

The Effect of Knowledge of Formal Grievance Policy on the Outcome and Satisfaction Level in an Academic Environment: A Case Study of IMSciences

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Abstract: Individuals that share a certain environment, always get involved in conflicts with others as result of difference of opinions. These conflicts when tried to suppress or not addressed, turn into a grievance. Likewise, an educational environment where it is encouraged to think freely so as to have better understanding of the subject matter, it is very common for such grievances to develop over grading and/or bullying etc. Therefore, a Higher Education Institution, a one like IMSciences, also serves as a platform where these grievances prevail. This research is conducted with the aim to found out that though there exist some on campus grievance protocols, yet we see that there tends to develop a bottle neck in the office of the Director or Program Coordinator, regardless of the grievance matter. This research will help analyze, why there is lack of knowledge regarding the on campus grievance protocols, how is it affecting the overall academic environment of the institute and in particular, the aggrieved party and what possible measures can be taken to make the environment at IMSciences, more productive and more prosperous with lesser number of grievances, if any.

Key Words: Academic Environment, Grievances, Protocols, Satisfaction, Outcome

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1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes what basically is meant by grievance. Why it prevails in a Higher Education Institution. From thereon, the focus turns to IMSciences and the existing possible measures that are in place to look over any academic grievance via its various committees.

The introduction would than summarize the Statement of the Research, Its Purpose, the limitations of the Research and the Scheme of this Dissertation

1.1 Introduction

People that share a certain environment, be it a workplace, social setup or an academic environment, often times indulge in feelings of insecurity with regard to their counterparts. This feeling of insecurity is due to work-load distribution, limitation of resources, discrimination or loops in the policies and/or any such factor of an environment. This insecurity often times turn into a conflict or a grievance and be that in an academic environment becomes an academic grievance.

1.2 Academic Grievance

An academic grievance or appeal is an allegation by a student of substantial and/or unjustified deviation, to the student's detriment, from policies, procedures and/or requirements regarding admission, grading policies, special agreements, instructor's requirements and academic requirements of the University (Academics: Georgia College).

In the present time, conflicts or grievances are part of routine in Higher Education, where academic [or professional] freedom is revered and free thinking is encouraged (Holton, 2006). In an academic environment, such grievances are very common as result of conflicting interests, grading problems, favoritism and bullying etc. Being part of a Higher Education Institution (HEI), IMSciences is also an open platform for such grievances to arise on routine basis.

1.3 Grievance Protocols at IMSciences

In order to deal with such grievance issues, IMSciences, like most others HEIs also has developed certain policies and procedures that tend to address such contingencies. This procedure includes (Khan, 2012);

- Semester Committee, which is responsible for addressing grievances and conflicts pertaining to the academia
- Examination Committee, which is responsible for grievances related to examination, marking of papers and their checking
- Disciplinary Committee that deals with grievances arising out of the disciplinary issues and breach of rules & regulations of the institute
- Advisory Committee that inquires off grievances arising out of conflict with other committees of the institute

- And the final decision makers, the BoD, that summons hearing arising out of the overall grievances, if any, that require attention and solution

In spite of the availability of grievance protocols in the institute, it is noticeable that regardless of the grievance encountered, it got reported mostly to the Director, thus developing a bottle neck of these grievances and making it difficult to address all of them, leaving the grieved party, with further grievance.

1.4 Statement of Research

The focus of this study is to determine the effect of lack of knowledge regarding an on campus grievance policy on outcome and satisfaction level of students in an academic environment.

1.5 Research Objectives

In an academic environment, there can be multiple kinds of grievances that can influence person affected and his/her surroundings. For example, a grievance related to course, assignments, presentation, bullying, and discipline etc. The Research objectives would therefore focus on:

1. Where are these academic grievances to be reported?
2. How is the outcome and satisfaction level of a student affected incase of no knowledge regarding formal grievance protocols?
3. And what is the proper forum to report either of the aforesaid or any other such grievance pertaining to academic environment?

1.6 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to find out why there is lack of knowledge regarding the on campus grievance protocols. What are the factors that are contributing to it? How is it affecting the aggrieved party? And what measures should be taken to enhance knowledge regarding the current on campus grievance procedures or to make them more effective and communicative to all the stakeholders at the Institute.

