REBUILDING LUMS FROM MEMORY, BLOCK BY BLOCK

How the O'Week Co-ordinating Committee brought the campus experience to first years

BY MOHAMMAD BASIT KHAN '22
COVER ILLUSTRATION: HAMZA NAVEED '22

How can a proper welcome to university with all its vibrant culture be emulated online, a space that has become infamous among 2020's students for bleak interactions through LCD screens? Being on campus is itself a rite of passage, but what alternative could possibly inspire the same feeling with a new batch of students who have never stepped foot on campus grounds? As the 2020 LUMS O-week Co-ordinating Committee came together in late May, the prospective juniors and seniors quickly realised that they might have to completely reinvent the wheel in preparation for a fully online fall.

Madeeha Akbar '22, Junior Coordinator and friends, Ahmed Farid Khan '21 and Saad Siddiqui '21 were looking for a fresh experience to add to the long-held tradition of orientation week, which was to go online for the very first time. Keeping in view the possibilities an online O-week could offer, Akbar came up with the idea for a virtual campus experience and suggested it in an internal committee meeting. With a go-ahead from Aadil Javed, President O-week '20, the trio got down to developing a rough image of the plan they would pitch.

However, arriving at a suitable virtual platform was a process in itself. "We basically researched into how we could do it, and obviously, there's Minecraft, but Minecraft is paid. So even if LUMS paid us to develop it, how would everyone else access it?" says Akbar. With Minecraft out of the picture, the team searched for alternatives. "The main thing was: even if it wasn't free for us to build it, it had to be free for everyone else to use it."

Exploring options of other online multiplayer games like popular first person shooter CS:GO, the group came across Roblox, a free-to-play online multiplayer game platform that, like Minecraft, allowed users to build and share their own maps, game modes, and more. For Akbar, Khan, and Siddiqui, it checked all the boxes. "So, we downloaded Roblox Studio, which is like the back-end of it," says Akbar. "We were very new to this and the very, very first thing I made was a Khokha table, just the table – no benches. It was honestly a very long process learning how to use it." However, with the help of videos and tutorials, in the span of a couple of days, the Khokha, superstore, and a small bit of the surrounding area were up and running on a server titled 'Khokha funz'.

The pitch at the next Coordinating Committee (CC) meeting was an instant hit.

Day 0: CC avatars gather for group photo at Khokha during first pitch

Everyone on the team was missing campus, according to Akbar, and the virtual Khokha was a pleasant surprise. "We were on Zoom, and that's when we realised we would need Zoom for this, because everyone was excited and shouting things like 'main idhar huun'," says Akbar, describing the scenes from the pitch.

The yet tiny Roblox map had quickly made a place for itself at the CC but now it was time to initiate the formal procedure of approval from the LUMS admin. "It took the admin a bit because we were just showing them pictures. We told them to download it but they wouldn't do that," says Akbar. The team of three continued to work, however, and in the start of June as Javed announced the approved virtual events at a CC meeting, it was official: Roblox LUMS was happening.

With Akbar and the two non-CC developers Khan and Siddiqui, the O-week Roblox team came together with Senior Coordinator, Aamna Nasir '21, and Junior Coordinators, Zehra Ahmed '22, Rajveer Ahuja '22, and Shahbaz Asif '22.

"We had been thinking of ways to give students a holistic experience with a fully virtual project," says Ahuja, "but we didn't do much with it because things like connectivity issues and incompatible devices would make people feel excluded."

However, when Ahuja and the other CC members were asked at the pitch to simply download the app on their phones, it was a game changer. "We didn't know it could be done on a phone so easily. So, we looked into the requirements again and realised if even 95 percent of people could play the game, it would be a great hit."

A group chat was quickly set-up after the first meeting and the group got to work on laying down the foundation of each building on campus. "The goal was that we make the outside very accurate," describes Akbar, "but the inside as much as possible."

With the campus shut down and out of access, visiting the buildings and getting an accurate view was impossible. "It was 100% off of memory," says Akbar. "So, we looked at old

pictures or videos for the tiny details. I remember when I was building the Pepsi Dining Centre, to get all the lawns and little bushes, there was a video one of us sent (that I used)." However, the process wasn't only about reconstructing the brick and mortar virtually – recreating the experience was important. "Saad and Rajveer did the School of Science and Engineering (SSE)," says Akbar, "and then they added the whole batch night thing to it. It was really cool, and everyone was pumped."

"I wanted to show the nightlife at LUMS and so the DJ setup at the batch night had to be in the game," Ahuja says, explaining the process. "I mainly worked on the cricket ground, the football field, the library and its lawns, and I also thought about leaving some easter eggs, so I hid a cat in the gardens at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), a deck of cards at the Khokha – just to tell people what these specific places are known for. The creative freedom was very exciting."

For Nasir, going out of bounds on the playable map resulted in a glitch that the team could shape into a fun experience. "Basically, if you went at the back of SSE, you could jump off the map and it would take your avatar to the sky. So, we played the *Zindagi Na Milegi Dubara* monologue at that point when we did the coaches' training session," says Nasir. "The idea was to make it not just another campus tour but also to have them (the first years) actually feel what it is like to be on campus. We felt adding (pop-culture references like) this would help them relate to it."

