

# **Bringing the Residential College Model to LUMS**

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## **Executive Summary**

It is important to agree that a quality education experience is not limited to rigorous academics but also integrates healthy non-academic activities that instill a sense of community and civic responsibility amongst students. Freshmen entering their university years should feel welcomed by senior students and faculty. As the years progress, their relationships and activities should help to develop a sense of belonging to the institution and ownership of its collective values. This is not only important for creating a rich and multi-faceted educational experience but is critical for providing a safety net to students who are lagging behind in academic, social, or personal development.

While LUMS takes pride in providing the best academic programs in the country, development of formal structures for non-academic activities has severely lagged behind other reputable institutions worldwide. This contradicts with the LUMS vision which calls for a holistic educational and residential experience. Although student-initiated societies are admittedly very active, the process of student participation in societies remains voluntary with little support from LUMS as an institution. Furthermore these societies were not designed to build community-based “safety nets” that identify and support at-risk students. Moreover, little has been done to develop a student community, as evidenced by the lack of an office for student affairs and limited faculty-student interaction outside of the classroom. Even the organization of the hostels, which are segregated by batches, is counter-productive to facilitating peer-to-peer interaction between junior and senior students, which is necessary to build mechanisms for informal mentoring and guidance. We can agree from this that the current academic advising and student support services are deficient, and the current curricular and extra-curricular structure does not provide the holistic experience we would like. This realization necessitates some kind of change.

In this paper, we argue that the residential college model can provide an integrated academic and non-academic student experience as well as a solution to some of the problems mentioned above. Adopted by many universities worldwide in recent years, a residential college model emphasizes faculty-to-student interaction outside the academic sphere and peer-to-peer mentoring for students. Each individual college is a smaller, independently-governed community within the university that provides a platform for more personalized interaction with mentors, both academic and pastoral. There is evidence that such a model not only provides a strong sense of community to students and therefore helps in early identification of at-risk behaviors, but also improves academic performance. For example, Cambridge University boasts an enviable 97% on-time graduation rate, which is largely attributed to the strong community based environment and the personalized system of tutorial supervisions available through its colleges. Many leading universities rely on the residential college system for academic advising and peer counseling. If LUMS were to build such an integrated academic and non-academic student experience, the university can take pride in its pro-active attitude towards student issues, instead of a reactive attitude. If we can pre-empt at-risk behaviors by building warm, caring, and respectful communities, we can truly be proud of providing the highest quality education in the country.

## **A Brief Review of the Current LUMS Education Model**

A LUMS degree commands a certain respect in the market and a great deal of pride for the degree-holder. It means that the individual has been accepted to one of the best higher education institutions in the country and successfully completed a course of rigorous studies, testifying to the individual's academic competence.

However, as with any educational institution, there are aspects to the LUMS education model that remain incomplete. Student life and community enhancement have remained tangential to the development of academic programs. We believe that a LUMS education means much more than a top-quality classroom experience, but it includes an overall, integrated collegiate environment.

As the LUMS student body has flourished, the disconnection between academic culture and the larger campus community and its culture has grown as well. During the first round of recommendations provided by the Committee to Review Student-Related Policies and Procedures<sup>1</sup>, the committee found that non-academic student issues for both the undergraduate and graduate program seem to have been ignored or sidelined. It can be argued that since these undergraduate students are the youngest and most ill-prepared for life "on their own," they should receive greater attention to ensure successful completion of their degree program, but that is not the case.

Although student societies actively offer student social events, faculty participation is purely voluntary since societies are entirely a student initiative, with no formal LUMS support or encouragement. The importance of the university's commitment to a strong research tradition is indisputable. However, when this negatively impacts faculty-student interactions and leaves students to fend for themselves, we must re-examine our efforts for faculty mentoring and pastoral advising to students. The lack of faculty/administrative support for student life and rise in at-risk behavior as discussed later in this paper, propels us to re-think what culture and community means at LUMS. The rapid increase of student programs and student enrollment indicates that unless the current model is adapted, even the early steps being taken today will prove unsustainable.