1.7 Personal Limitations to the Study

- The study is limited to only the students, as stakeholders of the institute
- The study is carried out under the impression of IMSciences environment
- Time shortage
- Unwillingness of students to speak off their grievances

1.8 Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. A pilot study was conducted initially to determine that does there exist any lack of knowledge regarding on campus grievance policies or not. Based on the pilot study, an interview instrument was

developed and interviews were personally conducted from the students of IMSciences.

1.9 Scheme of the Report

The following chapter in the dissertation focuses on the previously done work on the subject matter, followed by the methodology used for data collection. This is followed by analysis through interviews, which are backed by a pilot study. The last part of the report discusses findings and conclusion which than lay basis for recommendations in order to take steps that would ensure a healthy academic environment with proper mechanism for grievances redressal.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter entails the previous work done on the subject matter. What were the different methodologies and the conclusions proposed by the researchers who have already worked upon the topic? What did they find out or described regarding their view of an academic grievance. The end of this chapter would entail that due to the scarcity of the literature on the topic at hand, what other possible constructs that were close to the subject matter, were looked upon to get some idea about the topic

Much work has been done on addressing grievances in terms of organizational environment, discriminatory grievances, minority grievances, grievances in the health sector etc. yet very little work is done regarding grievances relating to the academic environment. For example, the work done on grievances can be traced back to dates as early as 1854, in an article of Association of Medical Journal, edited by John Rose Cormack, addressing the grievances that prevailed in Health industry, focusing on grievances of poor surgeons.

The most authentic work done on academic grievances was (Tjittas, 2009) whose research was based on creation of a formal academic grievance policy in the University of Pennsylvania, USA. The methodology used included selection of a sample of 2,239 Graduate students from different departments of University from which 119 students at random were drawn based on the criteria that they must be a member of the students representative body and must have the idea regarding the different grievances faced by their fellows and the proper departmental level procedures to address those grievances. Internet was used as a tool for the collection of data through survey, as emails were sent to the selected respondents, whereas follow-ups emails were sent day after to ensure that respondents take out some time to complete the survey. The online collection of survey data was through surveymonkey.com, which was selected by the author basically because it provides anonymity to the respondents and helps in ease of data collection and compilation. The Demographics used by the researcher were;

1. The School of the respondent
2. Role in that school (student, faculty or staff)
3. Length of service
4. Gender

The results indicated that 78% of the students who were selected as respondents did not know about any grievance policy in their department. It's also noteworthy that a student would take interest about an on campus grievance policy only if they know what grievance was? The result of one of the questions asked by the researcher was that only 32% of the respondents knew what grievance actually was. So the conclusion by the researcher was that it's not only important to have an academic grievance policy and make it accessible to all the students but it is also necessary for the institute's administration to tell the students of possible academic grievances faced by them during their professional education in their orientation.

The analytical study of (Miklas & Kliener, 2003) can also be referred to as work done on academic grievances, where the authors described different types of grievances or conflicts that prevail in HEI. They also suggested that the best possible methods to resolve these situations of grievances are either moderation or adjudication.

(Miller & Sarat, 1980) In their research, focused on grievances that prevail in the diverse cultures, utilizing random sampling data collection of 1,000 households through telephonic survey, focusing on the grievances or disputes that are brought to court or for nonjudicial alternatives in a three stage disputing process: grievances, claims, and resolution. The respondents were asked that did they experience any problem over the past three years, how it was handled by them and was the household at any risk of experiencing a certain type of grievance. About 40% of the respondents stated that a certain type of grievance was experienced by them for which redressal was sought from the opposing party through third party or use of lawyer. The results indicated that the grievances identified by the respondents have a direct impact upon their personnel life, work life, social life and the education life, which is why there is a need for some proper grievance protocols to address those grievances.

Since the topic at hand, has not had much of the discussion in the preceding years, therefore to better understand the problem, some similar terms are described to explain the construct of academic grievance. For instance, employee silence can be related to academic grievance, as it tends to explain the nonbehavior of an employee that is found ambiguous by the observers (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). Likewise, procedural justice is also a better source to understand the term grievance, as it explains a class of psychological reactions that occur as a result of violation of certain norms in an organization (Lind & Tyler, 1988), in our case, an academic environment, where a student reacts to a certain violation of the educational environment code and regulations.