However, the project wasn't completely immune to hiccups. "We actually ended up making Khokha very big," laughs Akbar. "Everything was much bigger than what the end product was. We tried scaling it down, but it wouldn't, and we ended up having to delete all of Khokha and rebuild it again, smaller. It was still a little big but that was the point and we were like, okay this works." Using readymade objects within the game environment was also prone to bugs and viruses, according to Akbar. The team ended up losing the Academic Block fountain to a similarly broken script that threatened to disrupt the entire project. "We took a minute and said, okay let's be more cautious and every time we use something new, we have to check if the game is working," says Akbar.

O-week moments: Khokha "chillings" in full swing

With a plan to allocate each group its own server in a given time slot at the event, the team prepared to kickstart O-week with a release trailer after keeping things under wraps for months. As the events began, the Roblox team went around making sure everything ran smoothly. However, the excitement and enthusiasm they saw from the first years was overwhelming.

The CC's whatsapp groups started flooding with videos and pictures of animated Roblox avatars having a good dance session at the batch night to a group prayer at the mosque for campus reopening. For Akbar, the idea of creating the charged atmosphere of any regular O-week was more important than just the virtual campus. "Yes, we built it but it all comes back to the coaches. They were very open and told them things like this is what we do over here and this is what the culture is in this particular spot. So, it comes down to the person who's giving the tour, because for a lot of students this was the first time they were seeing anything remotely similar to campus."

Describing the contagious excitement of the participating first years, Akbar recalls a particular voice note that a coach forwarded to the group, "It was from his kid and this kid was just so hyper, and he's like this is so cool, I've seen many orientations from abroad and 'LUMS chaa gaya'. I literally showed it to my parents, I was so happy about it."

For Mariam Ali '22, this was her third O-week: first as an attending first year, then as a deputy member the year after, and this time around as a coach. "Being on-campus, the excitement levels and the connections you make is obviously a different experience. Although it's hard to replicate it entirely, this was definitely a great way to simulate it to a large extent." However, she had high hopes for an eventual welcoming on campus for the first year batch, "Hopefully, we can recreate that too if campus reopens in spring and we get to have a physical O-week!"

With the commencement of a fully online fall right after the O-week, there appears a need within the wider LUMS community for a return to the place that many called home. When asked about the future of the virtual map team built and the possibility of opening it to the wider public, Akbar says the game still lives. "We haven't really finalised it in a particular sense but it's in our minds. It's not abandoned and it will be used, for sure. Let's see."
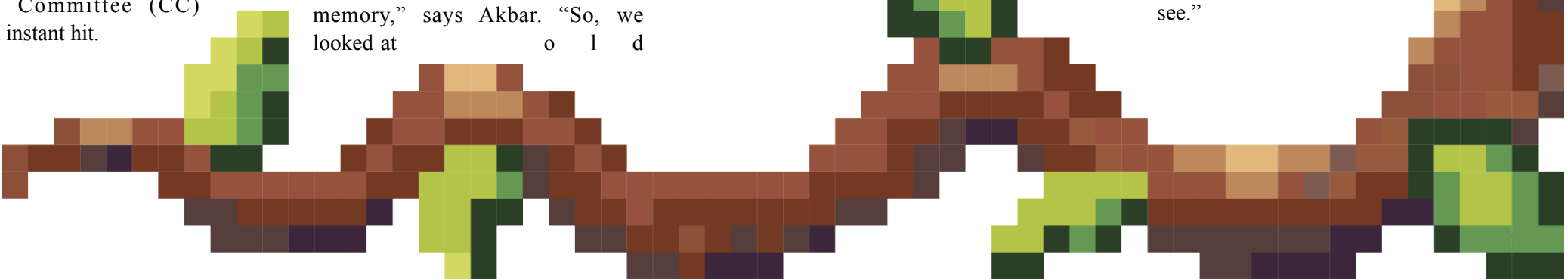
STUDENT-LED INITIATIVES TO COMBAT COVID-19

by Manahel Ayyaz Khan '22

The Covid-19 crisis brought the world to a halt. Millions were uprooted from work, college, and schools and were forced to isolate themselves. The pandemic hit Pakistan, and a weak health sector with a burgeoning population set it up to be a hotspot for corona. While the state bureaucracy fumbled to put up an adequate response, Amar Lal Ramnani'22, a student at LUMS, along with his group of high school friends, started the "Mask Banao" initiative.

"We wanted to do something for the people in this crisis and realized that Pakistan desperately needed masks," said Ramnani. It is important to note here that March and April were seeing a severe shortage in PPEs not only in Pakistan, but globally. Hence, Ramnani and his friends' initiative was well-timed.

Inspired by the "Masks for Everyone" initiative in Europe, Ramnani and his team set to work on distributing cloth masks. These, he explained, could be mass-produced and distributed to the people- first, of Karachi and then, provincewide, and it provided them with some protection against the disease. It is noteworthy that their work received coverage from some major media houses including BBC, ARY, and Dawn.

The name "Mask Banao" came simply from the idea that"mask bana saktay hain" when the friends were thinking of what to do. The masks were produced in Faisalabad and then shipped to Karachi, which was becoming a hotspot for the pandemic around March and April..

