and nothing seems to work according to plan... when there is a plan.

As far as Christine can tell, time has no meaning in Rio. She's made one Brazilian friend, Raphaela, who immediately invited Christine out dancing with her friends. They agreed to meet at 8pm, but it was 10pm before everyone showed up, with no apologies for being late. So when she met Raphaela for coffee last week, she was sure to let her know that she only had 45 minutes between classes—to avoid any misunderstanding. Raphaela was still 20 minutes late, and took time to finish a call on her cell phone before she sat down. To set a good example, Christine got up to leave in time for her class, cutting Raphaela off in the middle of the story she was telling. Raphaela was astonished. "Why can't you just be a few minutes late?" she asked. "We just got here." "No," thought Christine. "*You* just got here. I was on time."

And her group project is a nightmare. Her team members turn in the work they're supposed to do at random times, and the project has stalled twice while they waited for someone's contribution. Christine was terrified that they'd miss an important assignment, but Paolo, one of the worst offenders, stayed up all night and got the assignment in. She has to admit he did a good job, which is confusing, since she was convinced he was lazy and incompetent. There's no rhyme or reason here, and she can't seem to get her footing. Brazilians seem alternately friendly and inconsiderate, lazy, and productive... what on earth is going on?

Analysis

Using the sections of the *Cultural Analysis Toolkit* indicated below, break into groups and answer the following questions.

- 1. Reactions and Interpretations:** How do Christine's Brazilian counterparts probably feel about her behavior and expectations?
- 2. Gathering Data:** What observable phenomena support your conclusion about the cultural feature responsible?
- 3. Coping with Differences:** What might Christine do differently in order to minimize her own frustration and cultivate smooth relationships with Brazilians?
- 4. Learning from Them:** How might Christine explain her own cultural bias?
- 5. Learning from Them:** What strategies might she use to get her needs met?
- 6. Learning from Them:** What Brazilian traits could she benefit from?