Surviving First Semester in an Engineering School

MASHIAT LAMISA

If you have already considered pursuing a career in engineering, I'm guessing you are either entirely bonkers, or you are really proud of the way your mother says *"Amar meye engineer hobe!"* to the auntie next door, or you're genuinely interested in a career that lets you make and break things from scratch. So before we get to the how, let's talk about why you would want to survive the first semester in an engineering school.

Attending an engineering school is like riding on a roller coaster while drinking from a fire hose. It is a place where your pride will be bruised, your intelligence is going to be questioned 25/8 and your failures are going to outnumber your bad jokes about life. You will spend several nights in labs, crying over the code that just won't work. You will have no life, and definitely no time to twerk. That hairline will be inversely proportional to the number of credits you will have to take. But since you are already here or soon will be, let me tell you if you don't learn to cope up from the very first semester, drowning pools you will see. So, now that you know the why, let's move on to the how:

LEARN HOW TO LEARN

The first step to surviving any subject in college is to learn how you can effectively feed your brain with Terabytes of knowledge in the shortest time possible. But the emphasis on this step is much more when you're under a rigorous engineering curriculum which is primarily focused on problem solving. After all, that's what engineers do, right?

Coming from the very orthodox NCTB curriculum, all my life I have learnt to toss down whatever I was fed in crowded coaching classes. Similarly, I thought that through lectures, my university professors will spoon feed me whatever I need to be an engineer and I'll get to learn things. But that's absolutely not how learning in college works. Here, you will need to develop your cognitive skills to solve your own problems, because unlike high schools, here it's extremely difficult to find worked-out examples of a particular problem. The lectures are often incomprehensible and the problem sets they make you solve will be a lot more difficult than what they teach you in class. So the earlier you teach yourself how to learn, the easier things get for you.

STITCH IN TIME

I understand how satisfying procrastination is, but it's not really a good option in university. The moment you give yourself up to Satan's handwoven world of procrastination, you risk yourself several marks. So do your assignments on time, skim through the lectures the night you get them, prepare early for even minor quizzes so that you don't have to take on the pressure the night before. That way, you not only keep your scores up, you also get lots of free time for Netflix and whatever.

GET YO'SELF SOME FRIENDS

It is difficult, I know. Even more so when you are LoN3Ly BoY M@N!K or *Ekla Pothik*. But you gots to make friends, son. One of the main attractions of being in an engineering school is the national and international competitions and Hackathons that you get to participate in. For majority of those competitions, you need to have a good team with intelligent members who understand each other, and are ready to cooperate and compromise. Hence, from the very first semester, you will need friends - whether that's to spend the time between classes, or to study in groups (which I highly recommend) or, just because. Like they say, you only understand a concept really well if you teach it to others. So go ahead, help your friends with what they are having difficulties.

ASK

Engineering schools are famous for their inconceivable textbooks and confusing quizzes. But don't let that unnerve or depress you. Ask around, bug people as long as they don't give you the exact answer to what you're looking for. Go to faculty members during consultation hours. Ask questions in class even if they sound stupid because who knows, another student might be too shy to ask the same. Remember, for engineers, asking is religion.

HAVE FUN

Up until now, I have emphasised mostly on the academic side of engineering schools. But there's a brighter side to it too. As soon as you get into university, enjoy that *"OMG I'm going to be an engineer and I'm going to change the world!"* feel for as long as it lasts. Dance around the new campus, whine about how dirty the washrooms are. Whine about the cafeteria food but have them anyway. Go to libraries and labs and breathe in the air, and the extremely fat books. Join the Robotics Club, or the Journalism Club. Have no fear crossing your boundaries when it comes to learning and experiencing.

And above all, try enjoying the classes. Learn to make them fun for yourself, no matter how boring the lecturer is. Because at the end of the day, you might as well become an engineer and change the world like you always dreamt you would.

May the odds be ever in your favour.

Mashiat Lamisa is often seen frowning at the sight of people who dislike poetry and tomatoes. Send her poems and really cool tomato babies at mashiatlamisa@outlook.com

ENGINEERING SCHOOL

BEFORE   AFTER