A major obstacle that the group faced was the denial of COVID-19 among the common citizens. They treated it as a hoax, and the group had to work to raise awareness through social media among the people about the genuine threat the disease posed and how masks reduced the rate of infection. Ramnani told *The Post* about the concerns their parents had due to their constant exposure to the environment outside. "It was becoming increasingly hard to convince my parents to let me continue with the work because they were concerned that I might contract the disease" said he. But as COVID-19 cases go down in Pakistan, he considers the risk worth it.

The core team consists of five people, and there is a general body of over sixty. Moving from Karachi to interior Sindh and then Punjab, they work with over twenty NGOs like Feed The Poor, Rizq, Hamdard Haath, and Spark Foundation who act as distributors. They recently partnered with Careem to have points exchanged for mask donations.

While the end goal is a vaccine, Ramnani predicts that the pandemic should be under control in Pakistan by November unless hit with a second wave. He says that the team is still on its toes as the cases rise and there is a growing anticipation of a second wave. Until then, they continue this act of community service.

WHAT LIFE ON CAMPUS IS LIKE, WITH SOPS

by Manahel Ayyaz Khan '22

After active social media, press, and in-person campaigning, the student body and the administration came together to discuss a phased reopening, with strict implementation of standard operating protocols (SOPs). A Zoom meeting, moderated by the Student Council, was held on August 21 to discuss the possibility of a hybrid reopening of the campus for the Fall semester. The result of the dialogue led to the decision of having a phased reopening with 160 students coming in the first phase. As of the second week of October, an additional 311 students have been brought back to campus. Moreover, additional undergraduate and Masters students are expected to return in November if things go well.

At the start of Fall Semester, a post on LDF by a returning student portrayed a grim picture of what on-campus life for students might look like with the implementation of SOPs. But midway into the semester, a further relaxation in these have raised hopes of having a full return to campus by Spring 2021, considering the current COVID situation, in the hearts of some, if not all.

Those that were prioritised for the first phased opening included students with internet connectivity issues, PhD students with stipends, and those with unsafe home environments.

In order to ensure utmost safety of the returning students, detailed and stringent SOP guidelines were sent to them. Most notable clauses in these included:

· *All lectures during Fall 2020 will be online.*

· *Students are not allowed to use common rooms and lifts which will remain locked.*

· *Takeaways are allowed but with contactless deliveries. The order should be placed on the table at the security gate for pick up.*

· *Visitors are only allowed in cases of emergency.*

· *Off-campus visits will only be allowed in the case of emergency and for only certain hours.*

· *If a student needs to stay overnight, upon return the student will have to stay in quarantine for 5 days and after 5 days the student will have to get tested, the cost of which will be borne by the student themselves.*

· *In order to go off-campus, students should get a request approved through OSA at least 24 hours in advance. They should provide the purpose of visit, proof of the purpose, time, duration and the place of visit.*

· *A student who feels unwell and leaves for home will not be allowed back on campus for the remainder of the semester.*

Some of these regulations caused concern among returning students, especially the ones who needed to go out for jobs in order to support themselves. Bilal Naeem'21 told *The Post* that the University had promised to provide on-campus earning opportunities to such students, but a follow-up has not been made on that yet.

There were also collective concerns about some facilities, or the lack thereof, on campus. During the first few days of accommodation, none of the outlets on campus were open, except for Jammin Java. This led to major inconvenience for students as many had to go grocery shopping, but the SOPs did not allow them to step outside campus premises—while faculty members, at that time, could. It is important to note that some students do not have friends or relatives outside that could provide delivery and food drop-off services, causing them to rely on Uber and Careem services. However, according to Zoha Batool'21, "Often the riders bring in wrong orders and for someone on a strict student budget, the service also often gets pricey."

The recent relaxation in the protocols allow the students to go off campus, with curfew at 8 p.m, so they may finish any important off-campus tasks.

Various students are reporting different experiences of their on-campus stay so far.

COVID-19 AND LUMS' FINANCIAL BLUES

by Abdul Wasay Ali Khan '22

When Dr. Arshad Ahmed claimed at the Open House earlier this summer that LUMS was losing out financially with operating online, his comments left many students bewildered. Repeatedly, skepticism in the student body has prevailed despite a recent email from Dr. Arshad, where he elaborated on the financial setbacks that come with operating online.

Many students believe that LUMS would have had to incur a lot more costs had the semester been hybrid, and has taken a cost effective approach by going online. The logistics involved with a hybrid semester account for many more expenses than they have incurred for a totally online mode.

So, what is the net effect on finances of operating online?

The LUMS administration remains steadfast in their assertion that an online semester puts immense strain on their finances.

Dr. Ahmed said, "The added expenditure that we have had to incur to adjust to an online semester, along with the lost revenue streams, have far outweighed the savings we have made by not operating on campus." He also added, "To further strangle our budgets, we have also reversed the initially planned 13% fee increase and have continued to financially support students to make LUMS more accessible than ever."

Ammar Shahid '21, who has been on the forefront of the campus reopening, argues that, "Accounting for inflation and looking at the past financial statements, I can confidently say that LUMS has saved around 300 million by not going hybrid this semester."

What are the potential savings and added expenses by going online?

Zunair Zafar, CFO of LUMS, on the matter of saving on finances owing to an online semester said, "We have saved on utilities and travel expenses of faculty, but they are far less than the expenses incurred on software licenses, servers, training workshops, student-faculty collaborations and the various other expenses incurred to ensure a smooth online shift."

