Thanks to the generous field research grant provided by the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane University and the Tinker Foundation, I was able to undertake original and intriguing field research during a six week period in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At this stage of my PhD studies in the Political Science Department at Tulane, the grant proved to be an invaluable contribution to the development of my research and field experience. My project was proposed as exploratory research, and I now have a strong foundation to base a future in depth investigation of specific institutions that support urban agriculture in Brazil. Also, I am now presented with a chance to make a productive contribution to the growing body of research that examines gradual institutional change.

I am very excited about the primary data I collected through interviews with those directly involved in institutional change. Institutional support for urban agriculture in Rio de Janeiro has undergone some very drastic and significant shifts, which is currently reflected in and affects policymaking at the national level. I looked at long standing institutions, such as the National School Meal Program, as well as recently formed public entities such as the Council of Food and Nutritional Security. My preliminary findings are counter-intuitive and potentially groundbreaking. Mainly, the government’s broad focus on achieving aspects of the UN Millennium Development Goals has caused a number of indirect effects. It has transformed institutions, the conventional model of economic development, democratic participation and
governance, and the lives of small family farmers in urban areas whose needs have historically been ignored.

My research mainly consisted in interviewing farmers, agronomists, activists, researchers, and members of city government. I attended a three day conference on Food and Nutritional Security that took place at the State University of Rio de Janeiro. At the conference, I documented how government players and community members articulated and negotiated many of the issues my project was examining. As outlined in my proposal, upon arrival in Rio de Janeiro, I utilized my previous contacts in the well-known NGO, the AS-PTA, to familiarize myself with the most recent developments regarding institutional support for urban agriculture.

To provide a brief highlight of my experience in the field, and to articulate the importance of having previous contacts in Rio, one of my early meetings uncovered a particularly interesting happening that directly related to my research. At the time I arrived in Rio, an important government issued document (the DAP), which plays an important role expanding family agriculture in the city, was denied to an urban farmer who is currently presiding as president of the municipal council on food security. Without my previous contacts and experience in Brazil it would have taken much digging to uncover this detail. It was crucial to be present during important developments regarding the issue I was investigating as they guided my interviews and have shaped the analysis of my findings.

Despite the generally positive experience conducting research and the enormous potential for building on the primary data I collected, it is important to report that I was unable to conduct sufficient interviews within the city government in Rio de Janeiro. Restrictions of time and access limited my data collection to one government ministry. While this was incredibly helpful
for my project, I nevertheless am certain that expanding the reach of this project to different and numerous recently formed secretariats in city government would have proven fruitful. I hope to continue with this line of research and I am in the process of producing a detailed field report and preliminary findings this semester.