



# Usama Waheed

**Adjunct Faculty, MGSHSS**

## Nomination Portfolio

Vice Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence

15th April 2023

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## Nomination letter

Dear Awards Committee,

I am writing this letter to nominate Usama Waheed for the Vice Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence. I have had the privilege to be his student and witness his outstanding contributions to teaching, learning, and the personal growth of students. In my four years at LUMS, after having studied under thirty-five instructors, I can confidently and positively state that Sir Usama is one of, if not the most, innovative, impactful, and brilliant instructors I have come across. This nomination will seek to prove just that.

Sir Usama is committed to innovation. He will never teach a course the same way twice - only better. Within the classroom, his innovation peaks through the content, the graded components, and the class participation. Every semester, he spends hours revisiting, revising, and adding to the course syllabus to make it come to life for the students. The concepts he teaches are taught in a way that they are easily digested - be it through interactive class activities, personal experiences, docu-series, class field trips, or his classic black slides. During COVID, when we were all plagued (pun unintended) with online classes, he released podcasts of his Zoom classes for students conversely affected by higher screen times. His emphasis on practical and self-reflective components is especially important with the invention of ChatGPT; a tool that can pass an entire MBA degree. The instruments Sir Usama designs are not ones that students can hack using an AI based model, but instead require students to bring parts of themselves in their essays.

The concepts Sir Usama teaches are made all the more memorable by his innovative additional CP component: memes. From the Hook Model to Eleanor's Rule of Three to Pavlov's Dog, each psychological concept was simplified and at the tip of our fingers through the memes we made for class. Those who were absent or did not understand the concept went through the class reading for context, if only to partake in the shared joy.

The graded components Sir Usama gives us are immensely innovative in their own right. Whether we are writing a paper on the many 'selves' we wear each day or how two days without social media feel like, the assignments are such that they stay with you long after you finish the course. They are incredibly reflective, to the point where students are compelled to look twenty years into their past to make sense of a decision they made today, all tracing back to a psychological theory we studied in class that makes layers of more sense now that it is applied. No one I know approached the assignments like 'work' - they approached them as hills they were eager to scale to learn more about themselves, with class concepts acting as guides and Sir Usama as the wind beneath our wings.

His teaching pedagogy is brilliant, but it is truly the interactions that students have with Sir Usama outside the classroom that set him apart from other instructors. He is incredibly generous with his time; we can walk in unannounced any day to talk about our greatest life plans, smallest worries, biggest mistakes, or grandest achievements, and he would listen. He would have the right words and advice for each situation. You could not walk out of his office without feeling lighter, even on the heaviest of days. His interactions outside the classroom made us want to be better students inside the class and better humans out of it.

Sir Usama has redefined what brilliant instructors should be like for me. From teaching pedagogy to innovative content to mentoring, Sir Usama goes above and beyond to leave his mark as an educator, a counselor, and a friend. He personally invests in his students and his work, and this shows in his consistently high course evaluation records and the countless notes that line his office wall. I could have a dictionary open next to me, and still run out of words to describe how Sir Usama has impacted the LUMS journey of countless students so profoundly. I feel privileged to have been one of his students and hope that the Committee does his contributions justice through the VC's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Ahmed Jarar Abbasi, Class of 2023

# Usama Waheed

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## EDUCATION

- New York University** 2018  
M.A. Social & Consumer Psychology | GPA **3.9** New York, NY  
Coursework: Innovation & Design, Consumer Research, Statistics, Psychology of Social Media, Consumer Behavior
- Lahore University of Management Sciences** 2016  
BSc. Management Sciences | GPA **3.7, Graduating Award of Distinction** Lahore, PK  
Coursework: Data Analytics, Statistics, Quantitative Research, Decision Analysis, Spreadsheet Modelling, Marketing