Shahid '21, however, is among those students who remain skeptical of this claim, and said, "The massive amounts saved through utilities and travel expenses have offset the expenses to shift online and the numbers from the past can be used to validate that."

On the other hand, whether LUMS has incurred these expenses by spending smartly also remains ambiguous, given that some students feel that the tangible benefits for these expenses are yet to manifest.

Taha Waseem '22, displeased by the current state of the online situation, said, "It is hard to believe that LUMS spent heavily and prepared extensively for this online semester. In spite of all these supposed workshops and collaborations, we still have instructors who do not know how to mute participants on Zoom, and the quality of learning is far from on campus learning."

What are the lost revenue streams?

Zafar also stressed on how LUMS has lost out on various revenue streams by operating online. He said, "Hostel revenue has been wiped off, whereas the revenues from our 19 centers at LUMS have taken a significant hit too. REDC alone has lost out on roughly 45 million rupees due to its programs coming to a sudden halt."

Zafar also added, "Loss in terms of donors is also real. The corporate world has gone into a safe mode and that is a loss in opportunity for us. Our expectations from them for the immediate future have, for sure, gone down."

Lack of donations, however, does not have anything to do with an online semester.

In spite of all these losses, Dr. Arshad claims that the financial aid levels haven't gone down. "We still support 1 out of 3 students at LUMS despite the financial crunch."

Has the summer semester eased the financial turmoil?

While the Vice Chancellor in his email extensively talked about added expenses and lost revenues due to COVID-19, the email did not mention the financial gains that came through this year's two summer terms. According to Dr. Arshad, over 1400 students enrolled into these courses. The high enrollment in these courses was widely attributed to sudden change in fee structure, as well as to an online mode of learning.

LIFE ON CAMPUS WITH SOPS

While some students are facing major problems, others appear to be satisfied with the accommodation. "I couldn't work at home due to severe connectivity issues," said Naeem '21, "so I'm not complaining."

The students who returned in Phase 1 had to face all kinds of troubles that were surely hard for anyone to anticipate. Earlier in September, a post on LDF by a returning student on campus indicated the state of on-campus facilitation, "I have weak eye-sight and I need to get new glasses made but apparently, it isn't important enough to count as an emergency!" said Batool '21. Meanwhile, other students expressed gratitude to the university for letting them on campus and saving them hassle.

"What irritates us aren't the cage-like restrictions," said a student who wished to remain anonymous, "it's the fact that the faculty and administration themselves don't seem to be following the SOPs. It's almost as if the admin believes that the students are the only potential transmitters of the virus!"

Addressing this issue, the administration has said that during the trial period the management tried to implement some SOPs to see if they actually work not just for the students on campus, but for everyone residing at the university. "We are mindful and we do know that there appear to be different rules for different people here. Our goal is to have the same rules for everyone on campus and that is the direction we are going in. That includes students, faculty and staff as well as any visitors."

Where there seem to be a lot of mixed feelings about the SOPs and their implementation, the returning students have expressed deep gratitude towards the behavior of the general staff, many of whom have shared their numbers and offered help in case of emergencies. A faculty member offered to disburse Rs. 100,000 in order to help the students in need.

Regarding the future of these SOPs and campus reopening, the VC has said, "We are currently working on a three-step process regarding further protocols. The first will be a COVID client specific procedure where we aim to increase the availability of on and off-campus check-ups for any potential cases. The second phase will see the opening of an isolation center on campus for potential cases and those they have been in physical contact with. The third phase will be for the cases that worsen, for which they are working with two hospitals at the moment."

Finally, the VC expressed his intention to bring the student community back to LUMS in its full strength for Spring 2021 if the situation remains favorable.

Despite an unstable COVID-19 scenario, the LUMS community remains hopeful to see a full return to campus for Spring 2021.

DATA (IN)SECURITY AT LUMS

Managing Virtual Security with an Increased Digital Correspondence

by Zoha Fareed Chishti '23

"It is important to understand that malicious users always look for easy prey, first, and use social engineering to set up traps. Even if you have spent millions on hardware, one weak link internally can expose all that you have protected," says Tariq Sheikh, Senior Manager at Information Security (InfoSec) LUMS.

On September 9 2020, just a few days before the commencement of the fall semester, Ayman Fuad '24 received an email on her outlook account that was meant for another student. The email thread which contained another student's private information was mistakenly forwarded to Fuad. She told The Post, "[The email] contained a password, as well as the student's phone number and address. This is the second time something like this has happened."

Over the past few years, students at LUMS have witnessed various cases of data security breaches. Back in 2018, major files containing sensitive information (like phone numbers, addresses, CNIC and passport numbers) were leaked online. With an increased reliance on virtual correspondence in the past few weeks, students took to LUMS Discussion Forum (LDF) to share their concerns after receiving suspicious links in their outlook inboxes.

Ramsha Fatima '22, who suffered a breach on her outlook account on September 23 2020–wherein an email with a malicious link was sent to a lot of people on her contact list including the Vice Chancellor, the Dean of MGSHSS, the Coordinator of MGSHSS, multiple instructors, her student loan officers and fellow students–talked about how jarring the experience was. She said, "I discovered the breach at 6 pm, exactly when my class had started. I was constantly panicking, trying to act fast but also trying to keep up with my class. I was very afraid of the consequences." She had to track down all the recipients, send out apologies and change her security details. She further added, "I started thinking of worst-case scenarios [like] my student loan being delayed."

