

A potpourri of expectations from International students in Bahrain

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During my time at UMGC, I had the pleasure of achieving two baccalaureate degrees as a student, serving in various positions as an administrator, teaching hundreds of semester hours as an Associate Professor, and authoring multiple publications used for teaching students and educators. I won't bore you with the details, but I could write a memoir about each of those roles. In this memoir, I will focus primarily on one of my memorable administrator/faculty experiences.

In 1972, I lost my job as a civil servant due to the then newly implemented dependent hiring preference for certain jobs. As a European Division provisional student, I landed a job with the European Division Headquarters, then located on Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany. Thirteen years later, two bachelor's degrees from University of Maryland University College and a master's degree from Boston University, I joined the Computer Studies Department as Assistant Coordinator to Rinaldo Vachino. During the mid-eighties, Maryland was deploying several hundred computers (then the Northstar Advantage, an all-in-one computer with a green monochrome screen and two 5.25-inch floppy disks) throughout the European theater in support of their curricula. David Glaser and Rinaldo Vachino asked if I would like to go to Bahrain to start up the computer program there. I was to setup the computer lab, hire some computer faculty and teach some computer seminars to kickstart the program.

The suspense started when I arrived in Manama. I had to pay the local Customs Officer \$20 to get a temporary entry Visa. Recalling the checkpoint briefings we used to get going to Berlin, I thought I was going to be arrested for bribing a Bahrainian Customs officer. This entry Visa looked like a set of postage stamps and for the ensuing years that I had that Passport, that page always slowed me down entering into any foreign country. David promised that they had reserved a house for me there in Manama because a hotel stay would have been inordinately expensive. I thought that sounded great, but little did I know that the house was already occupied, not by people, but by geckos, lizards, unidentified flying creatures, etc. The house did have air conditioning, so I turned it to its coldest setting to try to flush out those occupants, but that made it all the much worse for me when I had to go back out in the 45-degree Celsius weather. Even though I slept mummified in my sheet every night, I got used to it.

When I taught the first Maryland computer seminar there, I had a full class of about 36 international students. I had been used to teaching adult U.S. military students and civilians, but in this class I had at least 8 different nationalities (half the class was from the surrounding Arab countries, both men and women). Unbeknownst to me at first, when I

gave an assignment, the Arab men were making the Arab women do their work for them. When I reiterated that this was a U.S. University and that everyone had to do their own work, the women seemed very reserved at first, but everyone quickly adapted. The Arab men and women were astonished later when they compared their grades (this was prior to seminars being graded on a pass/fail basis).

The next surprise for me came when I was at the beach. There were two beach areas, one for the locals and one for the westerners. Being fair-complexioned I was quickly approached by armed guards who spoke Arabic to me. Of course I didn't understand a word, but after identifying myself I was told I could continue to enjoy the beach but to beware of this invisible demarcation.

I enjoyed all 42 years at Maryland. One third of those years working full-time and being a student part-time; two thirds of those years working full-time and teaching part-time. I meet weekly with several former Maryland staff members for biking and bowling activities and to reminisce about our times at Maryland.