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Teaching Faculty** Jan 2020 – present  
Lahore University of Management Sciences Lahore, PK
- Develop and teach courses in psychology and behavioral economics
  - Lecturing on topics including **heuristics, UX research, psychology of tech**, social media, and behavioral design
- Co-founder & UX Research Lead** Apr 2020 – present  
dli5 Lahore, PK  
*[full-time researcher, part-time designer at a product studio that aims to democratize UX knowledge]*
- Founded a product & design agency to help clients with **user research**, audits, heuristic evaluations, and **UX design**
  - Lead UX research efforts for clients across multiple verticals to help inform product design decisions
  - Build mockups and wireframes to hand off to designers (and occasionally dabble with hi-fidelity designs)
  - Develop publicly available case studies that highlight UX best practices, making them accessible and actionable
- UX Consultant** Jan 2020 – Apr 2020  
Airlift Technologies Lahore, PK  
*[UX team of one at a smart bus service building towards becoming Uber for public transport]*
- Built and evangelized for a culture of research-driven design to improve UI/UX across three products
  - Conducted **contextual inquiries** with drivers to gather insights that **improved driver happiness and NPS scores**
  - Experimented with research methodologies including **interviews, focus groups, surveys, usability tests** and **card sorts**
  - Developed user stories and **designed wireframes** to push insights into production and development
- Graduate Research Assistant** Oct 2018 – Oct 2019  
New York University New York, NY
- Conducted literature reviews for studies on Instagram influencers and Amazon reviewers to inform research design
- Instructional Design Consultant** Mar 2018 – Feb 2019  
World Economic Forum New York, NY
- Designed training module for employees to use internal tools; involved video design and content strategy
- Chief of Ideas** May 2015 – Jan 2017  
MARO Tandoors Lahore, PK  
*[early team member in research & branding role at a food startup selling innovative naans]*
- Drove **5x growth in revenue** by researching and executing disruptive advertising strategies
  - Conducted user journey research to inform design decisions for **3 digital** and **2 physical** touchpoints
  - Analyzed campaign data using **qualitative and quantitative methods** to extract insights for future campaigns

## Teaching philosophy

Every student interested in studying Psychology at LUMS starts off by taking an introductory course called Human Behavior. Much like this aptly-titled foundational course, my teaching philosophy is inspired by those two words:

**Human**, as in treating students with respect and empathy;

**Behavior**, as in encouraging them to introspect and grow.

I have had the privilege of being exposed to a variety of subject matters during my education. While my primary training has been in Psychology from New York University, I have also had the opportunity to study topics in marketing, data analytics, design, and qualitative research across three different universities. Throughout these experiences, one belief has remained constant:

**The mark of a truly high quality education is that it inspires behavioral change for the better.**

This has proved transformative in my own life, and my teaching philosophy revolves around **reflection**, **communication**, and **feedback** to enable my students to do the same.

**Reflection**, I believe, is the first step to changing and improving your own behaviour.

To encourage this, all of my courses have a number of introspective assignments: those that ask students to think about their thoughts - and their actions - and explain how they could do better knowing what they know now. It is easy to externalize learning: to think of Psychology as something that happens to others, not to us. But I challenge students to look inwards - to point fingers at themselves - and tell me how *they* have personally been affected by these ideas; and how they can use them in everyday life.

Open, free-flowing **communication** is the next ingredient in behaviour change.

Every student should have the space to talk about their reflections and understand themselves. I make it a point to be generous with my time: no email should go unanswered; no request for help should be turned down; and no conversation should be cut short. When students are given this opportunity to express themselves, they are better able to internalize the ideas I teach: to think of the world beyond their individual bubbles and become better versions of themselves.

Finally, meaningful **feedback** is important for keeping on track in this process.

For most assignments, I give personalized, individualized feedback. The prompts for my assignments are often open-ended and students may interpret them differently according to their own life experiences. Individual attention is necessary to walk them through how they can do better. This helps each student improve as individuals, not just as part a collective.


While I stress upon my students to self-reflect and improve, I certainly wouldn't be practicing what I preach if I didn't join them in this endeavour myself.

To enable my own self-reflection and improvement, I solicit feedback from students and colleagues several times a semester. I involve my students in both the initial design of the course, as well as subsequent modifications to it. During this process, I try to lead by example of how feedback can be acted upon to bring about change - much like what I demand from my students.

