

Advising Hala Ali

-----Original Message-----

From: hala ali
Sent: 14 September 2004 12:22
To: Wakeford, John
Subject: Overseas Ph.D student

Dear Dr Wakeford

It's my pleasure to contact you. I had a friend who knows you personally and she encouraged me to contact you for consultation regarding my PhD study in the UK. Actually you know that many students like me are mentally exhausted from that psychological stress but they usually prefer not to raise this issue to avoid further troubles. This might explain why I did not use my real E-mail or my real name in this E-mail.

I've completed 4 years now in my study in England and I was expected to submit before this month (Sept, 2004) unfortunately the speed of revising my thesis by the main and second supervisors seems not very helpful & I applied for visa extension for 6 months to get it done, still I feel that infrequent meetings with them might delay my submission again and again..... I keep E-mailing both of them & the main supervisor is always busy and could not select an external examiner for me until now although I was asking him for that long time ago. I suggested to invite a suitable one from abroad to examine me as there are no many people in this speciality here in UK & he said that the university wont accept this as it will cost a lot.

I suggested many people but he saw them as not appropriate because they might be against our approach in this thesis don't know how to convince him that the time is running and I was sponsored by my government until last month only (4 years funding only) regardless I completed the thesis or not, so the time now means money and I can't afford staying in this country without funding & without job as well.

The second supervisor is only concerned with the statistical issues. I keep asking her to help me but her phone is always on the voice mail and she was temporarily based in the university (part-time research fellow) now she is expected to be away and I can't catch her at all.

I keep telling my main supervisor that he selected this person to supervise me and help me, but he was usually asking her to advise only and not to work on my behalf as I should do things by myself (although you know that every one is not perfect in statistics and if the problem related to some calculation, she must be able to sort it out for me in one session) still I feel they agreed together not to get it done now, as both of them are busy ... !!

I'm under so much pressure and I need your advice please.

I look forward to hear from you
Best regards

Q1 List the main issues that have arisen here

Q2 Discuss the main points members of your team would make in a reply to Hala Ali

Wakeford, John wrote:

Dear 'Hala ali',

Thank you for emailing me about this serious matter. Here is my view:

Given the picture as you paint it, I think that you are being very reasonable in your requests. I think you should identify a list of your precise needs: advice, appointment of examiner etc with deadlines and email both supervisors and say that, if these matters are not sorted, you will have to get help from elsewhere.

You should also get hold of the Postgraduate Handbook and look at the section on duties of supervisors, and how examiners are appointed, and refer them to it. You should also see what the procedures are for making a complaint if they do not resolve the matter to your satisfaction. Usually, if your supervisor/s is/are not helpful, you are expected to see the Postgraduate Tutor in the department, then if necessary the Head of the Department.

Again, be very precise in your requests. Make it clear that you will take the matter further if there is not a timely and satisfactory resolution to these issues.

If you agree, I would like to add this email to my file for using, without identification, in training postgraduates and supervisors. Would that be OK?

Come back to me if you want more...

Good luck.

John

Q1 Discuss John Wakeford's response

Q2 Have you any alternative or additional points that should be included in the reply?

Dear Dr Wakeford

Many thanks for your reply. Your advices are greatly appreciated, unfortunately, I've tried most of it before and it seems that my Boss, is strong enough to defend whatever in his mind.

In the 2nd year he started to appoint this second supervisor to my thesis & I was not happy to have a supervisor specialised in Statistics (which is so far from my speciality) and this will be criticised from the committee who will up-grade me to a lecturer in my university back-home) and my supervisor insisted that we need the statistician in this study as he and me are not strong enough in statistics & at this time, I explained again and again until I felt fed up ... I went to the postgraduate research office for advice, they referred me to the postgraduate tutor of the school, and as I expected, she can't do any thing more than listening to me & then get back to my supervisor (same circle, I've to go around it all the time) but it made it worth than before (when he feels that I'm not happy with his decisions

Actually, I addressed the problem of time & lack of funding in front of him many times to urge him to help me get it done. At this time he managed to revise 4 chapters to me in one week. Again, he became busy and can't get in touch with 2nd supervisor to ask her to help me or to find someone else to help me. He only can see me, once per month or may be after 6 weeks which delay my work more and more !!