### **Problems of the Current Model**

To ensure a healthy and prosperous campus community, most universities invest a great deal of time and resources to develop campus cultures. Without vital student services and a positive student life, negative sub-cultures can take root in smaller groups across campus. It is time to confront the problems faced by students-at-risk and understand the deeper issues being faced by LUMS students. Only once we understand these issues, can we take active steps to address the symptoms of the lack of student life and encourage students towards a healthier and more productive student experience.

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<sup>1</sup> This Committee was convened by Professor Tariq Jadoon in response to student-admin discussions on April 24, 2008. Following the tragic suicide incident in the male hostels, the committee was asked to submit a report by June 15, 2008. Logging in >200 person-hours, the 11-faculty member committee ~~hours~~ reviewed the lack of a student-centric culture in the undergraduate program. They made policy recommendations on three levels: students support services, academic policies, and campus governance issues.

To understand student life, we must identify the two levels of attention: students exhibiting at-risk behavior and the university's involvement in student community and student development. The first level helps to identify specific problems students face and encounter at LUMS and directs out attention to ask what is causing these problems. A deeper analysis of the first level will lead us to the second level and asks, what more can LUMS do to facilitate a positive student experience.

Since at-risk behaviors, by definition, signal greater urgency, this paper will address these first. Students can be said to be divided into two main groups on campus: the hostel residents and the day scholars. Both of these groups exhibit at-risk behavior in different ways.

### *Hostel Residents and At-Risk Behaviors*

While the hostel residents live on campus, they have yet to be recognized as such. Most of the university administration, faculty and students regard hostels as little more than sleeping quarters. This can be seen as partly due to severe lack of hostel staffing and general lack of student-driven organization in the hostel system. The hostel system was designed for LUMS when on-campus housing accommodated less than 300 students. Today, there is one warden who is responsible for more than 800 male hostel residents. With the departure of the female warden in F-2, there is currently one resident female warden to meet the needs of more than 450 female residents. The hostels are currently segregated by batches and in some cases, even by schools.

Such a system creates and perpetuates stressful relationships between administration and students as well as amongst students. Furthermore the lack of male resident staff to live in the male hostel compound almost allows for substance abuse activities to flourish without interference. Knowing the difficult living conditions and the rigorous demands of academic study, it is easy to understand the general anxiety and unhappiness faced by many students on campus. Anecdotal evidence by various faculty member and the findings of the Committee, following the April 2008 suicide, point to exceedingly high instances of depression amongst hostel residents. These feelings and energies are then channeled into unhealthy activities. Some students become severely depressed and others find solace in drugs, prescriptive and non-prescriptive. Naturally, we know these behaviors affect students' academic performance. The administration becomes knowledgeable after a student has been placed on probation or received failing grades, but little is done to pre-empt such cases. We can do much more to create a warm, caring, and community atmosphere so that no students are left behind.

### *Day Scholars and At-Risk Behaviors*

In contrast, day scholars do not have many spaces to socialize or rest on campus when they are not in classes. During the day, one can see many students eating and lounging between classes in the current green space between the main academic block and the Pepsi Dining Center. With the construction of the PDC's upper floors, there are more spaces for dining and lounging, but the spaces are "owner-less." In that, the students have not been able to make the space "their own" since that is not was it was designed for. Administrative officers arbitrarily respond to space reservation requests for these lounges. As it is, very few students take advantage of them. Without a sense of ownership, it is difficult to expect the students to feel a sense of belonging. The result of the name-less, character-less spaces is a serious lack of contentment and belonging on campus. Day scholars frequently complain about this disconnected feeling. These students

are also vulnerable to negative expression of these feelings in unhappiness, lagging grades, and interest in illegal substances.

Both hostel residents and day scholars face many other pressures on campus. The academic structure and grading system encourages competition amongst students. While many students find this competition an invigorating challenge, a good number of them require extra support and assistance to succeed. Adding to this pressure, many families demand students to not only be successful, but excel at all academic tasks. Since it is impossible for everyone to be the best, these pressures can become a ticking time bomb for students, stressing them out unnecessarily. As parental pressure, academic pressure and general life stresses mount, some students find themselves ill-equipped to handle these alone. If LUMS were to have built-in safety nets to help students before the situation becomes out of control, we would find ourselves with fewer cases of anxiety and serious depression. There is an urgent need to build social and academic safety nets for students.