When these systems of reflection, communication, and feedback work in harmony, only then can **behaviour change** occur naturally. And I have observed this outcome across multiple dimensions: professionally, I see students start thinking about their surroundings from a different mindset, and sharing course learnings from their daily lives long after they have graduated. Personally, I see them develop new habits, get rid of old ones, and change how they interact with the people around them,

My hope is that by fostering a relationship with students that nurtures this change, they can become not just excellent scholars of Psychology, but also excellent human beings along the way.

## Evidence

Students are the most important component of any learning environment, so I would like to use their words to vouch for my methods. I will primarily quote anonymously collected student feedback, indicated with a  icon.

### 1: Assessments

Given that my underlying goal is to encourage introspection and behavior change, as well as have real-world implications for learning, I have found that standard quizzes and exams tend not to be sufficient in the pursuit of this philosophy. I present my course content in a way that helps students internalize the learning so that 5 years later, they can still recall the material as seen in everyday life. To match this learning experience, my assessments have students reflect on course content as applied to their own behavior; or have them go out and experience the world around them to spot course concepts.

For example, in my **Psychology of Technology** course, we study a module on social media addiction. I then ask students to abstain from social media for 36 hours, and reflect upon what they learned about themselves.


In my **Decision Behavior course**, we study biases that affect decision-making, and methods to correct for them. While it is easy to find fault in other peoples' decision-making, my quizzes ask for students to evaluate their own mistakes. The image on the right is one such quiz question, for example.


**Q1.** We've covered a handful of biases by this point. Pick any that you most resonate with and tell me about:


- i) a past situation in which you now recognize that your decision-making was affected by a bias. Why do you think you were a victim of this bias in this situation? What would you have done differently in hindsight? [5]
- ii) a future situation in which you think - despite now being aware of these biases - that you will *still* fall prey to it anyway. Why do you think this would happen despite your new-found awareness? [5]

In my **Consumer Psychology** course, I ask students to go to a shop or restaurant, and conduct an 'experience audit' of what the outlet is doing well and what could be improved.

Here's student feedback that indicates the effectiveness of these assessments:

 *I loved this course and it helped me LITERALLY today a while ago dealing with something so I just want to thank you...for giving us something we can actually apply in our lives to become better versions of ourselves or atleast try to.*

 *This has honestly been such an amazing experience and I didn't think I would end up learning so much about myself and about the way things function in the real world than I did by taking 2 courses with you.*

 *I've literally taught my family everything I learnt in this course because I would share all my assignments with them since I found them so interesting*

Here are some other innovative assignments from my courses:

Assignment	Purpose
<b>The 'Who am I?' paper</b> Psychology of Technology	Students analyze their own Facebook and Instagram profiles to understand why they have different digital self-presentations on each platform
<b>Subculture Ethnography</b> Consumer Psychology	Engaging in an unfamiliar subculture for an entire semester, to understand why people have different consumer preferences. Topics have ranged from yoga to calligraphy
<b>The Evil Final Project</b> Psychology of Technology	Creating a mock 'evil' app that is designed to be addictive for users, in order to understand how we fall prey to real-life versions of these addictive apps

### 2: Communication

As part of my teaching, I encourage students to have frequent, informal communication so they can learn directly from me. For this, I first have to break down traditional student-teacher power dynamics to put them at ease.

To achieve this, I start by setting up a **Slack workspace** (an instant messaging tool) for my courses. Initially, this was brought about because of online classes to provide students with a shared space to feel more connected to each other; now it is a regular feature of all of my courses. Slack avoids the laborious process of typing out a formal email, so students are able to ask the smallest of questions, talk more naturally, and can expect faster responses.

*... You've been insanely helpful and always just a message away. I've never encountered an instructor at LUMS that's been so approachable and helpful. Literally 0 complaints.*

*I also loved that you were very responsive with email replies and especially the slack messages. I didn't have to wait long to hear back from you and that really helped a lot because my work wasn't put to a stop.*

I feel strongly about deep learning happening outside of the classroom, in a more personalized format. In my **office hours**, students can expect individualized feedback, and the exchange of ideas on non-course related topics. Given the introspective nature of my courses, I noticed that students often had trouble articulating their thoughts. Free-flowing conversations in office hours helped them voice their thoughts, after which they were better able to put those thoughts on paper. Occasionally I even have walking office hours - where I take a walk around campus and any student can join in to have an informal chat. This allows them to share things at their own pace and comfort level, and the extra help motivates them to put in more effort, leading to high-quality work that I can be proud of.