Madiha Tariq '20 says, "There have been multiple security breaches that were never addressed. Files were leaked with sensitive information. A private email thread
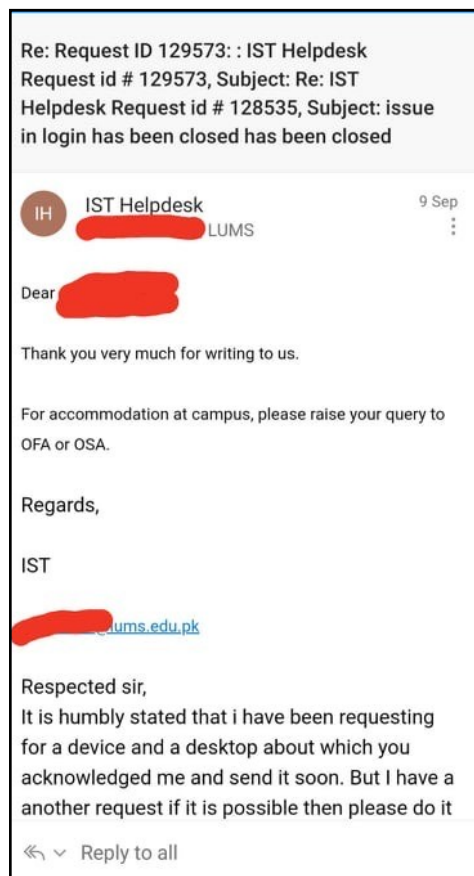
Image 1: Email correspondence between IST and another student mistakenly forwarded to Ayman Fuad

of a first-year student was forwarded to [a lot of people at] LUMS - and that too by IST!"

Tariq explained that she noticed how frequently data privacy is violated at LUMS when a discussion regarding data security broke out on the School of Science and Engineering girls' WhatsApp group. The discussion prompted Tariq to send an email to the administration to bring their attention to the severity of the situation.

In the email, Tariq wrote, "We are expected to trust the university with medical information for Zambeel medical forms and OSA petitions, with personal family matters for why a student might need campus accommodation and even with mental health issues while contacting campus counsellors." She also highlighted how the entire student body felt the impact of these breaches in her email saying, "[These] mistakes don't just affect one student; it makes every one of us afraid to share our information and many [out of fear of their private information being so carelessly leaked] won't even reach out to the university even when they most need the help." As of yet, Tariq has received no response from the administration to her email.

Amna Khan* said (about the 2018 incident), "Everyone felt violated, disappointed in lums facilities for their failure to protect sensitive data despite paying so much. Safety was completely stripped as anyone could literally come to your door."

While talking to The Post and discussing these concerns, Tariq Sheikh said, "Following the 2018 incident, Information Security (InfoSec) at LUMS was established. InfoSec communicates with the community to create awareness along with inviting industry experts to talk about the challenges [in cyber security]."

Sheikh, while talking about the 2018 data breach, explained that a malware (in one of the IST computers) had allowed a hacker to access the Zambeel database, and thereby leak the information online. He explained that LUMS had thoroughly investigated the 2018 data breach and upgraded the server infrastructure and security protocol.

With the university going online, the reliance on digital modes of communication is greater than ever before. There is a pressing need to ensure that the information students relay to the university remains safe. Sheikh explained that Infosec has planned a security model based on the current compulsion of virtual correspondence. He said, "During this year, we will be installing enterprise grade endpoint security software (antivirus/antimalware) onto all our computers, which are presently secured with Microsoft's bundled software (Windows Defender)."

"We are ready to hold simulation sessions which can teach students about cyber security." Sheikh told The Post, "But the students don't attend them. The last session we held only was attended by just 3 students." He stressed on the importance of verifying data before engaging with it and expressed the importance of students being responsible. "It is a collaborative effort—we are ready to put in the efforts to improve security, but the onus of responsibility also falls on the student."

Upon being asked for a solution, Sheikh replied, "The users need to be aware of the threats and how to avoid them. And institutions need to invest in endpoint security solutions that protect users' computers and not just server infrastructure."

*name has been changed to respect privacy

COVID-19 AND LUMS' FINANCIAL BLUES

Nubeed ur Raheem '22 took two courses over the summer semesters. "I only took these courses because of the fee structure, which was initially implemented on a per credit hour basis. Plus, an online mode meant that I had something to do over an otherwise quarantined summer at home."

Calculations by The Post suggest an inflow of around 80 million rupees in form of tuition fee during the two summer terms owing to the unprecedently high number of summer semester enrollments.

The financial aspect of a hybrid semester

While a few revenue streams have been foregone by LUMS by operating online, such as hostel revenue, and the potential increase in fees, the question of whether LUMS has benefited by not operating in a hybrid mode like IBA, Habib and many other universities all across the country, remains. While a complete online semester is pinned to the safety of the student body by the administration, the financial cushion that it provides to LUMS should not be downplayed.

A hybrid semester would mean that LUMS would have had to operate both online and on campus simultaneously which would mean added expenses for LUMS.

