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TRUSTING THE PROCESS: THE POWER OF A STUDENT-FACULTY PARTNERSHIP

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Being a law student with a minor in psychology, I developed a keen interest in the interaction between criminal law and psychology, and I wanted to do a research project of my own in the upcoming semester to explore the subject further. Sitting in the library working on my paper during my fall semester final exam week, I received an e-mail from the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) Learning Institute (LLI) announcing the upcoming projects that students could apply to as Student Partners for the Pedagogical Partnership Program (PPP). Interestingly, one of the projects was led by the very instructor, Ms. Hiba Akbar, for whose class I was finishing my paper. She wanted to design a criminology course that would include themes from sociology, political science, and anthropology. I instantly felt a rush of excitement for it seemed like the perfect job for me.

Nervously, I wrote Ms. Hiba an e-mail telling her that I had read about her course design project and believed that it might be a good idea to include a psychology perspective in the course. She replied asking me to visit her office and tell her more about my ideas. Having forgotten all about the paper that was due the next day, I excitedly ran to her office, quite literally, where I poured out all that I knew about criminology and how psychology could contribute to it. A few weeks later I was informed that I had been selected as a Student Partner to design that course. This essay is a reflection on my personal experiences of growth and (un)learning which, I believe, only became possible through this student-faculty partnership.

During one of our initial meetings, Ms. Hiba told me that since I was interested in the psychology component of our course project, she was comfortable leaving those topics up to me to research and put together on my own. Being entrusted with this huge responsibility made me very nervous for I greatly feared not being up to the task and disappointing her. However, looking back, I now realize how this was empowering, too. I took it upon myself to do everything in my power to not let her down, and in the process of doing so, I ended up becoming more confident in my own judgement and voicing my opinions more openly in a room where I knew that they would be heard and appreciated. I unlearned two complementary things: that only faculty can bring subject-matter knowledge to course design, and that I was incapable of contributing to the course design.

This process of slowly finding an equal footing with my faculty partner in course design was extremely unfamiliar to me. Before this partnership, I had only worked as a Research Assistant (RA), and my only job was to complete the tasks delegated to me. For our project, in contrast, we decided to divide the topics we studied and then explain to one another what we learned. We set up tasks and realistic goals on a weekly and monthly basis. The entire dynamic was new to me. It was both invigorating and scary for me because I did not want to leave this impression on my instructor that she had made a mistake selecting me for this project and that I was not capable of assisting her. And how could I be? I was just a student, and she was a very competent instructor with years of teaching and research expertise. These are some of the thoughts that would often come to my mind. I seriously doubted my capabilities at first, but Ms. Hiba's trust in me contributed to my unlearning these doubts and growing into my new role. Her approach of

treating me as a partner in this project helped me in taking the lead and making efforts to equally contribute to the project.

I had finished taking a class with Ms. Hiba only a month before our partnership officially began. So, initially it was very difficult for me to be able to break through that barrier and settle into my new role. I was a shy student at the time who would avoid speaking up in class as much as I could. I believe this is something Ms. Hiba recognized too, and from the very beginning I could feel the clear difference between our interactions in the classroom setting and sitting across the table from her during our PPP meetings. It was in these meetings, when we were exchanging ideas and both contributing to our shared course design project, that I realized I was no longer her student but her equal partner in this project. This realization coupled with her trust in my abilities to use my creativity and intellect helped me not only in becoming more confident but also capable of comfortably voicing my opinions and ideas to her—something I could have never imagined while I was just her student only a month previous.