*I started utilizing [office hours] midway through the semester and the amount of help, support, and insight I got was insane.*

*i kind of felt i need to do well in the course to meet his expectations. So the friendliness is quite optimal, i doesn't lead to students taking the course work for granted*

*Additionally, your ability to check up on people individually and... just having casual chats makes you stand out... I also think that individual feedback, criticisms, praise is a key part of teaching that is so overlooked here at Lums. So thank you for that.*

All this means that I can simplify the student-teacher power dynamics and allow for better communication:

*[He] Relate to the students understand them and do not have extra unnecessary boundaries that may scare off students*

*He's great at overcoming the student-professor barrier with the most ideal balance, so students think he's cool and approachable but they also look up to him and fear his disapproval.*

*the fact that you were not only an instructor, but also a friend with whom I could relate with and could talk with about totally random stuff that almost no one else would care about was truly special.*

### 3: In-class experience

While the above comments refer specifically to out-of-class interactions, the tone is set inside the classroom.

For the in-class experience, I try to have students talk to me as an equal. I make it a point to listen to every student's thoughts without interrupting them, which encourages even those who don't normally participate to express their thoughts without fear of judgment. Since my teaching philosophy involves reflection, I am usually the first to demonstrate this by narrating my own personal experiences. This nudges the students to open up with examples from their own lives, which creates a more permanent impact than textbook examples.

*A big factor that made me enjoy this course so much was how the instructor was very encouraging towards all students. They acknowledged and welcomed all kinds of input in class discussions and never made anyone feel small or dumb. As someone who's struggled a lot with spoken CP, this was very refreshing and even led me to speak up more in other courses.*

*Also loved how most of the examples we saw were actually from the Instructor himself, that is PASSION. Allow for levity and learning through pop culture references and real life examples.*

*Teaching style wasn't intimidating/made it easier to interact. Allows people to speak up more without hesitation or judgment*





## 4: Giving feedback

As a qualitative researcher, I am interested in understanding the *why* behind data. So I extend this courtesy to my students by offering them detailed, personalized feedback on their assignments. Each student has different capabilities, so it is important for me to tell them exactly what *they* could do better, instead of as a collective class.

Sometimes, I *only* give qualitative feedback and withhold assignment marks - which helps students move away from the focus on grades and instead maximize their learning. This way, every student - regardless of how well they've actually done - comes to me to understand where they went wrong - and more importantly, what they did right.

With this constant feedback, I notice that students also start putting in more of themselves in their coursework. It forms a reciprocal relationship: when they know that the instructor is willing to put in the hours needed to coach them to improve, they often respond by going well above and beyond my expectations as well.

 *detailed feedback (couldn't have done the project as I did without the feedback from you which helped me see my mistakes. Had it been another courses, I would just have submitted it without knowing my mistakes and the instructor wouldn't have told either, just would given marks so the feedback was highly appreciated*

 *CONSTANT FEEDBACK. Doesn't show you marks, to degrade you, rather you have hope till end to do the best in course as the feedback I got for reflection one suggested me to improve areas and not that I have got 5/10 or 6/10.*

## 5: Receiving feedback

### Seeking feedback

Student feedback is the single-most important component of my self-improvement, and Zambel course evaluations (shown right, **average instructor score 4.87**) provide me with a high-level understanding of how students feel about the course.

While these numbers are nice to look at, they come in too late for me to change the on-going course. They also don't tell me anything about *why* my courses are highly rated. So to supplement this, I send out custom-designed anonymous, qualitative feedback forms about 2 times a semester.

More recently, I have also held **focus groups** with former students to understand their perspectives on improving the course with the benefit of hindsight.