In November 2007, the university introduced the Hostel Fellow program, which asked junior and senior students to serve as mentors to the residents. While we recognize this is a step in the right direction, this program only addresses the needs of hostel residents, not day scholars. These students have tried to create a sense of community, but this program needs understanding, further development, and support from faculty and the larger university in order to succeed. If we want to encourage students to feel welcome and comfortable on campus, whether they are day scholars or hostel residents, we must ensure that they feel that they belong in their spaces and in their campus community.

### **What is being done to improve LUMS Student Life?**

A look at these manifestations of at-risk behaviors immediately begs the question: what has been done/ is being done to help students? The answer is disappointing, to say the least. LUMS has yet to open an Office of Student Affairs or Dean of Students. There is no collective effort to help student community flourish on campus or address at-risk behavior. Since the April suicide incident and the recommendations of Committee, there has been an effort to adjust administrative positions and re-direct student affairs on campus with the Office of Student Activities (one officer) and the Office of Well-being and Health (the former Student Recreation Center manage). So far, this has changed very little for students.

Student life continues to be student-initiated with little to no support from the administration. While it is commendable that the LUMS environment has facilitated diverse student societies to develop, it is important to remember there was no formal decision to do so on the part of the administration and faculty. Consequently, students have no structure for out-of-class activities and are left to their own devices for how to proceed. Since these societies are entirely voluntary, many students who are less social or feel out of place do not participated in these social events. The lack of faculty/ administrative supervision and support further minimizes the student experience and undermines the precarious sense of student community.

Along with the lack of student services on campus, the dearth of faculty participation in non-academic student settings presents another facet to the problems facing LUMS student life. We have the benefit of having many of our faculty members live on the same campus as students. Even then, there are rare instances where faculty visit the hostels or attend student social

events. The division between students and faculty further deflates the lack of campus social life and lack of community.

On their own, hostel residents have segregated themselves by batches. The lack of peer-to-peer socialization can already be seen to have negative consequences in the lack of student mentoring and camaraderie. In order for first-year students to feel welcome and comfortable on-campus, we must encourage the older students to help build such an environment. While the Hostel Fellow program works for such a goal, it is insufficient in scope and depth to meet the needs of the over 650 first-year students, both day scholars and hostel residents, on campus next fall.

If we can admit that we have largely ignored student services for the undergraduate program, then we must take immediate steps to improve the situation for the coming academic year. Currently there exists no office of student affairs to cater to student needs, i.e. co-curricular activities, health services, counseling, and hostel –related issues. While the University is in the process of setting up basic health services and counseling on campus, much more needs to be done. While the student numbers have grown, the administrative and campus personnel growth have not reflected the burgeoning student population, causing a steady decline in the quality and quantity of campus support services.

Based on these needs as well as looking to the future development of LUMS, this document proposes a more dynamic model to structure campus life—the Residential College Model. The next section will explain what this model entails and how it can help address the serious problems that we are facing at LUMS.

## **Proposal: How the Residential College Model Can Help**

### *What is a residential college?*

From private, prestigious universities like Princeton, Oxford, Harvard and Cambridge to less-wealthy and public institutions like University of Central Arkansas and Murray State University, a common trend can be seen. Each institution—along with many others around the world—has established, is planning, or is expanding an internal system of residential colleges: permanent, cross-sectional, faculty-led societies that provide the advantages of a small college in the environment of a large university. In Hong Kong, Sydney, and Bremen, the faculty and administration have taken the principle of residential colleges and adapted it for their particular cultural and university environment<sup>2</sup>. By introducing residential colleges to their institutions, these universities found merit in the model's effective method of enhancing the campus experience for their students. What connects all of these universities is the commitment to higher education reform that revolves around an integrated academic and non-academic holistic student experience.