The reason for explaining these constructs is because they associate to grievance, as literature available on grievance is at nascent stage. There is no exact similar construct available, though a more familiar term, Employee Grievance Policy and Procedures, has ample literature available, but it is in organizational context and focuses on rewards and associations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study is based on

What: Lack of Knowledge and Outcome of grievance & Satisfaction

How: Lack of knowledge regarding on campus grievance policy has affected the outcome of the grievance reported and the satisfaction of the aggrieved party

Why: Is the satisfaction level and outcome affected by the lack of knowledge regarding the on campus grievance policy?

When: November-December, 2012

Where: Institute of Management Sciences, Peshawar

Who: Students of IMSciences

3.1 Nature of the Study

The study is qualitative, non experimental and cross sectional in nature, having framework that is based upon the findings from the pilot study, in which it was determined that how many students in the institute wanted to report their grievances and how many of them knew the proper mechanism for redressal of their grievance.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of the study would comprise of all the students of IMSciences, currently enrolled in various programs of Undergraduate and Graduate level. The sample consist of students from BBA (Hons) and MBA programs, as most of them have spent more than 2 years in the institute, so would add to investigation of the subject matter and findings/recommendations would be better utilized.

3.3 Sampling Technique and Instrument

The sampling technique is snow ball sampling. It is because, from the pilot study findings, it was deduced, that most of the students at the institute did not directly understand the term grievance, unless it was used alternatively with conflict. Though both the constructs often back each other, yet some differences prevail, which is why snowball sampling would be used so to get first hand insights off the respondent regarding grievance. The unit of analysis is Individual based and the instrument to be used for recording the individual responses is in-person semi-structured, open ended in depth interviews.

The Data from the individual interviews is recorded and analyzed for the responses received that would add to healthy academic environment at the institute with stated and properly communicated protocols for addressing relevant grievance.

The idea of questionnaire for pilot study was taken from the research (Tjittas, 2009), who had worked for the formulation of a formal academic grievance policy in University of Pennsylvania (USA). The responses of pilot study enabled me to construct an interview questionnaire.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

1. Little literature available on the subject matter
2. No direct articles on the topic
3. Organization Specific

Chapter 4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis

This chapter initially focuses on the analysis of the data collected through pilot study, where the main focus area was regarding basic knowledge about an academic grievance and the existing on campus grievance measures in IMSciences. The later part focuses on the data collected for research study through interviews, in which three main queries i.e. an academic grievance, the reporting and the outcome are briefly explained and the satisfaction level of the students pertaining to their outcome is discussed

4.1.1: Pilot Study

In order to determine whether or not there exists any influence of lack of knowledge regarding grievance policy upon an academic environment, a pilot study was conducted in IMSciences. A qualitative experimental study was carried out at IMSciences, where the respondents were asked to evaluate a questionnaire that entailed the basic queries regarding grievance.

The sample was selected at random by the use of stratified random sampling technique, where 20 students were selected representing almost all programs offered at the institute, to answer the basic queries regarding grievances. The questionnaire used was self-administered closed ended questionnaire.

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of students from whom data was collected with respect to their degree program.

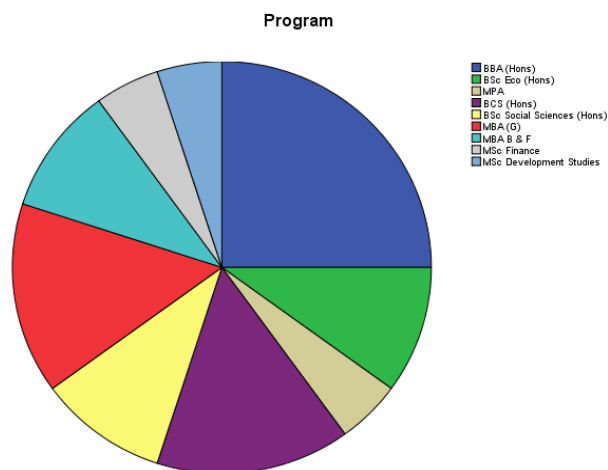


Figure 4.1

From the pilot study, it was deduced that though 40% of the students had no idea about the grievance (illustrated by Figure 4.2) itself, yet they did want to report a grievance (alternatively used with conflict) that they had encountered in the academic environment (Figure 4.3).