Semester	Course name	Instructor	Course	Process
Spring 2020	PSY 313 Psychology of Technology	4.97	4.92	4.66
Fall 2020	PSY 313 Psychology of Technology	4.88	4.83	4.39
Spring 2021	DISC 323 Decision Behavior S1	4.74	4.72	4.29
Spring 2021	DISC 323 Decision Behavior S2	4.92	4.82	4.35
Fall 2021	PSY 203 Consumer Psychology	4.93	4.93	4.45
Fall 2021	PSY 313 Psychology of Technology	4.95	4.88	4.41
Spring 2022	PSY 100 Human Behavior	4.84	4.79	4.25
Spring 2022	PSY 203 Consumer Psychology	4.79	4.77	4.35
Fall 2022	DISC 323 Decision Behavior	4.78	4.81	4.28
Fall 2022	PSY 313 Psychology of Technology	4.91	4.92	4.36

To gain an outsider perspective, I often invite friends and colleagues to sit in on some of my classes to provide me with **third-party feedback** that students may not be able to articulate. This is helpful in understanding how someone feels about the class environment having had no prior exposure to the content.

I have also made a habit of **auditing** colleagues' classes to observe what they're doing well, and how students engage differently in their classes. To date, I have attended over 35 sessions from seven different colleagues at LUMS, in courses ranging from psychology to statistics to even the MBA program.

### Incorporating feedback

I use these feedback processes to update my course and teaching methods in real time, as well as making year-on-year improvements. For example, this is a student comment from my first ever semester:

 *maybe the pitch / tone of your voice can be a little louder. This would ensure students to remain continually engaged. A flat tone can cause the class to get a little boring*



And from a year later:

*You're casual and u teach in a conversation like manner. You put in sooooo much effort to teach and we can see that when we don't get bored for a second during class. Its like learning from a senior student instead of an instructor and thats v cool.*

Some other improvements that have come from these feedback collection mechanisms:

- Changing every deadline to fall on a Sunday by asking students about their work patterns and preferences
- Scrapping assignments that students did not find engaging or valuable
- Adding industry-relevant projects suggested by students who have graduated and gained work experience
- Being aware of when student attention starts to drop and timing class breaks and activities to counter this
- Asking students which topics they would have liked to study but didn't, then including them next time

## 6: Teaching Innovations

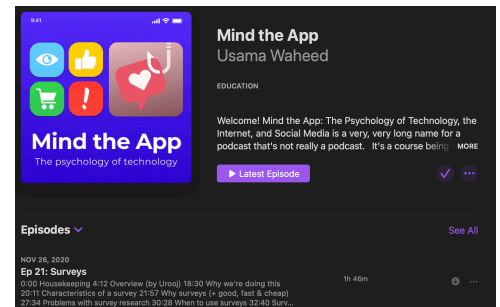
### New course development

I have introduced two new courses in a Psychology department that often struggles with offering course in applied psychology: [PSY 313: Mind the App - The Psychology of Technology](#); and PSY 306: Consumer Psychology. Both aim to go beyond the theoretical and show how psychological concepts are applied in technology and marketing.

### Student hosts and podcasts

During the online semesters, I introduced the concept of student hosts. Each class would be 'hosted' by a student, where they would introduce themselves, be in charge of discussions, be the designated note-taker for that session, and even get to play their choice of music during the breaks. These sessions were recorded and the audio uploaded to podcast platforms (shown right), so students could listen to the lectures on-the-go without increasing their screen time.

Because each session had a new host to look forward to, student engagement rose massively, and I later observed a couple of colleagues incorporating the idea into their own classes.



### Co-designing courses

Another practice I have adopted is to use students as partners and co-creators, to seek their help in course design. I have students decide (within reason) what components they'd be happy with, choose deadlines that fit their schedules, and suggest topics that they'd like to study. I have seen this process gives my students more autonomy, and subsequently they become more invested in the outcome of the course because they are able to set higher standards for themselves, chosen by themselves.

One of my more recent innovations has also involved students co-grading with me: to assign the final CP scores, I take the average of my own assessed score, the TA's score, and students self-assessing their score. This encourages transparency and leads to better participation, since students know they will be rewarded for their efforts.

