Preparing students for the 21st century

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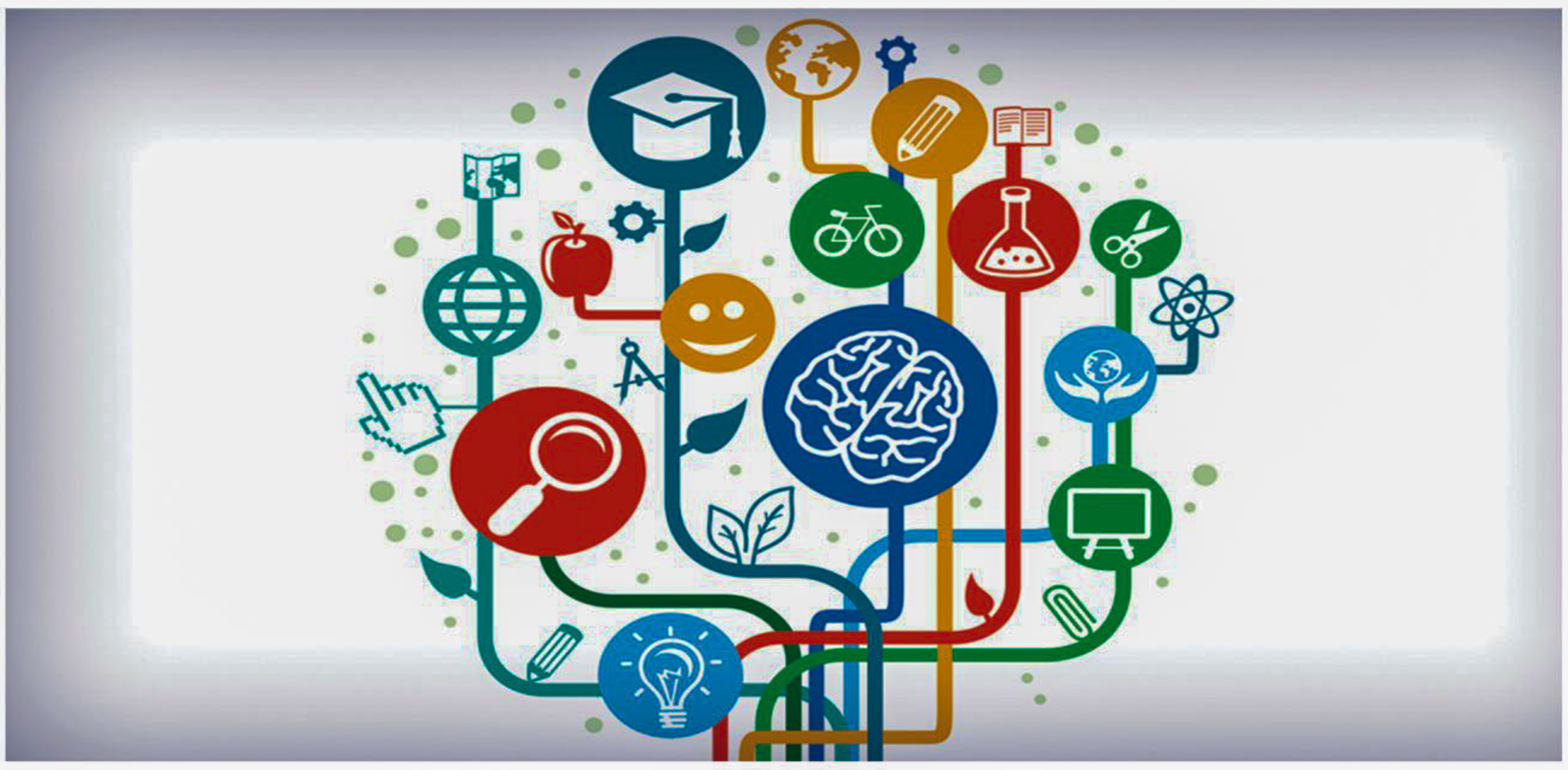

