

First decade of achievement at ULAB

PROF. IMRAN RAHMAN

AS the University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) approaches its tenth year, it has become one of the leading private universities in Bangladesh, offering a high quality, well-rounded learning environment to its students. ULAB's approach to learning is characterized by rigorous academic standards, active learning and opportunities for self-development. This approach to learning is reflected in the many achievements of the university to date.



Recent notable books include: Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape, published by the renowned international publisher Intellect; Bangladesh: The Price of Freedom by the noted Indian photographer Raghu Roy; and, a centenary edition of Tagore's Gitanjali. The current list of journal published by ULAB includes Bengal Lights literary journal, Crossings, a Journal of English Studies, Journal of Science and Engineering, and ICT for Development.

Dynamic Programs. All the academic programs at ULAB – BBA/MBA, English and Humanities, Computer Science and Engineering, Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering, and Media Studies and Journalism – are imbued with the value of Liberal Arts. Students learn cross-disciplinary skills and knowledge, meaning they can better weather the challenges of a changing global marketplace.

Active Learning. Learning is not directly transmitted from teacher to student. Rather, it needs the active participation of the student. ULAB faculty members are trained in Active Learning techniques to encourage greater student engagement. From debates, blogs, and filmmaking, to participation in archeological excavations, ULAB students have a wide range of active learning possibilities.

Research. The mission of ULAB is not only to educate our students, but also to be a creator of knowledge. ULAB promotes a research culture, whereby faculty members see research as important to their teaching and career prospects. Students participate in university research, and knowledge is disseminated locally and internationally. ULAB has four research centers; Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), Center for Enterprise and Society (CES), Center for Bangla Studies (CBS), Center for Archeological Studies (CAS). Considerable funds are invested in the centers to conduct research on topics important for our country and society. In addition, ULAB has a competitive Faculty Research Scheme, which funds faculty research on a generous scale. Solid research will help ULAB forge academic collaborations and links with reputable international universities and research institutions.

Publications. ULAB has a good publication record with a number of journals published by the university and books written by faculty and published either in Dhaka or internationally.

Extra-Curricular Activities. ULAB believes that knowledge can be produced beyond the classroom. Consequently, ULAB places great emphasis on its extra-curricular programs and provides ample scope to learn skills through its thirteen clubs. Of particular note are ULAB's Adventure Club, Social Welfare Club, Sustainable Development Club, Debate Club, Computer Programming Club, Electronics Club, Theatre ULAB and the Sangskriti Sangsad.

Highly Qualified Faculty. ULAB hires faculty members with degrees from renowned international universities, and relevant industry experience in their respective fields. A significant number of foreign faculty have worked at ULAB as full-time employees. Besides teaching, faculty are expected to conduct research and publish in reputable journals, be student advisers, and actively contribute to development programs.

Scholarship and Awards. ULAB provides a range of scholarships and financial aid to its students. Currently 65% of ULAB students are receiving financial aid. We have special scholarships to attract female students, engineering students, and fully finance 6% of students under the remote area and freedom fighters quotas.

Career Services: Classroom education needs to be augmented with career skills to land a good job. ULAB's Career Services Center helps students with internships and job searches, and offers free workshops on planning, goal-setting, and soft skills.

Student Affairs. In order to support students' emotional needs in the high-stress world of university, ULAB has established the only fully-fledged one-stop Student Affairs Office of any university in Bangladesh.

Permanent Campus. ULAB has acquired land and is completing all permissions to build the first-ever sustainable green campus in Bangladesh, in Ramchandrapur, Mohammadpur.

The writer is the Vice Chancellor of ULAB.

... Council revisited

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All of them do not provide equally high quality education. Looking at the vision and mission of these universities, one may conclude that they serve segmented markets and their standards correspond to respective market segmentation. One of the ways one can measure the quality of education is to determine how the graduates of these universities have been empowered while they studied at the universities. Obviously, all of these universities have not empowered their graduates equally well. The effectiveness of empowerment is demonstrated by the success of the graduates in demonstrating their achievements in respective professional fields. Professional fields include paid employment, (top business executives, bankers, research scientists, lawyers, physicians, architects, professors/scholars, bureaucrats, political leaders, etc. Additional examples might be self-employment (founders of top business houses, NGOs, women entrepreneurs, etc). If graduates of a particular group of universities tend to get much higher than average salary at the entry level jobs (also better ranks), or can establish themselves at their early life as professional leaders, one can conclude that these universities provide higher quality education. The situation may be observed for the next 10-15 years to find how these graduates demonstrate their leadership quality, i.e. how they climb up the ladder. If the number of high performing alumni of universities belonging to group "A" is much higher than those of universities belonging to group "B" then the "A" group universities are of higher quality.