### Memes as a learning tool

To inject a bit of light-heartedness into the class experience, I have a dedicated memes channel on Slack. While the intention is to make the course less daunting, it comes with the dual benefits of becoming a tool to illustrate course concepts that can be hard to visualize, and to encourage students to attend class to partake in the humor.

I also host Meme of the Month awards (pictured right) to reward the considerable effort students put in to create memes.

*...the memes have been extremely helpful in remembering certain concepts.*

*...this channel [memes] keeps killing me with fomo :(( wanna know what these memes mean*

*Adding memes to slide decks - really helped with remembering concepts 'cause quick associations*



## Use of Notion

For some of my courses, I have students do their projects on Notion (shown right) - a software similar to Google Docs. As they add new learnings to their documents, I comment in real-time to nudge them in the right direction. Notion also allows everyone to see everyone else's projects; this practically eliminates cheating and instead encourages students to seek inspiration from each other and reach for higher benchmarks of quality.

Project List	Author	Last Edited
Calligraphy	Adeera & Anoocha	March 24, 2023
Kitty Parties	Asha Asmr	March 18, 2023
Perfumes	Amna Shahid	March 13, 2023
Horse Riding	Asher Javaid & M. Ibrahim	April 6, 2023 1:0
Makeup	Ayman Rizwan	February 22, 202
Tarot Readings	Eisha Zaman	February 22, 202
Tekken	Eman Nadeem	March 19, 2023

## Co-working with students

For my Consumer Psychology final, students have to immerse themselves in a subculture for the duration of the semester and write an ethnography. To show them how I would do it, I have them pick a topic for me and I do the exact same project as them. Using this 'do as I do' instead of 'do as I say' approach, students can learn from my thought process, and as well as be inspired: if an instructor can dedicate time to doing the project, so can they.

## Live case studies

In my Decision Behavior course, instead of giving traditional case studies about foreign companies, I introduced an innovative series of guest sessions where the speakers would narrate a problem from their lives, and decisions they had to make - creating a live case study that students could relate to. Many a student came to me afterwards saying they could see themselves in the shoes of the guests since they were reflecting on similar problems in their lives.

## 7: Mentorship and professional development

As someone who also works in applied psychology, I bring in examples from my work to show students the gap between theory and practice. I invite guest speakers to class to show them how their course projects are applied in the real world. This also gives them a chance to network with the guests, leading to referrals and jobs. This is particularly gratifying, because Psychology courses aren't usually credited with being selling points in landing jobs.

*I've already said in other answers but the more I saw the actual implication and application of everything that we were studying the better it was for me. And I personally haven't seen this in other courses before so it really made the difference and impact stand out.*

*Thought I should let you know that I got offered a product management role (while having zero UX skills) solely because of Mind App... I just got through all the stages by talking about the project. Thank you for offering the only useful course I've taken!*

In continuation of my theme of providing practical advice to students in office hours, I have dedicated a considerable amount of time coaching them on how to approach job applications, ace interviews, and negotiate salaries as well.



For my own professional development, I stay on top of things by engaging with industry professionals, while also working on consulting projects directly relevant to my field of teaching. I was recently awarded the 2022 Global Scholarship from the Qualitative Research Conference Association to attend a conference in San Diego (shown left). As one of the youngest recipients of this award, the jury acknowledged that this was in large part due to my work as a teacher, as I could pass on my learnings to students in my classroom.

## 8: Outcomes

Has this teaching approach worked at all? While students are the best judge of the impact my methods make on them, I would like to share a few examples of long-term behavior change (personal and professional):

- Students continue to share examples from their daily lives over Slack months after the course ends
- From my Decision Behavior course, two separate students wrote entire case studies on themselves to analyze a real-world decision they had to make
- From my Consumer Psychology course, a group of students wrote me an email about how they analyzed the menu at a restaurant using course concepts
- Several alumni regularly consult with me on course concepts to seek advice on applying them to their work
- A number of students from my Psychology of Tech course retain healthy social media habits long after the related assignment ends
- Several students write to me about how the projects helped them talk through interviews and secure jobs
- Critiquing bad survey design is a topic we spend significant time dissecting, and to this day, students from years ago send me pictures of bad surveys they have come across in their daily lives

## Letter of Support | Dr. Adnan Zahid

13<sup>th</sup> April 2023

The Selection Committee,  
Vice Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching,  
Lahore University of Management Sciences.