Ms. Hiba and I were met with the rather challenging task of building from scratch this course that was supposed to be the first one of its kind taught at the LUMS law school. At the time, the entirety of our knowledge about criminology came from podcasts, YouTube videos, and a few articles here and there, which meant that we had to read carefully through a lot of literature to get a grasp on the subject. Initially, I had very rigid ideas about what this course was supposed to look like, and I was rather impatient to see our end results. Having started our research, I realized how there was a lot of ground to cover in the span of only four months, which would often worry me about whether we would even be able to complete the course outline in time. I thought in terms of deadlines and finish lines. It was at this point that Ms. Hiba reminded me that while setting up timelines and goals was a good thing, of course, it was equally important to understand that because we were starting with little to no knowledge on the subject, it was completely fine for us to take our time with it. She advised me not to focus on the end product more than what was in front of me at the time. Slowly, but surely, I too realized that having those firm ideas about what the outcome of our project was supposed to be, I was limiting myself from freely exploring the plethora of knowledge that this discipline had to offer. This was another unlearning for me, and another course of growth.

Before starting our research for the course, I was fairly certain that I knew enough about the subject to suggest that psychology would make up a crucial and significant component of the course. However, I was wrong, at least in part, which is something that it took me a while to completely accept. I struggled to put together psychology research that would meaningfully contribute to our course. At one point, my faculty partner contemplated not including a psychology module in our course at all. This felt like a personal failure to me because it was my job to design the psychology component, and this would mean that I had failed at that. Ms. Hiba reminded me that the ‘not-making-sense’ part was also a crucial component of the research process, and it might be a good idea for me to explore this module from a different perspective or leave it for the time being. I told her that if we are unable to find suitable literature it is because we are not looking hard enough and that I needed time to go back to this module and come up with something. She trusted me with that. It took a while of going in circles and engaging in healthy discussions with my faculty partner to convince her not to discard the psychology topics from our course. Personally, this was a point not only for growth but also of transformation for

someone like me, who had not only struggled to even speak up in class, unless absolutely required, but, on some level, also feared conflict. But having been given a space where Ms. Hiba made sure that I knew that my opinions were not only respected but also needed, I found it easy to let go of these fears and engage in fruitful discussions with her.

After a few months of extensive reading and research, we felt stuck and confused. We discussed how the course was not turning out to be as interesting as we had expected. There was an abundance of literature available, and we had a hard time picking out what was important. Moreover, at the time it felt like most of our course content was rooted in an overview of these theories, which the students might find boring. This point of standstill pushed us in a completely different direction.

On my own, I decided to take up the task of looking for ways to make the course more relatable and interesting for the students. This is where I got to explore and apply my creativity to our project while bringing in my student perspective to the partnership. After a few weeks of research, I came up with a list of movies that built upon some of the theories we included in our course and suggested that the students could write reflection papers based on what they observe in the movies. Moreover, I came up with a list of criminal profiles of serial killers rooted in criminology and forensic psychology concepts that the students could analyze based on the theories that they would learn in class. I shared these ideas with my faculty partner. She loved them and decided to include them in the course as graded components. Reflecting back on this phase of our project, I realize what seemed like a small feat at the time was in fact a big achievement for me because it pushed me not only to think outside the box but also get in touch with my creative side, which benefited our project and my own self. I did not consciously realize it at the time, but Ms. Hiba's trust in my capabilities pushed me to be confident enough to take the lead and to trust my own judgement, which, I admit, is something that I have struggled with during my academic career.

Ms. Hiba and I discussed that it was important for us to come up with a course that spoke of the South Asian context. The criminology literature and theories that we read during the initial stages of our partnership were heavily influenced and devised by western scholars, which did not seem relevant to Pakistan or India. So, Ms. Hiba suggested that we explore the subject through a colonial and post-colonial frame and also look at Asian scholars' contribution to the field of criminology. This was a direction that we initially had no plans to explore, and we did not know if it would yield any substantial research that would make sense for our course. However, we decided to take the leap, which ultimately proved to be a good decision. One of the things we learned through our research was how these western influenced criminological theories were reflected in the British policies pertaining to punishment and criminal justice policies in colonial India. Thus, the literature we found not only helped us develop a deeper understanding of the subject but also answered some of the very important questions that we struggled with: Why are we studying this? How is this relevant to our country? What will the students' takeaways be? We decided to make this the final module of our course for it nicely tied together the concepts and theories we wished to include and also explained how all of it was relevant to our part of the world. This was our "it is finally coming together" moment.

