

Sabbatical Application Narrative

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Coffee of Cape Verde

(See [annotated bibliography](#) in progress)

ABSTRACT

Cape Verde is an archipelago with deep connections to southeastern Massachusetts in general and with Bridgewater State University in particular. This sabbatical proposal describes two projects that arise from my two decades of work with the country and drawing upon two of my areas of interest. The major project is to learn more about the important but little-documented coffee industry of Cape Verde, particularly on the island of Fogo. An extended stay during the harvest season will allow me to continue sharing a global perspective on coffee with the country's growers, processors, and policymakers. It will also allow me to learn details of Cape Verde's unique coffee industry and to bring that story and the actual coffee to the attention of industry leaders in the United States. A secondary project intends to use recreational whaleboat rowing and sailing as a way to promote learning about Cape Verde's maritime heritage.



(PHOTO: Discussing coffee with Cape Verde President José Maria Neves in April 2023)

Context and Rationale

The country of Cape Verde is an archipelago in the northern Atlantic Ocean that gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. As a comprehensive institution serving Southeastern Massachusetts, Bridgewater State University is situated in the midst of Cape Verde's most significant diasporic community. This is the result of more than two centuries of migration from those islands to southeastern Massachusetts for work in whaling, cranberry harvesting, manufacturing, and more recently education and other professions. In fact, during the recent celebration of 50 years of Cape Verdean independence, its national leaders spent a lot of time with that community on our campus and in nearby communities.

Since independence, the connections have continued and strengthened, particularly in the areas of music and education. Bridgewater State University, in fact, has a unique partnership that connects the Republic of Cape Verde to the university itself. I am pleased

to have participated actively in that partnership since Dr. Ed Minnock asked me to lead Bridgewater State College's first travel course to Cape Verde in 2006. This paved the way for many more travel courses in education and other fields.

I have been instrumental in the development of the academic aspects of the partnership, often serving as a guest speaker for visiting scholars and helping to develop the minor in Cape Verdean Studies. Two recent experiences have been among the most significant. I helped to recruit and mentor a student intern who created a Cape Verde-related museum exhibit under a Sea Grant from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. I also taught a January 2024 travel course -- this one about coffee and volcanoes -- with the considerable support of the Institute. I have attached university publications about both of these activities as addenda to this application.

Proposed Activities

My main project builds directly on the 2024 coffee travel course. During that course, I was able to follow up on earlier connections made during campus visits by dignitaries from the island of Fogo. My students and I were to meet many of those who are involved in Cape Verde's coffee industry and to visit a small farm and coffee processor. I was also able to bring my global perspective on the coffee industry to a variety of audiences in Fogo, including local officials, high school students, and university audiences. A highlight of the experience was to bring exhibits that Bridgewater Honors students had prepared in 2022 and to donate them to Fogo's own coffee museum. The museum now highlights those donated exhibits for visiting dignitaries.

My experience on coffee farms and in coffee mills in Central America has helped me to understand that I can learn much more -- and offer much more -- by returning to Cape Verde for an extended visit during the harvest season, which is typically in March and April. This will allow me to learn in detail the processing measures that make Cape Verdean coffee unique in the world. Its growers have harvesting and drying techniques that I was not able to witness first-hand during my visit. A return will allow me to document these processes in detail, to map the locations of all coffee farms, and to obtain unroasted samples that I can bring back to industry experts in the United States.

In each of the past several years, I have been invited to attend a coffee festival and conference that takes place in Cape Verde during the harvest season. I have not been able to act on these invitations, however, as the timing of the festival is tied to the timing of the harvest itself, and given the size of the industry, it takes place in a very brief and changeable timeframe. It always falls during the spring semester, so I have been unable to attend. For the spring of 2027, I have already been offered housing that will allow me to be in the region throughout the final months of the growing season, so that I can both observe the harvest in detail and be an active participant in this festival.

The coffee industry of Fogo is small in area and in production volume, but it has great potential as a boutique coffee, with a ready market among both Cape Verdean diaspora communities and specialty coffee connoisseurs. The coffee industry of the island of São

Nicolau is even smaller and less known than that of Fogo; I intend to make at least one visit to those farms during their harvest season.

