



Dr. Ferreira exploring local foods in Hainan, China

HAITC Faculty Highlight – Bruno Ferreira

By Brynn Kowalski

Dr. Ferreira is an assistant professor with HAITC and is currently teaching in Hainan, Haikou, China. Holding his doctorate in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, Dr. Ferreira's research interests lie in the intersection of tourism, entrepreneurship and community development.

Q. What is your position/role in HAITC? What courses do you teach?

A. I am an assistant professor, and I have been in the position for almost two years now. I did start as a lecturer, and then I successfully applied for the AP position. I taught my students from Raleigh, North Carolina, for almost two

years until I finally got the visa that allowed me to travel last semester. I am actually speaking with you from the comfort of my office in Haikou. My area of expertise is Tourism Development and Management. Usually, I teach tourism-focused courses, but I also taught Assessment & Evaluation of Community Services last semester.

Q. Why did you pursue a position with HAITC?

A. I was already job hunting that semester leading up to my defense at NC State when I learned that HAITC was recruiting. I got really excited because our family's goal is to travel the world. By that time, we had already lived and worked on four continents. And so, when I realized it was possible to work for an American University in China, I jumped at the opportunity.

This position enables me to advance ASU's agenda of transformational research here in China, on an island starting to face the downfalls of unbridled tourism development. Here, I have the highest impact on my students and the community.

Q. What has the community at HAITC been like? Do you have any favorite moments working with your coworkers or students?

A. I think we were very well received by the local leadership, colleagues, and students. We were the first ASU faculty to come to HAITC from overseas in a long while. That contributed even more to the warm welcome; people were really eager to know us. Also, students have spent quite some time watching

Zoom lectures from their dorms. It was just incredible when I entered that classroom for the first time and was able to do what I like to do.

I remember that I was invited to join the badminton club the day I arrived. I was actually not a bad player in college because it was part of the curriculum of the Bachelors in Sports Science. But, I had not played for 20 years. It eventually started to come back to me slowly, and now I'm a very respected competitor. We practice every Thursday evening, and everybody shows up, including the dean and one of the vice-deans. It's unbelievable, you should see it!

Dr. Ferreira and his family also participated in a dumpling festival in December 2021, working the dough from scratch to a finished product to take home. While their skills were not as refined as their Hainan counterparts, they and the rest of the HAITC faculty had a wonderful time learning the art of dumpling-making.

Q. Do you have any hobbies or pursuits you like to do in your free time?

A. I recently acquired an electric guitar. Yeah, that has been one of my life passions. I started practicing again, which is something that you need to do to be able to play the music that I like to play. My wife tells me that my humor has improved greatly since I started practicing again.

Dr. Ferreira has also recently been invited to coach his son's soccer team, trading a few sessions for his club fees. Holding his Bachelor's in Sports Science, Dr. Ferreira was trained as a physical education teacher with a specialization in soccer, and finds this an

opportunity to get involved with the community both as a hobby, and a potential research pathway:

A (cont.). Since I'm teaching the Assessment & Evaluation of Community Services course, connecting with community partners like this soccer club might create opportunities for my students' class projects. Simple program evaluations like a survey of parents' satisfaction would go a long way to improve these programs while at the same time providing real-life experience to students.

Q. What is unique about your academic experience with HAITC?

A. I would say that the faculty body here is really diverse, which I appreciate greatly. As I said, our family's goal is to travel around the world to learn from different cultures, and you get a lot of that here. Definitely not just American and Chinese faculty. ASU has a remarkably diverse faculty body, and so does our Chinese counterpart, Hainan University. They do recruit locally, but they also have something they call "global hires". So, you pretty much have people from all over the world. Off the top of my head, Romania, Yemen, Korea, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Italy... and many more. We have an incredible melting pot here in Haikou, which I think really sets this college apart. And this is amid a pandemic with a lot of travel restrictions. We can only imagine what will happen once we are back to normalcy and more and more people can travel to join us here.

Q. What are your goals as an educator as you continue working with ASU and the HAITC program?

A. As an Assistant Professor, my main goal is to get tenure. That's always in my mind and greatly influences the projects I take part in. That said, I think we need to engage more with the community here, and I hope my research and teaching can contribute to that. Our mission at ASU is to engender social change, and I strongly feel there is so *much* more we can do here in Hainan. Students have taken part in occasional visits to communities, which I commend. But, we need to have a more permanent presence in the communities. Otherwise, we are falling short of our mission.

