

# Hands-on in Haiti

[k Send to Kindle](#)

Professors Enrique Silva and Danielle Rousseau embody the hands-on aspect of applied social sciences in post-earthquake Haiti—and beyond.

Though they teach in different programs within the Department of Applied Social Sciences, Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice Danielle Rousseau and Assistant Professor of City Planning and Urban Affairs Enrique Silva share a commitment to reconstruction in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake—both on the macro level of planning and the micro level of the individual.

Rousseau, who has spent the past decade involved in victim services, crisis response for sexual assault and trauma, and as a therapist in correctional facilities, focuses on how research informs policy and practice in criminal justice, specifically concerning women and trauma. Her role in introducing yogaHOPE's Trauma-Informed Mind-Body (TIMBo) program to the female inmates at MCI-Framingham was recognized by the Mass. Department of Correction. The non-profit yoga outreach program trains incarcerated women to be facilitators who can teach yoga and mindfulness practices to other inmates. Recently, Rousseau has been part of an effort to bring TIMBo programming to post-earthquake Haiti in partnership with local agency AMURT-Haiti, and has been evaluating how well the program provides “a positive means of coping for a nation dealing with complex traumas”—from the disaster itself to issues of shelter and safety, to the rape and sexual assaults that plague Port-au-Prince.

Silva is an expert in comparative urbanization and the formation of public sector planning institutions and practices. His research explores the ways human and economic resources are mobilized and policy decisions are made in socio-politically volatile or fiscally challenged communities.

Since the earthquake, Silva has been involved in reconstruction planning in Port-au-Prince and Mirebalais, Haiti. This year, he was lead principal investigator on the Mirebalais Planning Initiative (MPI), a project resulting from a partnership between Boston University, the University of Massachusetts Boston, and the University of the West Indies that is fully funded by a \$150,000 grant from the Kellogg foundation.

*Metropolitan* had a conversation with both professors, who remain optimistic about Haiti's future:

*Metropolitan:* When did you each develop interest in Haiti?

Enrique Silva: I was helping Elisabeth Coicou (MET'10)—a Haitian graduate student in MET's city planning program—on a grant proposal for a project on the redevelopment and planning of the area of Haiti that had been affected by hurricanes and mudslides. Then the earthquake hit. I was there within seven days, with a team that included Coicou, engineer Jean Lucien Ligondé (MET'09), and Anuradha Mukherji, a lecturer in the city planning and urban affairs programs.

Danielle Rousseau: My first trip to Haiti was about a year ago, when the founder of yogaHOPE solicited my help in training community leaders in Port-au-Prince to run the TIMBo program. I was on a research team that included a colleague from Harvard School of Public Health and a number of Haitians. Our goal was to ensure a program that was effective, culturally sensitive, and appropriate for Haitian participants.

Both of you saw Haiti for the first time after the earthquake. What were your first impressions?

Silva: We came by bus from the Dominican Republic, arriving at nightfall in Port-au-Prince. I have never seen so much destruction.

The scale of material and human loss had a lot to do with the way the city had been built. As a planner, I was looking at this as a problem of settlement, construction, and the processes that allowed people to live on precarious land with no regulation of building codes. What is the solution? That's what I've been working on ever since.

Rousseau: Even arriving two-plus years after the quake, my first impression was just how devastated Port-au-Prince still was—a lot of buildings down, and not many of signs of rebuilding or development.

The biggest effect on me was how the quake had impacted the lives of the people we were working with at the local agency. They were living in tent cities, and commuting multiple hours a day. And the women weren't feeling safe after dark because of the risk for sexual violence.

There have been some positive outcomes, though. For example, there had been buildings that collapsed and no one had claimed the land, so AMURT-Haiti took that opportunity to build an amazing school bordering one of the tent cities. The school became this green oasis in a sea of tents, and is now fairly renowned for its teaching and curriculum. The locals who were training to become TIMBo facilitators have been sharing the tools they learned. I was impressed by the Haitian evaluation team's ability to translate yogaHOPE into something meaningful to the Haitian people.

Enrique, what is the objective of the collaborative Mirebalais Planning Initiative (MPI)?

Silva: Mirebalais, a city outside Port-au-Prince, is where Partners in Health just built their national teaching hospital, Hôpital Universitaire de Mirebalais—and its promise of economic opportunity is a magnet to people fleeing Port-au-Prince. Like the capital, Mirebalais develops and grows with very little regulation. The MPI’s objective is to work with local stakeholders in Mirebalais to identify priorities and plan for them; understand what resources they have locally; learn how to raise and implement funds; and establish an urban growth program.



Is this

something that could be used as a model in Port-au-Prince?



Silva: The partnership behind the MPI and the Kellogg Foundation was established to create precedence in bringing together government, the private sector, and nonprofits to regulate and manage resources.

What research methods are most effective for your work in Haiti?

Rousseau: I engage in qualitative research, versus more traditional, quantitative evaluation. Qualitative research allows for a culturally sensitive approach, and we incorporated more visual scales and different strategies—talking to people, reviewing participant observations—to see how people are actualizing the TIMBo program and the tools.

Silva: I also take a qualitative approach to both research and outcome assessment—which, in planning, can be a slow process. It has to be systematic and reviewed over time.

Will your experiences in Haiti lead to collaboration at MET?

Rousseau: I potentially see co-teaching qualitative research methodology courses incorporating the perspective of community response to trauma—from natural disasters and political issues to sexual or gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, and more micro levels of violence.

Our long-term goal is to develop this qualitative approach, culminating in some studio-type classes where we can travel with students and engage them in projects in Haiti.

Silva: Haiti brings Danielle and me together, but the applications, the tools, and the courses that come up don't have to be about Haiti. Our experience in Haiti provides the context for training students in methods that aren't Haiti-specific.

Solutions and ideas for problem-solving in Haiti won't always come from Haiti—that's just the nature of global problem-solving. Similarly, ideas that arise in Haiti could inform policy in Boston. There are opportunities to research applied interventions in communities, from both planning and psychological trauma perspectives.

I believe that the best education fuses theory and practice, where students get their hands dirty and are exposed to worlds beyond their comfort zone. Our graduates have the skills to understand and navigate the complex sociopolitical environment that they're going to be working in, whether it's criminal justice or planning.

Distinguished Alumni Awards

The Academic Vision of Associate Dean Chitkushev

---

<http://www.bu.edu/met/magazine/commencement2013/hands-on-in-haiti/>