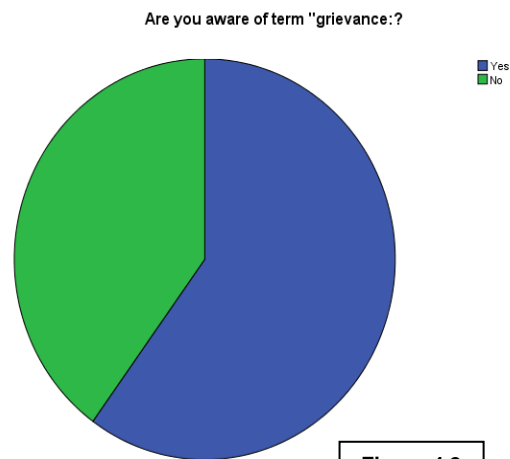


Figure 4.2

If you ever got into a conflict/grievance pertaining to your academia, would you report it?

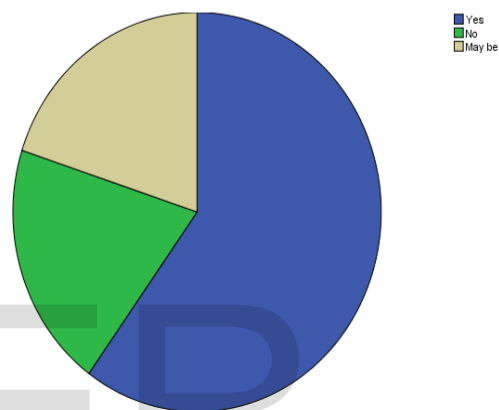


Figure 4.3

Students in the pilot study were inquired in the corresponding questions to know that where would they want to report their grievance? Do they have knowledge regarding any formal/informal committees that could redress their grievance and for how long have they been studying in the institute?

From the responses received, it was found that around 80% students would have reported their grievance to either Director or the Program Coordinator, regardless of the nature of the grievance (illustrated by Figure 4.4). Also, it was found that 65% students were not aware of formal/informal committees that would have redressed their grievance (Figure 4.5) and this included 60% of the students who had spent more than 2 years at the institute (Figure 4.6).

To whom would you like to report your conflict/grievance pertaining to your academic environment?

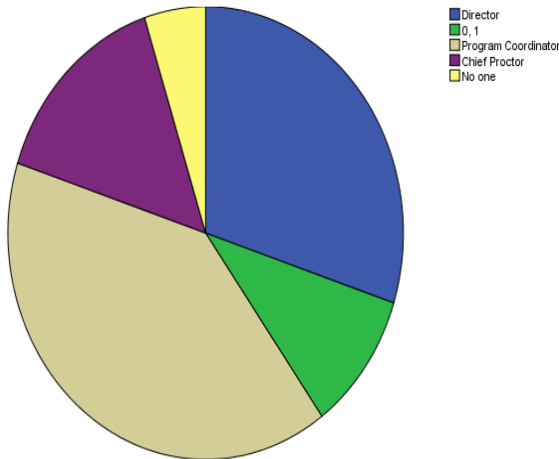


Figure 4.4

Aware of any formal/informal committees for redressal of grivance?

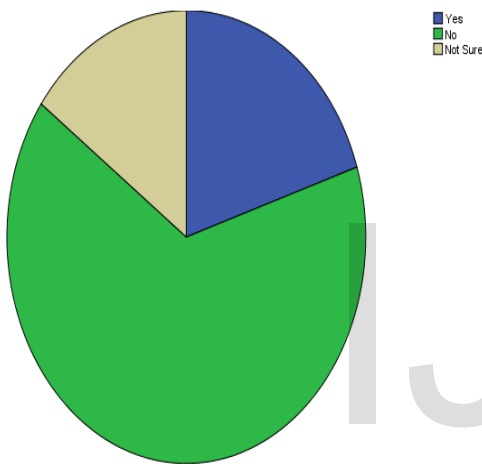


Figure 4.5

For how long have you been studying in this institute

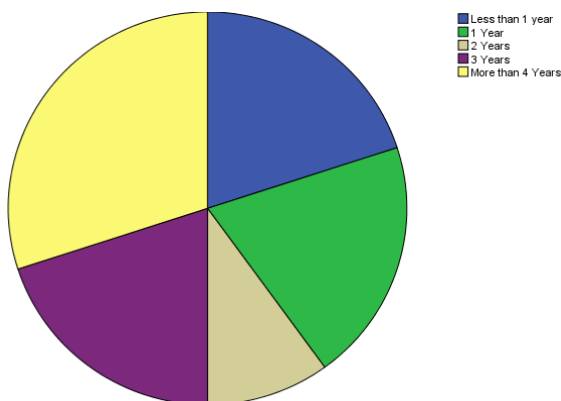


Figure 4.6

4.1.2 Research Study

Based upon the results of pilot study, it was found that there are certain barriers in the effective utilization of the existing grievance protocols in the institute. For this purpose, study was conducted, by the use of interviews from those

students who have experienced an academic grievance while studying in the institute.