Dear committee members,

I am writing this letter to support the nomination of Usama Waheed for the *Vice chancellor's award for teaching excellence*. I have known Usama since he was a student at LUMS. I taught him multiple courses, wrote his letter of recommendation, and then, 5 years later, had the pleasure of co-teaching Decision Behavior with him.

Let me talk a little bit about Usama as a student: he was very curious to learn, he thought deeply, was keen on contributing to class discussion, and was always keen for feedback to improve. When I started co-teaching with him in Spring 2021, I was impressed by his dedication: specifically, his commitment to giving feedback to students. I realized later that through his feedback he was trying to shape students into the kind of student he was – curious, thoughtful, and growth-oriented.

Teaching is all about building a relationship of trust with the students. Before students learn anything from an instructor, they decide the instructor is somebody they want to learn from. In my estimation all exceptional teachers excel at this part. I have not observed many who are better than Usama in building this relationship of trust. What works best for him is the ease with which he shares control of the class with his students. His classes are the best example of co-creation of the class experience.

Finally, I want to highlight his ability to constantly innovate his teaching style. There is a constant effort to improve through improvement and experimentation. This innovation spans the entire spectrum of the learning experience – he experiments to increase class contribution, individual reflection, collaboration amongst peers, building on feedback, and many more areas I may not have had the opportunity to observe directly while co-teaching with him.

His course evaluations, the deference the students show him, and the respect he has earned from his peers make him a very deserving choice for this award.

Sincerely,

Dr. Adnan Zahid  
Dean, Office of Student Affairs  
Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)

## Letter of Support | Simrah Zafar

Dear Award Committee,

I am writing to express my full support for the nomination of Professor Usama. As a former student of his, I can attest to his *exceptional teaching abilities and unwavering commitment towards his students*. I was initially enrolled in Usama Waheed's course, **Decision Behavior**, and I consider myself lucky to have ended up in his class. The experience was so enriching that I decided to take another course with him, **Consumer Psychology**. Sir Usama is not just an instructor but also a mentor as he goes above and beyond to ensure that his students have the resources and support to excel not just in academics but also in other areas of life.

Sir Usama's effort to make academia **engaging, relatable and feedback-oriented** is what makes his courses not only enjoyable but highly learning-intensive. I am sure every instructor aims for these **three** aspects to be incorporated, but I can say with surety that, throughout my time at LUMS, I only saw Sir Usama doing justice to the above-mentioned teaching methodologies. In his attempt to make the courses **engaging**, he went an extra mile to integrate the culture of memes which has proven to be an effective way to break the monotony of traditional teaching methods and encourage students to engage with the material. His email reminders for course readings before every session made even the most boring cases easy to read as they contained implicit triggers that nudge students to complete their readings, such as highlighted portions and relevant everyday life examples. This approach helps students to be better prepared for class discussions and activities, which, in turn, leads to a more immersive learning experience.

My favourite element of Sir Usama's teaching strategy is the factor of **relatability** where he bridges the gap between *academic concepts and real-life examples*. An example of an in-class activity involved sitting at a Khokha or a local flower shop to observe our surroundings for biases we learned in class. Sir took us to a local wrestling match to improve our ethnographic research skills and help us understand the barriers one might face during it. This activity was a hands-on approach to learning and allowed us to apply the concepts we learned in class to real-life situations in a fun and engaging manner.

Lastly, Professor Waheed reviews and evaluates every assignment in detail, provides constructive **feedback** and spends hours going back and forth with the student to perfect their work. He also encourages students to share their thoughts and ideas on how he could improve as an instructor. In my experience, it is rare to find an instructor who is not only open to feedback but actively seeks it out and incorporates it into their teaching style. Professor Waheed's willingness to listen to his students and make changes based on their feedback is a *testament to his dedication to his craft and his desire to be the best possible teacher he can be*.