How to convince him to get the external examiner for me very soon without raising any troubles with him. I can't say that I will raise this issue to the school because I might get in trouble with him for ever & I've bad example from one of the Arabian colleagues in different department whose supervisor was Indian as well & who decided not to give her this PhD she went back home with a master only after a long story known to every body in the British community ...

could u advise me with something different to get him more cooperative with me sorry if I could not use the right expressions for such situations ...

Many thanks ... look forward to hear from u again

Q1 How would you respond?

John Wakeford:

Oh dear. It seems that you have a difficult and unenviable choice: either trying to influence your supervisor (who seems to be immune to such influence) or going above him (which could alienate him further).

On supervision: have you contact with anyone other than him who could give you feedback on your draft material? Even if they are at another university? They don't need to be the world expert, merely know enough to go through your work to see if it hangs together as a thesis.

On the appointment of examiners. I think another approach to the postgrad office - who will want to see you submit, if only for their statistics, with a formal written request that the examiners be appointed forthwith. Have you approached the Students Union? They might advise and even accompany you at your meeting with the official. But, again, look up the exact regulations about the appointment of examiners. The official will be most disturbed if procedures are not being followed.

You could also call or email the Office of Independent Adjudication www.oiahe.org.uk telephone 01189559099 who say that they are willing to advise.

Good luck

John

Q1 Discuss this advice

Q2 Are there any other sources of help to whom he could turn?

Dear Dr Wakeford, John

Thanks for your E-mail. After discussing my problem with my supervisor face to face (to let him know that I'm really angry with him & I'm very worry more than before) he started to get an external examiner for me but did not confirm with him yet.

At that meeting (one week ago) he made it clear to me that he can only exchange documents with me via E-mail to revise it for me & he has no time at all in his diary until the middle of November, therefore I got more angry & started to think about raising the issue to the school postgraduate tutor (on a friendly basis) not on official basis to avoid having more troubles with him.

She advised me to wait for few days until she speaks to him and listen to his point of view, then she will get back to me with the best thing that she can do for me. I am still waiting but I felt when he learned that I visited the postgraduate tutor in her office, he started to E-mail me every day to say that he is happy with my work & encouraging me to go forward.

Although the whole problem as every one understands is focused in the time pressure for me & lack of funding to stay in this country for longer time ... !!!

Let's see what will happen

Thanks for your concern & I will let you know what will happen in the near future. Regards

Q1 Discuss this response and Hala Ali's strategy

Q2 Suggest any further advice you would give at this stage

John Wakeford

Well done. Keep on with this strategy if it's working... And keep me in touch if it's not. Best
John

....six weeks later

"Wakeford, John" wrote:

Dear Hala Ali,

How are things going now? Have you sorted out your problems?

Can I have permission to use your problem in discussion with new postgraduate students and their supervisors? Anonymously of course.

Best wishes

John

Dear Dr **Wakeford, John**

Yes sure you can use it as an example of international postgraduate students who are suffering in their study ... could you also underline the word (those from Arabian Muslim countries) please as I believe it is one of the strong factors affecting them & I'm one of them

I'm doing well ... things going slowly but at least still going. After raising the issue to the postgraduate tutor, and she had a word with him, my supervisor convinced her that he is so busy and that I also should be busy with the statistician who arranged 2 meetings in this month for me.

I made it clear for the man who will help in statistics that I should not be ashamed that I'm not perfect in statistics and it could be sorted out by any one who will get paid for this job, I

should not stop at this point just waiting and waiting for the statistical issues to be sorted or not ...

My supervisor is aware that I only extended my visa in this country until March 2005 and still insist that I can't submit at christmas time !!!!!!!!

Any way I'll keep trying

Thanks

Team task

On the acetate provided list the main lessons here for

- 1. Postgraduate research students**
- 2. Supervisors**
- 3. Institutions**