The interview questions, would basically analyze the respondent's feedback based upon three main queries:

1. How they would define an academic grievance?

This question was asked in order to know that how the aggrieved party does describes an academic grievance. In their opinion what factors/items or actions when combined, can be termed as an academic grievance.

2. What was the grievance encountered by them, to whom it got reported and the mechanism for that reporting?

These questions were asked to get a more detailed insight of the respondent's grievance and to know that the grievance mentioned by him, was it justified to report to the person or the authority, he/she reported too. Inquiries about the process/mechanism are made so as to know that is the process currently followed by the institute, appropriate for redressal or not.

3. What was the follow up of the report, the steps taken for the redressal reported and its satisfaction level with regards to the aggrieved party?

These questions were asked so as to know the effectiveness of existing grievance protocols in the institute. How was a grievance, redressed and were the actions taken, satisfactory for the aggrieved party or did it end up in further grievance for the person effected.

4.2 Discussions:

The Discussion is based upon three main components of the interview questions that are broken up into 5 items, namely (1) academic grievance (2) academic grievance encountered (3) reporting and process (4) follow up and outcome and (5) satisfaction & suggestions. The responses of the interviewees are discussed under these five domains to get a proper insight of an academic grievance

4.2.1 Academic Grievance:

The first query of the interview was that how one goes on to describe an academic grievance. As there is no proper or approved definition of the construct which was also proven by the pilot study, responses were sought in an attempt to get knowledge of what students think off, whenever spoken too about academic grievance?

Two of the interviewees described academic grievance as anything that directly or indirectly affect one's academics or pulls up barriers in fulfilling the goal of attainment of education. This shows that when a student would come across a conflict that hinders his/her education process, would be termed as an academic grievance regardless of the factor contributing to it. This approach at times may seem inappropriate, because often times factors outside of an academic environment for example, financial constraints in obtaining education, that are not accounted for in this study may also become barriers in one's education.

Some interviewees also described gender biasness, particularly the preference given to female students over male students, as a factor contributing towards academic grievance. This factor in an academic environment is very much appropriate to be termed as an academic grievance; however, it is mostly females that are aggrieved off gender biasness which is opposite the case in IMSciences.

Two of the interviewees reported quite similar opinions in interviews regarding an academic grievance stating that failure of the Management body of the Institute to have proper "check and balance" over the faculty members have greatly contributed towards an academic grievance as there is no possible way one can sought redressal if a faculty member becomes personal with a student. The opinion is justified to be termed as academic grievance as having improper oversight protocols for faculty members, often result in the misuse of authority by a lecturer against a student, where the norms of academic excellence and merit are ignored by the former against the later.

Moreover, the bullying and point scoring to get in eyes of teachers while stepping over other student's image, is also termed as an academic grievance by an interviewee. The opinion can be related to an academic grievance, for a student who is being bullied at, gets affected psychologically and thus is unable to fulfill his goal of obtaining education properly and focus on the educational tasks if no proper measures are sought to redress that grievance.

4.2.2 Academic Grievance Encountered

The question was inquired off in the interview, in order to get an insight about what is the most prevalent academic grievance that has been encountered by the students studying at IMSciences.

Most of the interviewees had encountered an academic grievance in terms of grading injustice, done as a result of the faculty member getting personal with the student. For example, three of the interviewees stated that due difference of opinion with the lecturer in class discussions, the lecturer's concerned, became personal with those students and this resulted in them getting lower marks out of 20 marks that are allotted for assignments and quizzes. Also, where the respective faculty member had made a theoretical paper, the respective student was given lower marks without proper justification. These actions aggrieved the students concerned, as their results in other disciplines highlighted their bright talent.

One interviewee, however, encountered a different grievance. The student went abroad on official scholarship program, as per which rules his education here would also continue in accordance with the institute rules but it wasn't the case for this student. According to institute, the student had been "verbally informed" about new policy changes, and therefore was deprived of a semester education at the institute, thus delaying his education by a year. This grievance also sits within an academic grievance because it hindered the aggrieved student's goal of attainment of timely education.

