

UFBA: Brazil's Less than Gringo-Friendly University

Contributed by John Dear
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Thinking of doing a semester as a student at Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) in the beautiful city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil? Thinking of having an experience of studying in the Northeast of Brazil? Think twice. At UFBA, if you are a foreign student you run serious risks.

You might be arrested even if you accidentally break the glass of a door so fragile that is falling apart by itself. And you are not going to have any assistance by the UFBA university, which, on the opposite, is going to be the responsible for your arrest.

UFBA is considered to be a very good university by the locals in Salvador da Bahia but it is also one of the worst university in the country for foreigners. You do not believe it? Read below.

This is what happened to a foreign researcher and professional journalist, who asked not to be named for the danger of retaliation. The man brought his ten-day old baby for vaccination to the CRIE, Centro de Referência de Imunobiológicos Especiais of UFBA. CRIE is a public center for vaccination and other medical services located just next to the reitoria (president's office), where the reitor Naomar Almeida has his office.

In Brazil there is a law which guarantees priority assistance to newborns like the foreign researcher's daughter. The man felt confident that he was going to be assisted soon. He had no idea what he was going to go through. A nightmare called UFBA. A real hellish situation.

As soon as the man got to the CRIE he sees dozens of people waiting to be vaccinated. Young and average people. No infants. The foreign researcher spoke to the responsible of the center, Jacy Amaral Freire de Andrade, who ironically, was herself a foreign researcher at Berkeley University, in California in 2003. One wonders what would happen to her in a similar situation at Berkeley University.

Jacy Andrade tells the foreign researcher that there was no chance for the infant to have priority. Despite the Brazilian law. Ordem de chegada. First comes first goes. This is the UFBA law. No exceptions. UFBA runs its places its own way. The man, distressed, with the other two-year old son in his arms opens the door and leaves it shut without holding it. The door was very fragile.

Let's explain why. The door was an old fashioned-door with thin glass in a wooden frame. Normally for these kinds of door in USA or Europe a particular glue is stuck on the glass to hold and keep it firm. Something that costs less than 1 dollar. But we are at UFBA, Bahia, Brazil. Here no investments are made. Not even the ones that cost few dollars.

The glass broke down. It had happened before. The other door at the same entrance had already broken before and a piece of wood had replaced the glass. A normal accident at CRIE. Do you really think so my reader? You are wrong: a foreign student was involved. A Kafkaian situation was going to happen.

The "criminal" family was immediately surrounded by eight security guards, who of course, did not care about the 10-day old infant being left in the sunshine. The "criminal" family was made up of the infant, the two year-old baby, the foreigner and his wife who had undergone surgery for the birth of her son just a few days before.

The family could escape. Some security guards are strange people in Bahia. They could not think that somebody would escape with a newborn in his arms. Unless he wants to risk her life. Frankly speaking to you should be crazy to run away not to pay for a glass that costs, at most, 30 dollars. But, then again, you are in UFBA territory. There the law, the way of thinking is different. UFBA security people can do whatever they want. Even with a newborn involved.

Despite that, the foreign researcher was confident. He knew the responsible for foreign relationships at UFBA, professor. Emilio Silva. The foreigner called professor. Silva on his mobile to ask his intervention. The foreigner offered to pay for the broken glass and go home. But the answer of Mr. Silva left him very surprised.

Mr. Silva said it was not his problem. He knew nothing about the foreigner's accident and nothing wanted to know about it. It was not his problem. You are on your own man, that was the message. I do not want to be involved, said Silva. And, all at sudden, the foreign researcher discovered he was alone. No protection.

And he was going to be arrested. Yes man, you read it right. He was going to be arrested to break the glass, even if he offered to pay for it. He was accused to kick the door and break the glass intentionally. The foreigner explained that it was an accident and he would never kick the glass because he was holding his 2 year-old son in his arms. If he kicked the glass he would have seriously hurt his son. No witnesses, only words of the professor of the UFBA. But UFBA is the law there. The UFBA teacher did not go to the police station. It was enough her word at CRIE.

The man was taken to the Federal Police and arrested. The police treated him well. They said it was the law. If you break, intentionally or not, a glass which belongs to the Federal government, like UFBA goods, you are breaking the law and are going to be arrested. It does not matter if it was an accident. You broke the glass, you are a criminal. Strange law the Brazilian law.

The foreign researcher was lucky. He called his wife, who ran to the police station and paid the 280 dollars bail and was released. He still has to face the judge and the law.

This is UFBA my reader. And if you think that you are protected because you are going to call the international department for their intervention in the case an accident happens think twice. You are going to be arrested instead.

The risk to be arrested at UFBA is very serious, especially for a foreign student and should not be underestimated. Due to its chronic lack of investments, UFBA infrastructures are literally falling apart. Any chair, desk, stapler or glass can be easily broken in a matter of seconds, due to their age and fragility.

And if you are a foreigner you might easily be found guilty to destroy public goods belonging to UFBA and be arrested for that. So my advice is think twice if you are thinking to go studying at UFBA. You go at your own risk. Remember the UFBA law, ruthless with foreign students.

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