

Batrisyia's downgrade

December 2005

Dear Professor John Wakeford,

I get an advice to look on your from one lecturer in England. I really need your advice and help URGENTLY because I just have a few weeks in Scotland before going back to my country.

My name is Batrisyia H.... a full time PhD student from Malaysia. Malaysian Government and National University of Malaysia fund me for the fees and cost of living as well. My husband and my daughter accompanied me to study here. My husband is an ex-Fujitsu Malaysia Engineer for almost 7 years; he left the company to follow me to continue my studies.

I have been doing my PhD at Middlemarch University since 26 October 2003. In order to give a clear overview of my PhD problem I lay in chronology as in attachment. In my cases, my first supervisor downgrades my PhD to MPhil unfairly. No justification and no reason for ground grade. Everything is done verbally. In my faculty here we don't have advisor, so I did contact so many people since 7 Nov. 2005. I did appeal through the faculty committee and wait for an almost two months for reply.

Unfortunately the appeal was also rejected with no clear reason and the faculty officer also warned me not to appeal over again to Senate. I will send by fax to you office. For your information, my second supervisor gave me full support for the appeal and still asks me to appeal to senate in order to continue my research.

I have a Master of Electrical Engineering already, and this MPhil is means nothing to me. In fact, to my sponsor MPhil means failure to the student and the government have their right to terminate the scholarship immediately.

I hope to see you personally, if you are round here.

Almost two months I suffer and depress about this problem. Please help me to sort out this problem.

Thanks in advance.

Regards
Batrisyia

[John asks for clarification....]

Dear Prof,

Let me explain in details. I have two supervisors, First Supervisor and Second Supervisor as in my offer letter. From all my research, I work just with my First

Supervisor. This applies to the entire PhD student in this department. My First Supervisor is the Head of the Institute.

According to my offer letter, I suppose to have first year review (viva). My offer letter also states this statement.

“You will required to submit a report and undergo an oral examination at the end of your first year of study”.

Every department have implement this except my department. So the decision of second year continue is not only from our supervisor but also from other committee members. At that time we know that our research can proceed to PhD.

In my case, at the end of my first year, I have to write a report on it and had been assessed by two internal examiners. One of the examiners is my Second Supervisor.

I got feedback from both of the internal examiners who advise me to change the method of implementation for my research. We have a strong reason to change because I am working towards quality of services in the third generation mobile communication. The two examiners are also working towards the same area. I also have many feedbacks from other friends as well. I did discuss this many times with my first supervisor and he refused for me to change the method. From that moment we have lack of understanding and it is difficult to progress with any research ideas when research interests differ significantly.

During the 2nd year appraisal report to my sponsor, my First Supervisor decided to downgrade my PhD status to MPhil and he did tell me this during our meeting. Having working for my research for the last two years this news really upset me. Since then, I have become so depressed that I cannot concentrate on my research any more.

I met my Second Supervisor and get some advice. I told him what I want to do and I finally came out to a new proposal. He is guiding me to the new proposal as well to appeal to faculty members. Until now he still want me to appeal to senate and willing to supervise me to continue with my research. I am working with the new proposal from Nov. 2005 and I was really happy and know how to do the research. Which is much more easier from the previous method. My Second Supervisor knows about that, and that why he wants me to continue.

As my Second Supervisor wants to accept me, with new proposal, my sponsor also agrees, but the status is PhD not MPhil. As I told you MPhil means failure to me. There is no funding for MPhil student because the offer letter is PhD student.

My research is a continuous project from two previous PhD students and the architecture I used has been patent by the University of Middlemarch, so I cannot bring my PhD research to another university.

Can you advice the best approach for me

- To change back my PhD status, as that is the requirement from my sponsor to continue funding my study. As I told you my aim is PhD not MPhil.

- To change the supervisor, as my second supervisor agreed to be my supervisor with the proposal that we had discussed and submitted during my appeal. My second supervisor required two years for me to finish my PhD.

I also have doubts with the way faculty handle my case during downgrade my status and also how they handle my appeal. Should I have the right to know the reason for my downgrade and reject my appeal because faculty committee don't even call me to defend myself? And don't even explain in the letter.

Regards
Batrisyia

Discuss your answers to the following questions before turning the page

Q1 list the issues that have arisen here

Q2 what advice would you have given Batrisyia?

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John wrote:

Dear Batrisyia,

It is difficult from your account for me to untangle the full story. I can quite understand your view of the situation but you will have to work with the university system as it exists, however unfair it may seem to have been to you. However, here are some comments arising from your account:

1. I am not sure that a supervisor can 'refuse' to allow you to change your research method. It is your decision, as you are the one who will be examined. If he tried to forbid you to develop your own ideas, while I realise that it might be very difficult, you could complain to the University about this, but I doubt if it would affect the appeal. (You should look at the university regulations about this).
2. From your account, I do not see how your first supervisor could single handedly 'decide' to downgrade your registration. He could propose this, but the decision is normally taken by a committee who has independently examined your work themselves (which I think is what happened?). Again, check the regulations.
3. From what you have told me I imagine that the University will be reluctant to reverse their decision on your work so far. But you could instead ask how you could be re-registered to start again using the new methodology and with a new supervisory team, possibly for an initial period of six months. Presumably your second supervisor would support this. In which case you could perhaps approach (the Student Union advisor) accompanied by your second supervisor to discuss whether and how this could be done?

Good luck, John

Discuss your answers to the following questions before turning the page

Q1 Discuss John's response

Q2 What additional or alternative issues would you have raised with her?

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January 2006

Dear Prof,

Hope you still remember me. I would like to say thank you for you, for your advice towards my previous problem. Verbally my appeal has been accepted my Head of Department since 5 Jan 2006. He is not in the University at that time and would like to allow me to continue my research with new supervision as well. I just got a letter on it today.

Again many thanks.

regards
Batrisyia
Scotland

--- "Wakeford, John" <j.wakeford@lancaster.ac.uk
wrote:

Dear Batrisyia,

I am very pleased to hear that your problems are resolved. If I keep it completely anonymous - removing names of universities and changing your name so that no-one else would know it was you - would you allow me to include a short summary of your experience in the seminars I run for new postgraduates and supervisors? If you do agree, before doing so I would send you a draft of the account I would use for you to approve.

Can you suggest another name for yourself that I could use?

Do not worry if you do not want me to do this.

Best wishes

John

Dear Prof,

FYI, I am also a lecturer from at my university back home. I have experience for 5 years as undergraduate student. I was also working as a Engineer at Fujitsu, after graduating from Seoul Korea. So I used to be a workaholic as well, just like a Korean.

I read through all your seminar papers before. Your case studies as well. For the benefit of others, supervisors and PhD students, you can use my case for your seminars. You can also name me as 'Batrisyia' my daughter name.

I would like to tell you for being a International PhD student and same time as wife and mum as well in UK, is not easy, but we have to cope on it. The main problem in life is we don't get any benefit here. People respect us only in the university. Outside people claim we are asylum seekers or refugee.

Well now, my head of department gives me a new primary supervisor and my previous 2nd supervisor. Only my 2nd supervisor know the whole story of my phd since my first year. If I am wrong, I don't think he want to help me.

I can forgive, what the previous main supervisor did to me, but I cannot forget about it.

Well, that's all. Thank you for reading.

regards
Batrisyia.

One the acetates provided

List the lessons here for

- 1. departments,**
 - 2. institutions,**
 - 3. supervisors, and**
 - 4. international research students**
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