Dayem Rehan '22 said, "Air filters, sanitizers, sanitizing gates, along with the many other equipment needed to cater to the student body on campus has clearly been avoided by a complete online semester."

While LUMS may have felt a financial jolt like many other institutions due to the overall economic hit owing to COVID-19, it may have reduced the extent of loss by deciding against a hybrid semester. The university administration continues to argue against the widespread notion that going online helps ease the financial burden. However, a large segment of the student body remains unconvinced by this claim and continues to severely censure the administration for operating online which many students claim is 'cost effective.'

JOURNEYING INWARDS

How Artists from LUMS Found Their Creative Grounding during the Pandemic

by Syeda Aiman Zehra '22

To set the scene: we have four artists from LUMS dismembered from their natural creative repositories, four walls closing in on them in a confrontation; outside, it is perhaps Lahore, Karachi, or Islamabad—the cities our artists hail from—but it doesn't matter where we place them on the map. For them, it's been the same still picture outside their window. What matters now is what they find within.

Our first artist, Mahnoor Lali '23, has found a crossover between embroidery and painting, a realm that she devotionally weaves through at her own account by bringing in threads from her past "stitch by stitch" to "understand who and where [she] is now." The process is laborious, repetitive, and begs days of patience. "But artists say trust the process, and I have to when I can't see whether the tiny stitches are taking me to that big

picture in mind."

One such big picture hosts a brown woman whose space is invaded by a series of vines extending out to her and larger than life Monstera leaves obscuring her face. The bright red of the dress begs attention to serve an aesthetic value that stops before it can turn human—the accompanying account is a familiar rhyme of similar dehumanizing effects: "Das pattay toray… bhaiya ki dulhan kaali, so so nakhron wali." Lali comments, "Where is the woman in all of that? Why is she so removed while this rosy narrative about a rishta is being created about her?"

"It just comes down to females claiming space in any way they can," she notes about her autobiographical art. At the same time, she nods towards efforts around her that have brought a shift in women's ownership of their lived experiences through movements like the Aurat March.

Continuing in the same vein, we have Kinza Ghanchi '23, who finally got time March onwards to pick up her iPad and Apple pencil and take control over her halted reality by digitizing her emotional process. When she did so, the community she found on her social media played a big part in the active construction of her identity as an artist. "I had never seen Instagram like that, it suddenly got so political that you had to take breaks. But, everyone on there kept saying, 'don't be afraid to use your voice for what matters.'" And so, she dived straight into activist art--art that responds to or calls attention to socio-political events and movements concerning the artist in some way.

In June, the #MeToo movement raged across the country and demanded support from bystanders and change-makers and accountability from perpetrators. Ghanchi delivered where she felt she could. "I couldn't read the stories, but WhatsApp groups were talking, I got to hear my friends' perspectives. I was so angry, I had to put something out there, anything," she said. The outcome was a doodled animation of three females holding hands, sharing the same pained and hesitant expression. Surrounding them in bold blocks of color were the words, "me too".

On the 3D stick figures that make frequent appearances in her posts, Ghanchi says, "I think the little dude can become my stylistic thing, you know."

To turn attention to stylistic choices characteristic of the artist, Asim Munir '23 has an interesting journey to relate. "I attended the UX Pak Conference held by INDEX. One speaker said that an artist needs to know how to express the same thing through different mediums." Munir launched off from here: through several art forms ranging from photo manipulation and pixel art to 3D animations and typography, his work began to undertake a sense of social responsibility as he sought to break stereotypes surrounding phuppos, deconstruct the Pakistani identity in relation to minorities, and decolonize concepts part of our mundane consciousness—playing cards, advertisements, and an otherwise westernized imagined future.

Munir tells *The Post*, "After my friend told me about Arabic advertisements cultivated in the local language, I began my own research. I looked at bazaar walls for Urdu advertisements. I started writing my own thoughts in Urdu." The last few months saw Munir's instagram posts being curated wholly in his mother tongue. This was done to the effect that his artworks too started displaying an aesthetic, cultural, and linguistic switchover of our most used social media platforms from English to Urdu.

Was it the pandemic that made all these ventures possible? "Pandemic sirf aik kirdar tha, wakt diya tha. It depends on the person whether or not they want to go after something," he answers.

This sentiment is characteristic of Shiza Akhtar's '22 art as well. Her fascination with body distortions began just before the pandemic and only heightened later, first through the traditional art form of painting, and then through digitalization.

At first glance, her art page is an amalgamation of blue-skinned portraits perfected to the jawline, and a vast collection of eyes, deformed and spilling across the confinements of the posts. "I don't know how to feel about anything, so instead of thinking and letting those emotions consume you, you put them aside and enter this complete apathetic mode," Akhtar says regarding her distortion art.

One painting exhibited four faces pressed together with their eyes leaking out into each others', creating a river flowing from one end of the face to the other. "It's like the pandemic, we are in contact, but we aren't connected the same way. Kind of like being dead together," Akhtar laughs.

The discoveries and learning arcs of these artists through solitude and through art show to us that the head and the heart still exist in the same body that enables them to conduct the act of creation. With this in mind, they are now closer to their creative source than they were ever before.