Beside high visibility of alumni, a proper mix of high profile scholars, researchers, teachers, and students determines the quality and image of a university. In addition, good governance and best management practices institutionalize quality assurance process. Good governance is reflected by good working relationship between the university, UGC and the ministry of education. For best management practices, it is necessary for the university to be compliant to the Private University Act 2010. An amicable working relationship between the Trustee Board and the University management is necessary for quality assurance.

Market segmentation, quality and accreditation
Most private universities are market and tuition driven. They offer degrees that can be sold at prices the universities charge. Tuitions and other fees vary from university to university depending on the market segment universities target. The market segments are based on the perceived quality and price. One segment may, for example, be very expensive. Universities that target to serve such markets are perceived as imparting the "best quality" education in the country, while others may be less expensive, and are perceived as the "lower quality". These market segments correspond to wealthy, upper middle class, middle class, financially and locationally disadvantaged (families living in remote rural areas having restricted access to universities) classes. The rich parents who want their children to study at the most expensive universities perceive that these institutions provide not only best quality education but also ensure high quality services, facilities and amenities. High price is often equated with high quality. One the other hand, relatively less rich parents opt for relatively less expensive universities. These universities charge lower tuition and other fees to attract students who are relatively poor or otherwise disadvantaged, perhaps compromising quality of education. This perceived quality based on market segmentation bears a special implication for accreditation. Accreditation for which universities need to spend lot of money carries the highest value for those universities that want

to be known as world class universities. Main mission of these universities is stated to produce graduates who are expected to outperform not only in the national competitive environment but also in international competitive environment. The ability and quality of such universities need to be validated by an adequately qualified, independent and neutral third party, viz. AC. Their reputation greatly depends on whether they are accredited by a globally reputable AC. The number of such universities that aspire to be world class is not small; in fact, it tends to increase. For them AC plays important roles.

Against this, there are middle and lower level universities. They do not hire globally renowned expensive scholars to teach and do research. They have more part time than full time teachers. Their mission is to produce graduates barely qualified for mid or lower end of employment markets. They are usually unable to meet the requirements of full-fledged accreditation. Similarly, Only teaching university may not seek accreditation of a high powered AC. For them mere membership of the government sponsored AC may be enough. This membership is a prerequisite of and not equal to accreditation. This membership demonstrates that the university imparts a minimum level of quality education which is lower than world class.

Accreditation Council (AC)
AC may be sponsored by the government or private initiatives. Article 38 (1) of the Private University Act 2010 requires establishment of an AC for private universities. It is not yet clear whether each university will have to be accredited by the said AC. However, it is assumed that each university has to be a member of AC. Such membership will authorize the university to operate legally. Perhaps membership will also indicate that university will impart a minimum but acceptable level of quality education which is not necessarily world class quality. Since accreditation is expensive, it would be prudent on the part of the university to undertake a cost-benefit exercise. It should seek accreditation only if benefits outweigh the costs. It is to be noted that, before starting its function of accreditation, the AC itself, must acquire its own recognition in the regional and preferably global academic community; otherwise its accreditation will not carry much value. AC itself must be of very high stature. Almost all countries have accreditation councils. Many of them are globally recognised such as, CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Washington DC), AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate School of Business International, St. Louis MO, USA), EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System, Brussels), SAQS (South Asian Quality Improvement System), Hyderabad, India, National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India, and many others. It is hoped that the accreditation council to be established by the government of Bangladesh will gain high enough recognition to add prestige and credibility to the university it would accredit. It is to be noted that accreditation function is both intellectually and physically demanding. Given so many academic dimensions, complex assessments and competing stakeholders involved, it is difficult to avoid subjectivity while decisions are taken during accreditation process. If the review team cannot complete the assessments in unbiased ways, the whole job of peer review may be questionable. Therefore AC has to be careful at each step.

