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Ever since the very first international student orientation, I knew that I was in for a very interesting and unique experience here at PUC-Rio. Aside from the cheesy Brazilian tourism video and awkward simulations of popular cultural situations interpreted by the CCCI personnel, one statement that was spoken to us by Linda Sousa, the international student coordinator, still resonates in my mind.

"Things here are different but that doesn't mean that they are worse than in your home countries."

So simple yet so profound, that last sentence pretty much sums up my entire experience here in Brazil: a struggle to stop contrasting so much and to start accepting things as a part of my new reality. For the most part, I've been quite successful at this, as my time at PUC has gone rather smoothly (the Federal Police situation, however, is a whole other question...). The coolest thing is that if ever there is a problem, all that you have to do is ask (sometimes many, many times) and eventually your questions will be answered. Patience is key; and a little bit of *malandragem* cannot hurt either. Often you will find that it is just you overreacting. So just *relax*. You are in Brazil after all. You will be amazed at how far a toothy grin and a thumbs-up sign can take you.

As with most universities, the classes at PUC largely depend on the professors that teach them, so choose accordingly and be sure to make the most of the Add/Drop, or Dê-Para, period while you're here. The dynamic of the class between the professor and the students may prove to be shocking for some, but the material in the class can be very, very engaging. But really, it all depends on you. I personally would recommend taking a sociology class because, as a foreigner in Brazil, I find it really interesting to compare what I read in my texts with what I observe in my everyday interactions in Rio de Janeiro.

Speaking of social interactions, at PUC there seems to be a wealth of opportunities for students to get together and hang out (i.e. lunches interamigos, field trips, chopadas, the casas in the Vila, demonstrations, and student performances). With that said, however, I would like to advise you to not necessarily expect a Brazilian student to go out of their way to approach you unless they specifically know that you are an international student and/or you are a girl. Unlike in some universities, where students actually live on campus, none of the PUC students live on campus and many still live with their parents, sometimes very far away from the university. Some of them simply don't have the time, as many of them either work, have internships, or families of their own to take care of when they are not at school. The key, I suppose, would be to meet someone that could then introduce you to other people. It has worked wonders for me!

Overall, I would say that my experience at PUC-Rio has been a great one thus far and I am highly looking forward to finishing the rest of my semester. I'm excited at the prospect of making new friendships, strengthening older ones, and optimizing my time here in Brazil. If

you're having doubts about coming to PUC, there is no need to. You are sure to have a wonderful time. Everything is in place for you to enjoy yourself. Really, it just depends on you.

