

# Bringing the Residential College Model to LUMS

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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.

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 manager). 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. Furthermore, the 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.

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**

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.

### ***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>1</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 all faculty members as well, with regard for majors or schools respectively.

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?***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://collegiateway.org/>

- **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.