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International students in private universities

-Prof. M. Lutfar Rahman



OUT of well over one hundred universities in Bangladesh, most are private institutions and a large number of tertiary level students are enrolled in the private universities of Bangladesh. A

good number of universities in private sector earned confidence of students and guardians by offering satisfactory level of education and the others are in the process of improving their quality under the supervision of University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh. In a word, the private universities are playing a significant role for tertiary level education in our society.

With the tremendous advancements of transports and communications in the recent past, globalization has become a common word of the time, and we live in an increasingly global world now. In the circumstances, it is no longer enough for a university to think within the boundary of its own country. Indeed, internationalization is considered to be an important criterion for universities, which are actually international institutions by name and nature. A university and its students are benefited from exposure to international students, who add variety to the campus and contribute to prepare students for global organizations.

Currently over two thousand students from abroad are enrolled in Bangladeshi universities and the huge majority of them are enrolled in the private universities. This short article presents a brief overview of the foreign students in Bangladeshi universities, specially in the private universities.

The number of private universities and enrollments in private universities are steadily increasing in Bangladesh. According to the 38th Annual Report of UGC for the year 2011, total number of enrollments in 52 private universities was

2,80,822. This number is over one hundred thousand more than the corresponding number (1,85,910) for 32 public universities, excluding National University and Bangladesh Open University. According to the report the total number of students in private universities more than tripled to 2,80,822 in 2011 in the past six years from 88,669 in 2005. The number of students in private universities in 2012 is 3,14,640 with the addition of new private universities (39th Annual Report of UGC for 2012).

According to UGC reports, the total number of foreign students in the private universities in 2011 and 2012 are 1651 and 1642 respectively. Out of 1,642 foreign students in 2012, the first five universities admitting 1459 students are University of Science and Technology Chittagong (USTC, 1237 students), International Islamic University Chittagong (98 students), American International University Bangladesh (57 students), North South University (35 students) and BRAC University (32 students). In 2012, students from 34 countries were enrolled in different private universities in Bangladesh. With the increase in the number of foreign students, private universities are gaining better acceptance internationally and earning more and more foreign currency for the country. This is a very positive trend and the authorities of such universities need to offer quality education to keep up the trend. Year wise growth in the number of foreign students for the past seven years is tabulated below:

Year	Number
2012	1642
2011	1651
2010	1557
2009	1199
2008	812
2007	596
2006	498

It is to be mentioned that out of 1642 foreign students in 2012, 1237 students were enrolled in MBBS program alone in USTC in Chittagong.

It is interesting to see the picture for the public universities. In 2012, the number of foreign students enrolled in 18 public universities, out of total 34 public universities, was 525. The

corresponding numbers for 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008 and 2007 are 210, 359, 390, 221 and 207 respectively. The increase of 315 students in 2012 indicates improvements of quality of education and increasing confidence of foreign students on public universities of the country.

There are many reasons for foreign students not preferring public universities. Among them, the most mentionable reasons are session-jam, complicated admission process, lack of academic facilities, increasing unrest in the campuses and inadequate presence in the Web. The Websites of a number of public universities do not provide information of expenditure, accommodation, food, lifestyle and geographical and environmental information of the university campuses. Also most of the public universities do not have international office for foreign students. The private universities, on the other hand, have campuses free of unrest and violence without session jam; they conduct makeup classes lost by natural and other calamities and complete academic sessions in time.

QS Stars (www.topuniversities.com/qs-stars) highlights universities for internationalization by awarding recognition. It evaluates universities using a set of criteria, the universities are then awarded with a badge displaying number of stars based on internationalization. Only University of Dhaka, from Bangladesh with the score of 26.67 out of one hundred, is listed in the 201-250 bracket out of 424 universities listed from Asia in 2012. Internationalization is a current trend and the universities of Bangladesh have to move forward for international students and internationalization with increasing efforts.

The private universities shoulder heavy load of tertiary education in Bangladesh and earn the lion's share of foreign currency from overseas students without spending taxpayers' money. At present, there are limitations of the private universities, but the trend clearly indicate that it is not far when the private universities of the country will have more and more foreign students, as it is now in USA, where out of fifteen top universities ten are private universities (according to the QS Stars internationalization ranking of universities in 2012).

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