I also have the dream, or ambition to run a study abroad program, a summer school, or an alternative spring break service trip for students. I already have a couple of locations in my mind, such as Romania, Mexico, Guatemala, or Portugal. One idea would be to create an ethnographic field school where students could enroll to develop linguistic and research skills, while at the same time working shoulder to shoulder with people in the community. This is definitely one of my long-term goals. I had great experiences as a student doing this kind of work, and I feel I should pay it forward and provide that kind of experience to our students here who are also eager to learn more about the world. It is true that many of our students have been able to travel abroad, to Paris or New York, but likely in the scope of a structured family trip or on a package tour. I think there's value in taking students on different terms to

another country, to another culture, and I think ASU is very well positioned to do that.

This ethnographic field school would benefit both the host community and the students, offering a positive economic impact as students find lodging and food and the organization rents space for meetings, and the students would benefit from being exposed to new Western cultures that are not the United States. In addition, they would receive college credit and gain experience that puts them ahead of their peers on graduate school applications.

Q. Have you found you found yourself developing new skills since working with HAITC, or falling back on other ones you may not have expected?

A. I spent two years teaching from behind my laptop. And that's painful, that's really painful. Maybe that has to do with my physical education background. I need to be with people; I need to move around, I need to interact, I need to see people, right? So, these were really harsh times, not just for the students but also for the instructors. My first in-



Dr. Ferreira teaching at the HAITC campus in Hainan

person lecture at HAITC took place on my first day out of the 28-day quarantine. So, on day 29 after arrival in China, at 8:35 am, there I was teaching on the 5th floor of the Tian building. The staff sent me straight to the classroom before I even knew where my office was. So that's how the experience was [laughs]. I thought I would be all rusty and

that I would just embarrass myself in front of the class. But no, it all came back to me in the snap of a finger. It was amazing, just as if that two-year intermission had never happened. I was in shape after five seconds, it was definitely impressive! I'm not sure I answered your question but... I find it really remarkable that, for some reason, it all came back to me and I was able to deliver a great session, and I even received a round of applause at the end. You know, maybe they would applaud me anyway just to make me feel good, but I honestly think they were wholehearted.

Q. What excites you the most about the future of this program?

A. There are great plans in the making for Hainan, and Haikou in particular. It feels like I am in the right place at the right time, that something big is about to happen here. It is great to be a part of it and see that the HAITC keeps growing. Our reputation keeps getting stronger, even beyond China, despite being a new college. More people are being hired; just recently we hired a new assistant professor and a lecturer, there's a search for another lecturer, and also for an associate professor to coordinate the Master's program starting in the fall.

Q. Do you have any fun new memories or experiences since moving to China?

A. Yeah, I have lots of fun memories, especially whenever I try to speak Chinese. It just sparks laughs because it's so terrible. Chinese is a tonal language with four tones, or five if you count "no tone" as a tone. I can speak three languages fluently, but nothing compares to Chinese. My Chinese has

not improved much despite taking twice-weekly classes with a professional instructor. For example, once, I tried to impress my teacher by attempting to call her Lǎoshī, which means “professor” or “mentor,” and what ended up happening was that I called her Lǎoshǔ instead, which means “mouse.” Let’s say she was not very happy with this misshapen. That was quite embarrassing, I think [laughs].

On the bright side, I don’t have a problem putting myself in embarrassing situations if that’s what it takes to learn the language. The type of research that I want to pursue is very engaged with the community, leaning heavily on qualitative methods, therefore, I need to have at least a basic domain of the Chinese language. And to do that, and it’s probably not going to happen in the next year or so, I have to put myself out there. And that’s why I have absolutely no problem embarrassing myself in front of others with my lame Chinese.

Q. Have you branched out into any new hobbies or activities that you didn’t have a chance to do in the States?

A. Let me tell you this story: there’s an annual sports competition here at the university, just like the Olympics, for students and faculty. Folks here take it very seriously! There are medals, flash interviews, and prizes, totally crazy! As it turned out, that last year, our HAITC team performed really poorly in the badminton tournament. We were the last [laughs] or close to being the last-placed team. Obviously, something had to be done about it, and that is why they started this group. I love to be a part of it and I’m looking forward to



Dr. Ferreira at badminton practice

being capped for the team which will represent HAITC in the tournament. So that's definitely one skill that I was able to unearth since I'm here.