EDITORIAL

ZOOM: A MIRROR INTO BODY DYSMORPHIA

by Hajrah Yousaf '22

TW: Body Dysmorphic Disorder
*All names have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Hashim describes himself as being hypnotised.
As much as he wants to stop looking into a warped version of himself in the mirror, he just can't. No matter how exhausted he gets (and exhaustion is always a given), he can't look away. The vision in the mirror is a snake charmer.

"Charmed is the wrong word," Hashim says. "It's more like being repulsed yet still transfixed. If I could look away, I would."
Hashim suffers from Body Dysmorphic Disorder, which is different from body image issues in that it comes with a lot of compulsive behaviours such as mirror checking and even self harm in the form of scratching, etc., to correct the 'defect.' It also comes with an immense amount of anxiety.
One way the symptoms of the disorder present themselves for Hashim is by prompting him to continuously check his appearance in the mirror. He admits to having spent hours looking at his reflection and criticising his weight. "There have been nights when I could have slept early, or studied, or read, or done anything at all but I spent that time in front of the mirror," he laments.
This particular symptom isn't only faced by Hashim. Zara recalls being surrounded by mirrors in her A levels classrooms. "I'm kind of obsessed with mirrors ever since I went to that school. I can't not look at myself in the mirror because I need to see myself looking pretty so that no one else can see me ugly," she says.
"The irony of the situation is that I am currently looking in the mirror, watching myself speak," she says with a laugh.
With classes being online on Zoom, Zara faces having a mirror in the classroom once more: having her video on lets her see her reflection constantly. "It's like being in class but having a huge mirror in front of you, and that is not healthy," she says. She describes being unable to relax or concentrate in class because she's always conscious of how she looks.
Unlike Hashim and Zara, Nirmeen never had issues with mirrors. Their reflection in a phone camera did seem to bother them, and the problem has been exacerbated with Zoom classes. They even recall trying to rearrange their furniture so as to catch their study-table in the best light. "I'm scared to drink water because I'm worried about how I'd look on camera. And these aren't things that you think about in a traditional class setting since you're not staring at other's faces and they're not staring at yours." This forces Nirmeen to be confronted with their appearance and also makes them feel watched, self-conscious, and distracted.
Similarly, Nimra resorts to remaining physically still for the entirety of her classes so as to counteract the anxiety she feels about being able to see herself continuously. When she's not motionless, she's usually shaking.

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER (BDD)

- A psychological disorder recognised by the DSM 5

- Characterised by a preoccupation with a perceived flaw(s) in one's appearance

- Causes emotional distress

- Can impact one's functioning

- Frequently accompanied by other mental illnesses such as OCD, anxiety, depression, and also low self-esteem

STUDENT TRIPS: WORTH IT OR NOT?

Despite COVID-19, there has been a resurgence in local tourism. Here's what students are taking into account before making the decision to travel

BY LAIBA AHMAD '22

Student Trips

Worth It!	Not!
Able to escape quarantine.	Risk of contracting COVID-19.
Can reunite and spend time with friends.	May expose at risk family members to virus upon return.
Provides a refreshing break from work.	Will not be able to escape anxieties regarding the virus.
Will generate income for local communities.	Could spread virus to local communities.

"I needed this trip to get out of the house, but that came with the risks and anxieties of Corona," said Nawal Fatima '22.

Trips hold the appeal of getting one out of the city at a time when most have not been able to escape the confines of their homes for more than a few hours a week. Sara Anwer '21, campus ambassador for tourism agency Chakoar, said "People were just so sick of being stuck at home!"

Yet, this opportunity isn't a reality for many. The very real threat of contracting the virus prevents them from travelling for their own sakes and for their family's too. "I have my grandparents at home and I would never want to put them at risk," Momina Umar '22 said.

A major factor that promoted local tourism among students was that it became a novel means of reunion at a time when most had gone months without seeing their friends. As Abdullah Nadeem '22 explained, "I had not had any physical interaction with my friends in over six months, and it was really starting to wear me down."

Others expressed that these getaways allow for a refreshing break during the semester. Anwer '21 said, "You go on this journey and you remember that there's more to life than just work."

Additionally, increased time at home often equals increased screen time, and in such a case, "travel provides a detox," according to Moeez Javed '21, CEO of tourism agency Hikerr.

However, the experience can easily turn sour. As Fatima '22 reminded us, "I can say that my experience was worth it because I hadn't gotten corona and no one in my group reported that they did either. If I hadn't been so lucky, I am sure that my opinion would be very different."

Even for those who decided to take the risk, the fears of the pandemic were inescapable. Nadeem '22 explained how necessary activities, like eating at restaurants and using public bathrooms, had become stress inducing.

Likewise, the fear of areas getting locked down, and him and his friends being locked in, was constant for Fahad Amir '22 throughout his journey with his friends.

For others, the logistics of planning excursions out of campus posed new hindrances. "You just have to plan more when you are going from home, you have so many problems to cater to," Anwar '21 elaborated.

The inability to follow SOPs becomes another obstacle. Although travel agencies enforce wearing masks, carrying sanitizer, and have fever checks, these procedures are rarely followed throughout the journey.