Just as the South Asian context was relevant to our course content, I believe it was relevant in understanding our partnership too. Students engaging with their teachers in conversations about teaching and learning is something that our education system is not accustomed to. The traditional power dynamics between students and teachers are difficult to transcend. When I was school going, doing so much as correcting your teacher's spelling mistakes or questioning their methods was considered a sign of being a bad student. "Oh, you seem to know more than me. Why don't you come teach the class and I will rest?" That response was something a lot of us heard back in our school days. Conversations like this between a student and their teacher end up with the students accepting their teachers' authority without questions. We tend to internalize these things and take them with us even as we move into university life. For me, the LLI was a significant part of helping me transition into my new role as a partner. The most valuable skill that I acquired from all the training sessions and check-ins with LLI was learning about negotiating with my partner rather than simply accepting assignments of tasks.

As I recall, Ms. Hiba and I had one of our regular meetings scheduled to discuss the literature we had read the week before. A few hours before our meeting she texted me that we might have to reschedule because she had forgotten her criminology book at home. She said, "I know this is a 'Why didn't you forget yourself at home' moment for me". This is one of those classic lines that our teachers use when we tell them that we have forgotten an assignment or book back home. Here, we were both coming to the table as students as well as teachers. I believe that in a partnership of this kind, the faculty partner has a very important role in determining the partnership dynamics. The faculty partner needs to be able to step out of their traditional role and treat the student as a partner. Because even if I, as a student, had wanted to be treated as an equal in partnership, it would not have been possible if my faculty partner had been unwilling to take that leap and trust the process.

Just a few months before this partnership work began, I had only stumbled across the word "criminology." Now I find myself wondering about the possibility of pursuing it as a subject for my graduate studies. Whenever Ms. Hiba and I discuss course content, I cannot help but imagine myself teaching this course on my own someday, too. None of this would have been possible without the PPP and my faculty partner's support. Ms. Hiba told me from the very beginning that for certain topics she'd solely rely on the research and knowledge I provide her. She trusted me with something, and I tried my best to deliver.

One of my biggest takeaways from my partnership experience is learning that I, a student, am capable of meaningfully contributing to a course design project and that a student perspective in a project of this kind is very important for effective teaching and learning practices. It is not traditional practice in our education institutes for students to be decision-makers in the teaching process. So, oftentimes, honest feedback from the students never ends up reaching the teachers. Here, I had this unique opportunity to bridge this gap. Sometimes, theory-intensive courses end up seeming boring to the students if delivered solely through long lectures. Ms. Hiba and I discussed how we did not want this course to turn out that way. So, I suggested we try using unconventional methods of classroom learning such as through movie reflections and asking the students to analyze the criminal profiles of violent criminals across the world. I believe my perspective ended up making this course more interesting and fun. While Ms. Hiba was bringing her years of teaching expertise to the table, equally important was my bringing my decades long

experience of being a student. I have come to learn that both are equally important for effective teaching and learning practices.

My partnership experience also helped me to let go of my pre-conceived notions about what the end product of a course was supposed to look like, which opened a lot more room for different possibilities and also shaped the course into something so much better than what I had imagined it to be. Learning to trust the process instead of worrying too much about the results proved to be transformative in terms of the research and the course content. The course, as it has come out, would not have been possible without a student-faculty collaboration. While I was bringing my persistence, imagination, and student perspective to the table, my faculty partner kept me grounded, and, of course, her research and teaching expertise were a given, which I learned a great deal from. All my contributions were welcomed, and I was respectfully told why something would not work. I was not just delegated tasks but throughout our partnership I saw how my viewpoints were heard and actively incorporated. This collaboration thus proved to be a very empowering experience for me as a student. The outcome of this student-faculty partnership is a course that reflects our collective yet distinct thought processes and personalities. An equally important outcome is my sense as a confident and capable self that I can carry forward with me. Working on this project made me realize that, given the right environment, where my ideas and potential have the space to nurture and grow, I, a student, am perfectly capable of meaningfully contributing to a course design project.