

### A Snapshot Tour of the Upper School at Graded

*Graded— the American School of São Paulo*, has been in existence since 1920 and was originally commissioned by the American Chamber of Commerce. Interestingly, the name Graded had a specific context in the American educational milieu of the day. Formed as a privately funded, independent, co-educational day school for American ex-patriot children living here in Brazil, it was believed that only the best would do for the new school. American educational systems, at that time, were experiencing tremendous changes due to large immigration and urbanization issues. Ellword Cubberley, a professor at Stanford, had become a lead proponent of using industrial management theory to track and systematize schools as a way to meet the challenges of this new student population. John Dewey's beliefs that education should take into account a child's psychological and physical development were making inroads. From inception, the school was purposely leveled by grades, rather than being taught multi-aged, as a reflection of what was then considered current and best practice. The proud use of Graded in the original Portuguese formation of the name— *Escola Graduada*, was a clear statement of the educational philosophy of the school.

The school moved to its current site in Morumbi the mid-1960. At that time, this area to the southwest of central São Paulo was rolling hills of lush Mata Alantica rain forest. A great deal of land was bought to provide for future expansion and green area. The architect for the Nissan car factory, which had just been completed, was commissioned to design the school. The original school layout with a cafeteria at the head, and rows of classrooms set off in open-air wings, and administrative wing at the foot mirror that same plant. Over time, the city has grown out to the school, and it is now surrounded by chic apartment buildings and compounds for the well to do. That said, sitting cheek to jowl, is one of the oldest and most organized of *favelas*, or squatter's towns in Brazil, the ironically named Paraisópolis (Paradise City). The campus now has three distinct sub-campuses for the elementary, middle, and upper school each a school unto themselves. For my purposes, however, the focus is on the high school.

Currently, the high school has expanded to three two tiered wings, A-C Block, and shares the administrative offices with the middle school. It has two computer labs; an upper school library, an auditorium, and two gyms— all of which serve the middle and upper school; a covered open air courtyard and student center—with the aptly named orange bra covering distinctively appearing on Google Earth; and a serviceable track and series of tennis courts. A cafeteria serves all three divisions. The rather portentous jewel in the crown is the new arts center that houses two theaters, arts classrooms and a dance center. Students access the school through high walled guarded gates generally via a car and driver or by a fleet of mini vans with designated routes in the city.

The population of the school has shifted significantly over the last twenty years. The clientele is made up of high-level expatriate families of corporations and the upper echelon of the moneyed Brazilians. They need to be, with a tuition cost of near 24,000 American dollars per high school student per year. About 60 percent of the student at Graded consider themselves Brazilian in language and culture but often hold an American passport. As such, they are counted as Americans in the survey data published by the school but is not truly reflective of the ethnicity of the majority of the students. The rest of the population is made up of a strong Korean expatriate presence, closely followed by Spanish speaking nationals from other South American countries. Bringing up the end is a smattering of North Americans, Europeans and other Asian nationals. The language of instruction is English but a polyglot can be heard in the halls during class change time.

The school's mission statement is to, "*Graded School's mission is to provide an excellent individual education to prepare students to maximize their potentials and be responsible citizens in a pluralistic society. The School provides a high-quality, well-rounded, English-language, American-style education to children of the*

*international and Brazilian communities. Through its policies and programs Graded endorses the value of diversity and the virtues of social and environmental responsibility and cultural awareness.”*

One of the outcomes of the mission statement is that the high school actually has two heads, Barry Dequanne who oversees the international section and Angelina Fregonesi, who is the overall director of Brazilian studies. Interestingly, by Brazilian law, it is Mrs. Fregonesi who is the legal head of the school not the superintendent, Lee Fertig, our new superintendent, a veteran in international school circles. The school board has twelve self-perpetuating members who serve for up to three two-year terms. Additional administrative staff in the high school are Sherry McClelland, the dean of academics and arts along with three councilors for a high school student population of three hundred and seventy students. There is an active PTA at the school as well as the Graded Intercultural Center. The GIC offers courses in Portuguese, the arts and Brazilian culture to the staff and parents of the Graded community. Open communication between parents and the school is encouraged by a range of open houses, parent breakfasts, weekly email updates in the form of the Graded Gazette that gives current news about what is going on. In addition, this particular population of parents also feels comfortable with face-to-face conversations with staff or via email.

Because the school is charged to serve both the international and Brazilian students, accreditation and graduation requirements are somewhat complex. On the international side, the school is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AdvANED) and the Brazilian Ministry of Education. Graded offers both a standard American style diploma and the Brazilian. Student may opt for one or the other or both. In the American track, the students are to take at least seven courses per year to gain the required twenty-four credit hours for graduation. Of those, there must be four credits of English, three each of history, science, and math. One and a half credits of arts and physical education. A year of language, along with health and a technology project in the sophomore year are also included. If a student is to do the Brazilian diploma, courses in Portuguese, Brazilian geography and social studies are mandated as well as an additional year of science and math beyond that of the American diploma. Rather than fully offering the Advanced Placement program prevalent in the United States, the school offers the International Baccalaureate program starting in tenth grade. As an interesting side note, some of the English and history courses the student take have to be IB regardless of the student's language proficiency or if they are in ESOL or academic support. The PSATs, the SATs and Brazilian exit exam are given as well as the exit IB tests. The school uses a traditional ten point numerical grading system but with the lower end of failing arriving at sixty-four rather than sixty. Midterm updates and quarterly grades are given to the students. The staff of the high school is made up of a mix of local and international teachers, depending on the department and diploma system they serve. There is a degree of “parallel play” between the two systems of the high school academically but no curricular integration.

The school year is divided up into four quarters with two six-week breaks between the semesters and a week break during Carnival. The school day runs from 8:10 to 3:10. The high school operates on a four eighty minute periods, two day block rotation for the academic and elective courses. There are two small break times, a flex period used for assemblies and study halls and a forty minute lunch period which for the academic and elective courses. Students can engage in drama, jazz band or the Model United Nations. They may write for the school newspaper, The Talon or Knowledge Bowl. The extra-curricular courses reflect the school's mission statement regarding social and cultural awareness through offerings of Habitat for Humanity, Grass Roots, Peer Group Connection, student government or a variety of social outreach programs to the school's and orphanages in Paraisopolis. Each grade level takes a series of trips per year, lead by the teachers in small groups, to discover the rich and varied history of Brazil. Sports have place at Graded. Varsity and junior varsity sports are offered in basketball, soccer, indoor soccer, softball, volleyball, and cheerleading and compete against other American schools in Brazil and South America.