Freshmen have their own concerns which deter them. Though excited about the prospect to make new friends, Qirrat Ali '24 was hesitant as she would have to live with people she had not met in person yet. Additionally, she felt that this would decrease her chances of contracting the virus. Similarly, Humairaa Moazzam '24 simply would not feel safe with a private agency, one of the only options available as official society trips remain limited. *The Post* reached out to LAS for a comment on their inability to offer student trips this semester, but has not reached a response as of yet.

While some are obstructed from going, others simply may not desire to go. Javed '21 believes that seniors will prefer to make up for lost time on campus instead upon reopening.

Furthermore, those who actively argue against vacationing in far off areas believe we put local communities at risk by doing so. "Most people in these areas don't even have access to adequate health facilities," claimed Umar '22.

However, it may be that the bigger problem is actually us not going, given that tourism is mainly their bread and butter, as Asfandyar Qadri '19, founder of travel agency Triptician, said.

It is difficult for there to be a definite answer to whether to go on a student trip or not. This is especially so as mainstream COVID-19 coverage continues to send mixed signals, with many like Nadeem '22 believe that everything has gone back to normal, while others like Umar '22 claim that COVID-19 is again on the rise.

The fact that students have become so torn regarding the decision proves that student trips cannot go back to the way they used to be. Though not like before, the restarting of tourism has proved that as long as trips are going, people will, too, as the new face of student trips continues to evolve with the progressing situation.

ZOOM: BODY DYSMORPHIA

Under these conditions, going to class is an ordeal for her, and she is unable to reap many of the benefits of her education.This particular uneasiness isn't limited to students, either. Rahima is an alumnus and often uses Microsoft Teams for her work meetings. She usually keeps her video off. However, it is required at times. "I try to stay as still as possible and hope to not catch any attention," she admits, a tactic similar to Nimra's. "I'm not able to concentrate on the meeting at all, that's for sure," she replies, when asked about whether it affects her functioning. Rahima suspects her BDD is related to her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and that it makes some of her other conditions, including anxiety and depression, even worse.

While some readers may be inclined to suggest the 'hide self-view option' on Zoom. However, conversations with these people reveal that this isn't a great solution and can even make the problem worse. "I can't turn self-view off because I can't not look at myself," Zara explains. "If I don't know what I look like, but everyone else sees me not looking beautiful, that is not okay with me. Real life is bigger, there's a lot to look at. On Zoom it's just your face and your classmates' faces". In this way, this option adds to her anxiety. Similarly, Nimra recalls constantly imagining what she looks like even when she has the 'hide self-view' option enabled.

More individuals than we think are suffering through online classes (and meetings) in various ways. These problems aren't discussed often because of the sufferer's reluctance to do so. Yet, we must have those conversations and bring awareness to the problem. This is the first step that we can take in moving forward and coming up with solutions.

Moreover,

instructors being mindful of these symptoms would also alleviate some of the sufferers' anxiety.
Zoom is far from the perfect fix to the problem of online classes, as these conversations show. Adding to it, the fact that some instructors make it worse, the effects on students are devastating.

Note: If you or anyone you know is currently struggling with symptoms of BDD, please reach out to student.counselling@lums.edu.pk.

BDD SYMPTOMS
- Mirror checking
- Mirror avoidance
- Comparing appearance with that of others
- Excessive grooming
- Lack of desire to socialise
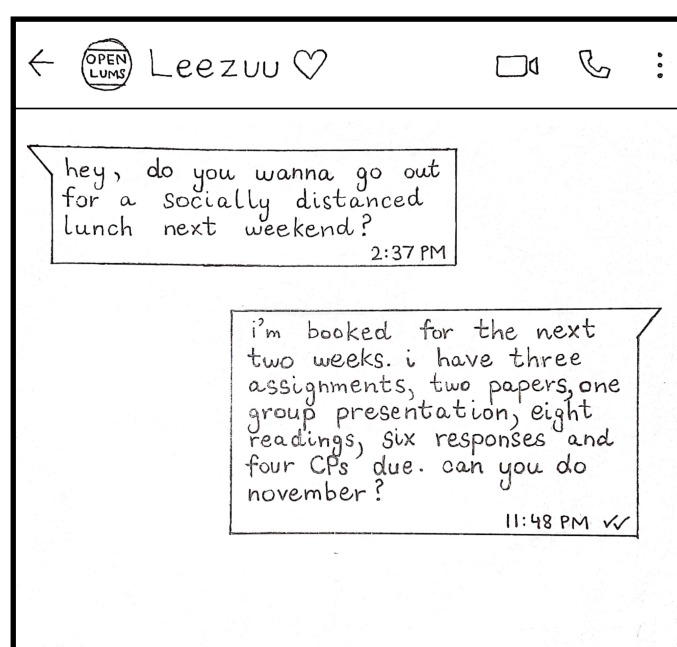- Anxiety
- Depression

If it matters to you, it matters to us.

COMICS

← OPEN LUMS Leezuu ♡

hey, do you wanna go out for a socially distanced lunch next weekend?
2:37 PM

i'm booked for the next two weeks. i have three assignments, two papers, one group presentation, eight readings, six responses and four CPs due. can you do november?
11:48 PM ✓✓

by Munema Zahid '24

دل میں اک لہر سی اٹھی ہے ابھی
کوئی تازہ ہوا چلی ہے ابھی

وقت اچھا بھی آئے گا ناصر
غم نہ کر زندگی پڑی ہے ابھی

ناصر کاظمی