LUMS is an ideal candidate for this change—making it the first of its kind in Pakistan. We wish to plan and establish such a model made of up several semi-autonomous and self-governed institutions within LUMS that will focus on integrated students' academic and non-academic life. These colleges will include all students on campus, both day scholars and hostel residents, and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://collegiateway.org/>

all faculty members as well, with regard for majors or schools respectively. The following are some general characteristics to help understand what a Residential College is.

A residential college should:

- *Be permanent*
  - The culture of a residential college model is designed to become a permanent institution on campus. Decisions taken regarding the college are done with such thinking in mind and with the agreement of all college members, students and faculty.
- *Rely on faculty-leadership*
  - Faculty leadership ensures that formal learning in the classroom is integrated in many ways with students' informal campus life.
  - Students, particularly in this country, see faculty as mentors and advisors. We can build on this culture as we develop more positive social centers and community on campus.
  - Non-faculty managers, such as wardens, have been less effective compared to faculty members since they are detached from the academic structure and students, especially facing the enormous number of their charges.
- *Decentralize education*
  - Centralized education, or when classroom teaching is assumed to be the epitome of learning, can be a deceptive model for truly reaching students.
  - Supporters of residential colleges see real education as local and based on sustained personal contact between faculty and student.
  - Residential Colleges allow for formal and informal advising systems to take root and become the foundation for faculty-student relationships, not just the classroom.
  - For LUMS, we propose a cap of 400 students per college to ensure the development of an intimate community of students and faculty members.
- *Establish and encourage social stability*
  - The permanence and stability of faculty leadership can counter substance abuse culture and maintain elementary civil order.
  - The faculty-student led government in a residential college would develop a safe and attractive environment for all college members and involve them in a regular rhythm of events.
- *Encourage genuine diversity and cross-sectional relationships*
  - In a residential college, genuine diversity would be encouraged by inter-batch residential communities as well as faculty representation from across all three schools at LUMS. This would enable greater communication between students and student-faculty, discourage clique-formations.

The current LUMS education model does make room for several of the characteristics mentioned above. But the main difference between the current LUMS education model and the Residential College Model is that in the RC Model, problems such as at-risk issues are pre-empted by a deeper understanding of students' need. Rather than waiting for problems to take shape and then developing facilities to address them, the RC Model encourages greater vigilance and participation from each faculty member and student on campus as well as supports self-decided initiatives on how to bring about improvements for campus life.

### ***How is the Residential College Model different from the current Hostel Model?***

- Faculty participation and leadership to develop more student-faculty relationships and interfaces. (Administrative personnel are not expected to contribute or assist community development.)
- Peer-to-peer mentoring: Day scholars and campus residents, regardless of batch, participate together and share spaces on campus. (This includes dining spaces and access to social spaces in the hostel buildings.)
- A larger sense of community to develop a culture of trust, respect, and pride. As faculty members and students interact and develop their respective college communities, they will also work together to create a culture unlike any that LUMS has seen. This new community will be able to positively and consciously instill important values such as commitment to philanthropic work, tolerance of individuality, open and respectful communication, and much more. In short, this model would bring faculty and students closer outside the classroom, enhancing education at LUMS.
- Student-faculty self governance and policy-making. Within these communities, students will be held accountable in ways that we have not yet conceived. In line with a culture of trust and respect, faculty and administrative role will be less to police students, and more so to guide students through how to hold themselves to higher standards.

### **Where do we go from here?**

If the faculty and the Board approve this proposal, we suggest taking immediate steps to institute this model for the LUMS campus community by the fall 2009 semester. This will entail the formation of a faculty transition team and student transition team to consider how this model will be designed within the existing LUMS infrastructure and then to proceed with implementation of this design in preparation for the next academic year.

Although this change will require a great deal of effort and patience from all stakeholders, the benefits will far outweigh the costs. LUMS could become the only Pakistan undergraduate institution with a top-quality academic experience as well as top-quality residential environment. Our greatest strength lies in the fact that the Residential College model at LUMS would be designed by students and faculty working together, emphasizing the deep synergy between the two groups for today and for posterity.