It would be unfair if I do not mention how Sir Usama helped me get a job during my senior year. He observed that I was lacking in performance which was unlike me. During his office hours, I mentioned that I am stressed because of the on-going recruitment drives. He picked up on this and helped me improve my professional profile along with interview skills. This is not just a case with me, but he also referred a number of students from our class to his connections and a few of us ended up getting an offer letter due to his referral. *Hence, he not only helps his students excel academically but also professionally.*

In conclusion, Professor Usama Waheed is not only an **exceptional educator** but also a **remarkable listener and advocate for his students**. He goes above and beyond to ensure that his students are not just learning the course concepts, but also developing essential skills that are transferable to their academic and professional pursuits.

Sincerely,

Simrah Zafar, Class of 22

## Letter of Support | Zona Seljouk

To the Selection Committee,

I am privileged to write a letter endorsing Usama Waheed for the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award. I have had the opportunity to know Usama Waheed on multiple fronts: as a student, and as a teaching assistant. My respect and admiration for him as a teacher grew even more, from the onset of the pandemic to its conclusion. Having taken my first course with this professor during the pandemic, and then serving as his TA currently, I can attest to his exceptional ability to adapt and modify his teaching style to suit the changing circumstances. I firmly believe that Usama Waheed is an outstanding candidate for this prestigious award, and I would like to provide concise reasons to support my conviction in this letter.

I first met Usama Waheed during the Spring Semester of 2021-2022, when I enrolled in his course, Consumer Psychology. Subsequently, during the Fall Semester of 2022-2023, I had the opportunity to take another course, Mind the App, offered by Usama Waheed. From the very beginning, it was apparent that Usama Waheed's teaching approach was vastly distinct from any other instructor at LUMS. His assignments, unlike the conventional ones, did not merely entail bookish tasks. Instead, the assignments involved tasks that challenged students who stepped out of their comfort zones as they were required to pursue more on-ground activities and research. Consequently, this not only ensured that students perceived mundane activities with a different lens altogether but also allowed students to approach familiar concepts in innovative ways. Notably, Usama Waheed demonstrated exceptional adaptability during the pandemic, particularly in light of the challenges posed by COVID-19. Despite the transition from online to in-person instruction, he remained highly accessible and engaged with his students, fostering the same level of connection and rapport that he had established in the virtual classroom. Moreover, one of the notable qualities that I highly appreciate about Usama Waheed is his inclination to place his trust in his students, whether it pertains to academic tasks or personal issues. His approachable demeanor and accommodating nature have made him an invaluable mentor and ally to various students, including myself. Furthermore, Usama Waheed's talent for maintaining an engaging classroom atmosphere is yet another quality that I greatly value. One approach that stood out was his introduction of "Meme CP" as a means of class participation, with monthly certificates awarded to students who excelled in this regard. This innovative technique not only facilitated academic discourse in a fun and unique manner but also served as a means of acknowledging and incentivizing student engagement.

After being thoroughly impressed by his teaching style and dedication to his students, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to serve as Usama Waheed's teaching assistant for the Spring Semester 2023. Throughout my time in this role, I have witnessed firsthand the lengths he goes to support his students, both academically and personally. What sets him apart as an exceptional educator, however, is his ability to mentor and guide his students beyond the classroom. As a senior at LUMS, I myself have benefited greatly from his advice and support during recruitment drives. It is clear that his teaching is having a real impact on his students' lives, as demonstrated by the success of one current student who landed a marketing job by applying the concepts taught in Usama Waheed's Consumer Psychology class.

I firmly believe that the dedication, passion, and excellence demonstrated by Usama Waheed during his time at LUMS makes him a deserving recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Award. His out-of-the-box teaching methods, his ability to cater to each student's needs, and his overall commitment to academic rigor have undoubtedly had a profound impact on many individuals, including myself. As such, I am confident that Usama Waheed will continue to positively impact the learning progression of future students.

Syeda Zona Seljouk, Batch 2023