4.2.3 Reporting and Process

The question was asked in order to know to whom the grievance was reported when the students encountered them.

As also evident from pilot study, all the interviewees had also reported their respective grievances to either Director or the respective Program Coordinator.

One of the interviewee, who sought redressal for grievance related to semester problem, had reported his grievance to Director immediately, but did not receive any response. The grievance was than reported to Program Coordinator, but delay tactics were used. The grievance in

itself was a matter to be looked upon by the Semester committee, but as proven by the pilot study, the aggrieved student was unaware of it and was sorting redressal from the parties that further aggrieved him.

Some interviewees went to Program Coordinator directly, to report their grievance against teacher becoming personal and giving lower score in examination. The process involved, as described by the interviewees, several applications, checking of the students' previous records and other academic data bases. The process, as described by the interviewees was very long and tiring and they were initially given no response that left them with further grievance as they were also unaware of the right forum to report this grievance which is the examination committee, in this case.

Another interviewee, when encountered the academic grievance, initially had reported it informally to other senior faculty members having to discuss that what should be the course of action when a grievance pertains to unhealthy and unproductive class environment maintained by a certain lecturer. After several discussions with some senior faculty members, the grievance was than reported to the respective program coordinator, in several meetings. The process followed by the student, in this case was a matter that should have been directly reported to the Program Coordinator, but like many other students, this student was also unaware of the proper channel to go through to report the grievance concerned.

4.2.4 Follow-up and Redressal

The question was inquired off respondents in order to know that after their grievance was reported, how it was followed up by the person to whom it was reported and what steps were taken to redress that grievance.

As stated in the previous section, since most of the grievances were reported at wrong forums, therefore the follow up on those grievances was in effective and hardly any steps were taken to redress the grievance of the aggrieved party. For example, one interviewee stated that despite of several applications, his grievance was not addressed which compelled him to file a suite in civil court against the institution.

Likewise, other interviewees also stated that no considerable steps were taken by the institute to redress their grievance despite of several meetings with the concerned Program Coordinator but in fact they were only further grieved as they were asked to take back their complains as the faculty was backed regardless of the teacher misusing his/her authority.

However, one interview reported, that by having several discussions with the concerned Program Coordinator, her grievance was redressed, as the teacher with whom the conflict arose, was changed after proper inquiry of the grievance reported.

4.2.5 Satisfaction and Suggestions

This question was asked in order to determine whether the respondents who had reported their grievance were satisfied with the outcome or not and what suggestions

do they propose for betterment of grievance protocols currently being utilized in the institute.

As it turns out from the aforesaid discussion, apart from one interviewee who was satisfied with the outcome, majority of the respondents were not satisfied with the outcome as it only aggrieved them more. For example, one of the interviewees reported that after the outcome of his grievance plea, the lecturer upon whom the grievance was reported became further personal with him and the concerned Program Coordinator thought bad of the student involved.

For the recommendations, one of the interviewee reported that the Institute should properly communicate all students about the current formal/informal committees that exist in order to solve various grievances. Another interviewee suggested that the institute should have a separate neutral independent body, with its own set of rules and regulations that would seek address all sorts of grievances arising out of an academic environment. Such department should be independent of all pressures, and must have due rights and authority to take penal action against the guilty party. The interviewee quoted the example of Lahore University of Management Sciences Grievance Department with their procedures & working and suggested that until the time IMSciences can develop its own department or system to redress grievances pertaining to academia, LUMS grievance protocols or for that matter, grievance protocols of any other institute that suit the environment of IMSciences, should be adopted on ad hoc basis. The grievance procedure of LUMS is available for insight in the annexure 3.

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Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes all the research work done upon the subject matter and then describes the conclusions that are drawn from the responses of the interviewees. In later part of this chapter, conclusions are given while based upon the objectives of the research that were set in the beginning of the research

From the aforesaid discussions, it is clear now that the lack of knowledge regarding existing formal grievance protocols at IMSciences, has greatly affected students who sought redressal. In most of the cases, the grievance of the aggrieved party remained un-redressed and this added to their already existing grievances.

Only in one case, was it found that the interviewee's grievance was redressed and was satisfied with the outcome but it did not come after a hard long struggle and a series of consultations. Though the nature of this grievance was relatively small as the grievance of the student was with the attitude of the teacher in class, but likewise the satisfaction of student was also normal.

