








Building research capacity in Latin America and in Brazil: the MECOR program

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WHAT IS MECOR?

The Methods in Epidemiologic, Clinical, and Operations Research (MECOR) is a training program created by the American Thoracic Society (ATS) to build clinical research capacity in low- and middle-income countries worldwide, with the purpose of improving respiratory health in these regions. The program started in Latin America in 1994 and now is offered in seven countries/regions around the globe. In Latin America, the program is a partnership among the ATS, the *Asociación Latinoamericana de Tórax* (ALAT, Latin American Thoracic Society), and four other respiratory societies: the *Sociedade Brasileira de Pneumologia e Tisiologia* (SBPT, Brazilian Thoracic Society), the Mexican Thoracic Society, the Colombian Thoracic Society, and the Argentinean Thoracic Society.

The objective of the MECOR Program is to train investigators, academicians, clinicians, and public health practitioners to design and conduct rigorous and reproducible scientific research that is relevant to the needs of the settings in which they work.⁽¹⁾ Ultimately, the program serves the purpose to improve global lung health through the development of local, national, and regional research capacity.⁽¹⁾

MECOR IN BRAZIL

The program is held in a Latin American country during one week every year. The first MECOR course in Brazil was in São Paulo in 1997. Since then, the course has been held in Brazil seven times, including the 2021 MECOR course, which was online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In these 27 years, 621 Brazilian students have attended MECOR, comprising approximately 35% of the students overall (Figure 1). However, when the course is held in Brazil, approximately 60% of the students are from different regions in Brazil.

IMPACT

Given that MECOR is a research capacity building program, the expected impact is that Latin American graduates thrive as researchers in respiratory medicine, critical care, and sleep medicine and produce science that has regional relevance and improves lung health in Latin America. The challenge has been measuring such impact, a task that the strategic planning committee within the program has prioritized. Although we do not have objective

indicators of long-term impact yet, many graduates have become leaders in respiratory medicine, critical care, and sleep medicine, as well as professors in Latin American universities and internationally recognized researchers. We highlight that, since 2012, both program directors and course leaders have been MECOR graduates, all faculty is from Latin America, most of them are program graduates, and all teaching assistants are graduates. This shows that MECOR produces scientists/educators who can maintain the level of excellence of the program. We highlight another important product of the MECOR program in Latin America: the continuing education series published in this Journal. The co-directors of the MECOR program have been contributing to the JBP with papers on scientific methodology since 2015, producing more than 30 manuscripts that have garnered hundreds of citations.

MECOR AND SBPT PARTNERSHIP

The mission of the MECOR program—to build research capacity in respiratory medicine—is aligned with the SBPT mission, which is to promote continuous professional growth and excellence and stimulate partnerships and scientific research.⁽²⁾ Over these 27 years of MECOR in Latin America, the partnership has resulted in the participation of many SBPT members in the MECOR program, many of whom have become SBPT leaders. It has also strengthened the partnership between SBPT with ALAT and ATS in a coordinated effort to contribute to the development of future leaders in respiratory medicine in Brazil and Latin America.

WHY APPLY TO THE MECOR PROGRAM?

During their time in the MECOR program, students learn how to design and implement a research project that is relevant to their setting, and how to analyze, interpret, and communicate their findings in the form of a scientific manuscript.⁽³⁾ The process is completed over three years, and students learn many research skills, in addition to basic biostatistics, critical appraisal of the literature, and presentation skills. Importantly, they network with colleagues from other regions and countries and become part of a community which feels like a family. This new community is very often a career and life changing experience.

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MECOR PROGRAM

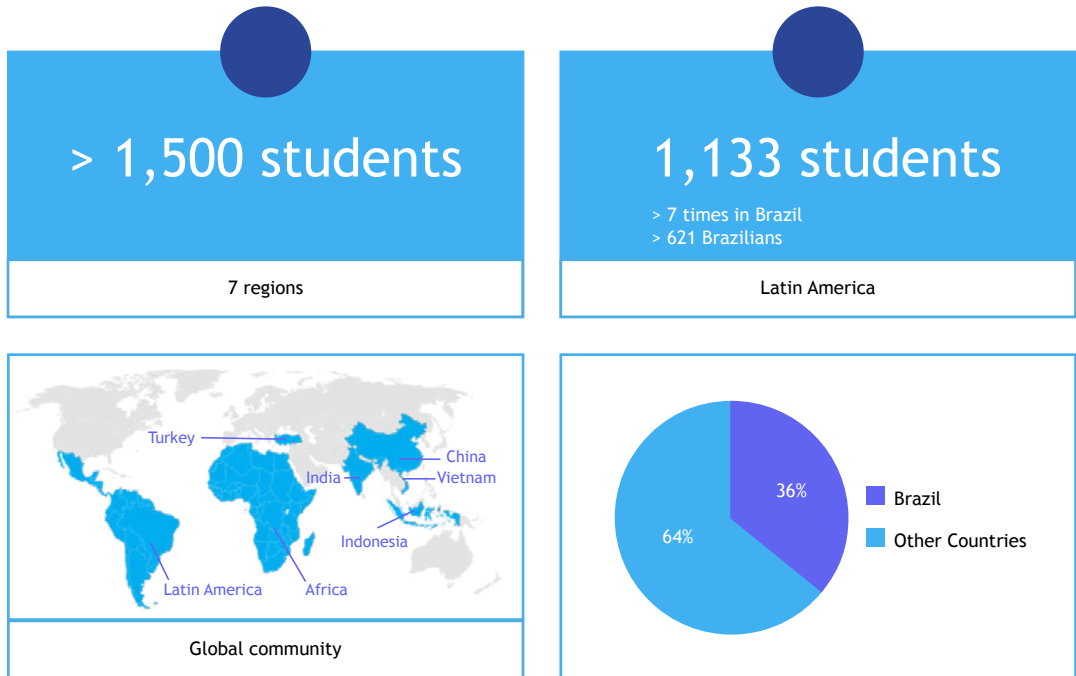


Figure 1. The MECOR program in Latin America and in Brazil.

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