

As a Visiting Professor at IIUM

I am a professor at King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It is customary for university professors to take a sabbatical leave from their universities and visit universities in other countries. My sabbatical leave from KSU started January 2002. Due to the current world conflicts and how Moslems in general and Saudis in particulars are treated in America and other Western countries, I decided to spend my sabbatical year in a Moslem country. I thought it would be better to spend my money in Malaysia than America. I thought Malaysians would treat me better than Americans. So I searched the internet for a university with which to affiliate and selected the International Islamic University (UIIM) in Kuala Lumpur.

In December 2001 and before my sabbatical started, I contacted the dean of the college of Education at UIIM and asked if I could affiliate with the College of Education as a visiting professor. In two days he e-mailed me back and welcomed me to the college. He sent a second e-mail in which he asked about my needs and I responded to that as well.

I arrived in KL the last week of May 2002. At the airport, the immigration officer stamped my passport with a 3-month visa pass. I asked him how I could extend my stay in Malaysia. He said the university could do that for me.

When I first visited the university, the dean gave me an office with a computer and internet access. He asked a couple of colleagues to help me find a place to rent. I rented an apartment next to Kerinchi LRT and was commuting to UIIM daily. He also asked for a copy of my passport and CV. He wrote a letter to the Management Services Offices at UIIM and attached the aforementioned documents. The administrative assistant at the College of Education told me that in order for me to be granted status of a visiting professor, and in order for the university to extend my stay, the university needs to write to the Prime Minister's office. He thought that I wanted to conduct a study in Malaysia and needed data. I explained to him that my

research project had nothing to do with Malaysia and did not need any data or statistics from the university nor any government department or agency in Malaysia. I added that I was writing a book that teaches Saudi students how to spell English. Contacting the Prime Minister's office sounded a bit unusual to me, on the one hand, and I felt the process would take a long time, knowing how complex formal procedures might be.

When I first arrived, I could enter the university campus and leave with no problem at all. But when school started June 25, a security guard stopped me at the university entrance and asked for my ID card. I told him that I did not have one. He asked for my number and I said I did not have one either. So I went to the administrative assistant and told him about it. He said in order to issue such a card; the university has to write to the Prime Minister's Office and offered what seemed a solution. So on July 3, he wrote a letter to the security chief in which he told him about my status and asked him to make it easy for me to enter the university campus. He gave me a copy of the letter to show it to the security if stopped at the entrance. I was stopped on and off. Sometimes they let me in and other times they would stop me and I would show the letter.

Two weeks later, I was stopped by the security, I showed him the letter, he deciphered it for a while but did not seem to like the letter and he barely let me in. I was so upset and embarrassed as I was entering an International Islamic University, not a military base. I also visited many non-Islamic universities around the world (in America, Canada, Europe) and was never barred from entering the campus. So I went to the Administrative Assistant and told him that it is embarrassing for me to be stopped by the security every now and then. I added that as a respectable professor I reject humiliation and embarrassment and that I wanted to return the office key and not go to the university anymore. He did not respond nor react at all. I went to my office and started collecting by papers and books. I expected the dean or anybody from the college to apologize or even show the slightest signs of concern at what happened and some willingness to help solve the problem. But nobody gave a damn.

The following day I stayed home because I was so upset. But nobody called me either. So on Wednesday, I wanted to bring my books from the office and hand in the key. At the entrance, the security guards refused to let me in as I did not have an ID card. I got off the taxi and was arguing with the security guards. In order for them let me in, I had to leave my backpack in which I had my laptop computer and money. I went to the office of the deputy rector for academic affairs. His secretary asked who I was and why I was there. I told her my name and that I was a visiting professor at the college of Education. She said that she wanted to call the dean to verify it (which I thought was rude as that implied that I was lying about my name and status). She took me to the Security department and a security guard took me to the college as they do with criminals. I had to wait because it was lunchtime. After lunch, I went to the vice-rector's office again and was able to meet him and explain the situation. He was kind enough to listen and told me that the college should issue a temporary card for me. He called the college and told them what to do.

The College's secretary took me to the place to make the card, but the girl refused and told her that I needed a number. So we left with nothing.

The following day, the dean wrote a letter to the Management Services Department and asked them to issue me a temporary car. They responded by saying that it is not their responsibility. They forwarded the dean's letter to the Security Department. But the security chief said that temporary cards are not issued by the Security Department. The letter was forwarded from one department to another and each department said that they do not issue temporary cards. Everything came to a dead end. I was back to square one.

A month later, I was in my office searching the university library databases for a conference paper that I was working on. The system was so slow and frustrating. So I thought it might be better to conduct my search from the library rather than from my office. I was surprised to see a warning in the university site saying that faculty without a MATIC card will not be allowed to enter the library. So I e-mailed the deputy rector and told him about the new library regulation and that

the temporary card had not been issued. After 10 days I received an e-mail from him in which he asked me to take 2 photos and a copy of my passport to the security chief to get the card issues. The card was finally issued on Sep. 6. It only took 2 months to issue.

I am writing this letter to draw your attention to the following:

- When a foreign professor would like to visit IIUM, it is better to explain to him/her the university procedures and have him decide if he still wants to come or not.
- When a foreign professor is visiting the university, it would be a good idea to issue the temporary card and have it ready by the time he/she arrives.
- The different people at the different departments do not seem to know the university procedures, so why not educate them.
- People at the university do not seem to care about foreigners. They make us feel as if we were intruders.
- People at the university seem to stick to rules and regulations literally. They are not willing to bend the rules a little bit to solve a problem. Nor do they cater for new circumstances.
- At the university, there is always one way to doing things. People are not willing to think of other options. No matter how hard you try to explain your situation they do not seem to conceptualize it.

Best Regards,
Prof. Dr Reima Al-Jarf
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