Secondary Project

In addition to the coffee-related endeavors described above, I will be using the extended stay in Cape Verde as an opportunity to enhance connections related to whaling, the industry that first brought Cape Verde in contact with southern New England. Ecological and historic aspects of this maritime tradition are explored in depth in the Tale of Two Capes project by Carolyn King, a BSU graduate whose work I mentored in 2022 under a grant from WHOI Sea Grant. Through her project, I became acquainted with Cape Verde's leading marine biologists and their conservation work.

The Azores are another northern Atlantic archipelago that remains a part of the country of Portugal, and like Cape Verde it has a strong diasporic community in our region. For the past decade, I have been an active member of New Bedford's Azorean Maritime Heritage Society and a supporting member of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. These affiliations have given me direct experience with the boats that were used in hunting whales in the Azores as recently as 1983, and with rowers and sailors who are still active (though not hunting) in the Azores. I have included a *National Geographic* article about these connections as an addendum to this application. I have begun to work with AMHS leaders to explore the possibility of expanding that regatta series to include Cape Verde. I would use part of my sabbatical to explore the vestigial whaling facilities of Cape Verde on the island of São Vicente and to identify local community members who might wish to enter such a partnership. I would also visit exhibits that the New Bedford Whaling Museum has contributed to maritime museums in São Vicente and São Nicolau.

Relation to Teaching, Scholarship and Service

Academic geographers typically specialize in both a sub-discipline and a region. Because my doctoral work had focused on political ecology with a minor in Latin American Area Studies, I was pleased to be hired in 1997 to teach geography at BSC, with an emphasis on environmental geography and the geography of Latin America.

As I developed my teaching and scholarship in both areas, I began to notice an overlap between the two, in the area of coffee. An industry expert first visited my Latin America class in 1999, and by 2007, I was teaching both a travel course and a second-year seminar on the environmental and economic geographies of coffee.

Since then, I have gained a reputation for using coffee to teach about geography and geography to teach about coffee. Teaching and learning has had a "snowball" effect over the years, as my public scholarship draws on the curiosity people already have about coffee. It gives me a chance to bring a geographic perspective to many new audiences -- often with the help of my students. Everything I learn about coffee comes back to my work at BSU and in the surrounding community. In the case of this sabbatical project, that community will include the university's partners in the Republic of Cape Verde.

Need for Sabbatical Format

The sabbatical format is ideal for the work proposed. Travel to Cape Verde, among its various islands, and even across the complex terrain requires significant planning and dedicated time. Many of the relationships that have been initiated during visits to and from Cape Verde have left open many questions in my mind and in the minds of Cape Verdean interlocutors. We need more time to share knowledge with each other. And because of the seasonality of coffee, many of these conversations are best held on-site and during our spring semester.

Moreover, the semester-long visit will allow me to improve my language skills prior to the coffee conference mentioned above. In Cape Verde, both Portuguese and Kriolu are commonly spoken. They are closely related but distinct. My use of Brazilian Portuguese serves me well, but my Kriolu is limited. My ability to understand Kriolu is gradually increasing as I expand my involvement with the Cape Verdean community in New Bedford, and I know that I would benefit from language immersion in the early weeks of this project.

Measurable outcomes

The most important outcomes of this project will be in my own teaching. My coffee second-year seminar and any future travel course will include a much deeper understanding of the coffee traditions of the country.

Within Cape Verde itself, this project will result in better connections between its coffee growers and processors and their potential customers and collaborators abroad. Because Cape Verde is not a member of the International Coffee Organization (ICO) of the United Nations, it is not possible to bring its coffee to market through conventional pathways, and very few specialty coffee buyers have sufficient interest to develop their own connections. I can help to build those connections. Moreover, I hope to connect growers to experts in coffee agronomy who can help determine whether and how to improve the placement of Cape Verde's coffee in specialty markets..

Finally, I expect these projects to benefit the Cape Verdean community in southeastern Massachusetts generally and at Bridgewater State University in particular. Many in the community have heard good things about the coffee but have had it in the form of poorly packaged airport gifts, if at all. And although many Cape Verdeans are aware of the whaling heritage, few have had an opportunity to learn about it through rowing and sailing activities.