On the other hand, the grievance of the student who had to repeat a semester as a result of policy change, was big in nature and since it remained un-redressed, the non-satisfaction level of that student was very high which is why he developed further grievances against the policies and management of the institute thus hindering the process of his goal of attainment of education.

It is also noteworthy to state here that most of the grievances reported didn't get the proper attention as expected was because they got reported to the wrong person. For instance, the interviewee who had problem with exam marking as a result of teacher getting personal, it was an issue to be looked up by the exam committee but was reported to Program Coordinator and thus remain un-redressed.

The reason for this reporting on wrong forum is because mostly students are not aware of the existence of any formal protocols in the institute and they have never been spoken too about where to go for seeking redressal. Reporting on the wrong forum only made things worse for those students as they teachers against whom grievance was reported became more personal and intense with them & thus they had to suffer more as a consequence. Also, due to undue favor of the management for its faculty regardless of being wrong, students are forced to suffer more if that teacher comes along to teach them again. Also, those students whose grievance is very strong in nature were compelled to file case against the institute in civil court which is not only harmful for the student because of opportunity cost of his study time but also harmful for the sake of institute's reputation.

If the on-campus existing protocols were properly communicated to the students regularly or in events such as

their orientation, many students who sought grievance would have at least reported it to the right forum and thus bottle neck would have been avoided. Also, in most cases, where management was unable to look up a grievance reported, having immediately directed them to proper forum is what would have avoided the further grievance on part of the aggrieved party.

5.2 Recommendations

Based upon the thorough research conducted and the conclusions deduced, the following recommendations are made in order to make the academic environment healthier and productive.

1. Proper communication of existing grievance protocols and formal committees by use of:
 - a. Orientation Sessions
 - b. Seminars
 - c. Notifications on official notice boards
2. Immediately directly a grievance reported to the concerned person/committee, if grievance is reported on wrong forum
3. Having proper check and balance of the faculty members without giving them undue backing
4. Not assigning a faculty member thrice to a class, so as to suppress any grievance that might arise as a result of the faculty member re-taking a class
5. Penalizing the guilty party after thorough inquiry of the grievance reported
6. Adopting any existing grievance protocols on ad hoc basis till the institute develops one of its own

Apart from the aforesaid recommendations, having an independent neutral department whose sole purpose should be to look after the grievance reported and take the steps necessary. The department should be provided with full powers and authority of penalizing the student or faculty member found guilty. The Department should be headed by a neutral person but should preferably be a Psychologist, in order to have better insight in the grievance reported. The head of the grievance department should have same powers as the Director of the institute and should be accountable to Board of Directors, alone. All the other existing committees should be brought under the domain of this department and would be accountable to head of grievance department. For better understanding, a model of the hierarchy of this department is given below:

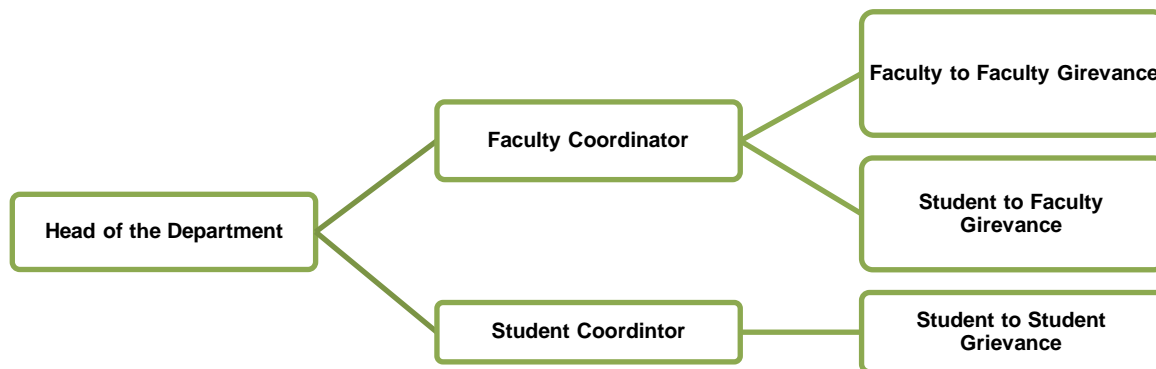


Figure 5.1: A proposed model of Grievance Department of IMSciences

This model is developed by the Researcher, based on the interviews from the respondents

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