As a young country, Bangladesh takes pride in numerous major developments that have taken place over the years. However, when co-curricular activities and skills development are considered of great importance globally, Bangladesh's education falls behind with its redundant emphasis on theoretical and bookish knowledge. Consequently, most students fail to compete in the rat race that is inescapable in the 21st century. It is a matter of hope that years of research and evaluation of the calibre of graduates have led some Bangladeshi universities to actively and regularly revise their curriculum to help prepare their students for the professional and practical challenges following their graduation. This article looks at the unique and innovative curricula of some private universities of the country.

BRAC University

BRAC University has a semester dedicated for the enhancement of the values, leadership capabilities, and professional competency of its students. Mr Rehan Ahmed, Campus Superintendent, BRAC University Residential Campus, Savar, shares, "The residential semester follows a comprehensive educational curriculum along with extracurricular activities to help students gain confidence, improve communication skills, become aware of the society and take decisions independently."

In a three-month period, students get acclimatised to a disciplined life and learn to value time management. Through courses like Bangladesh Studies, Bangla Literature and Language, Ethics and Culture, and English Language, students of BRAC University learn the fundamental principles and characteristics of a global citizen.

For three days in the semester, students take on roles as cooks, guards, waiters, and cleaners which nurtures a sense of responsibility and mutual respect for those who serve them. Additionally, they go for field trips and take part in community service projects. Experts from different professions also join in to conduct seminars on contemporary issues. Lastly, what seems like a hectic semester also constitutes interactive and extracurricular activities such as drama, recitation, debate, creative writing, and yoga and meditation.

The residential semester is well appreciated by students who go through a transformative experience in only three months. "The residential semester at BRAC University's Savar Campus has helped me grow as a person and made me more independent and worthy of myself. I came back as a more confident and compassionate person," said Nafisa Nawar, a fresh graduate from the pharmacy department of BRAC University.

Daffodil International University

The course Art of Living sensitises the young generation to the importance of values, integrity, and humanity at a time when such concepts are rare to find. Syed Mizanur Rahman, Associate Professor and Head, Department of General Educational Development, Daffodil International University, and the co-author of the course said, "You may wonder 'why values?' when it is neglected everywhere. But it is also true that something that is rare is of the highest worth. It is this ideology that we impart among our students in this course."

Students are trained to evolve as innovative and effective learners. The course involves various group and outdoor activities. A signature part of this course is Parents' Day where students' parents are asked to attend a daylong workshop with their children. This session ends up being a heartwarming event for all the attendees where everyone witnesses a refined parent-child relationship. Md Razaul Kabir Fahad, a computer science and engineering student of Daffodil International University, reminisces, "When my parents attended Parents' Day, I was asked to give my father a tight hug. A gesture as small as a hug reduced an imaginary distance between me and my father. If not for the course, such a rewarding experience would not have been possible."

The university has also recently introduced a holistic training programme on career development. Employability 360° was designed to enable students close the gap in their leadership, entrepreneurial, and communication skills, effectively translate knowledge to action, and enhance perseverance and determination. The course prepares the students for the job market by teaching them to create video resumes, write cover letters, manage websites for digital portfolios, run YouTube channels, learn Google site-mapping, acquire interview-winning skills, and be more vocal and expressive, among many other skills.

"Employers conveyed their concern regarding the lack of skills among fresh graduates. They say that there aren't enough adept candidates to fill the vacant job positions. Employability 360° takes a modern teaching approach to equip our students with necessary skills for the job market," says Mohammad Shibli Shahriar, Associate Professor and Head, Department of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Daffodil International University.

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Eastern University

Eastern University's Faculty of Law ensures law education that is in line with the national legal system as well as the global jurisdiction. The faculty prepares students to join the court as lawyers and judges or even ministries and academia.

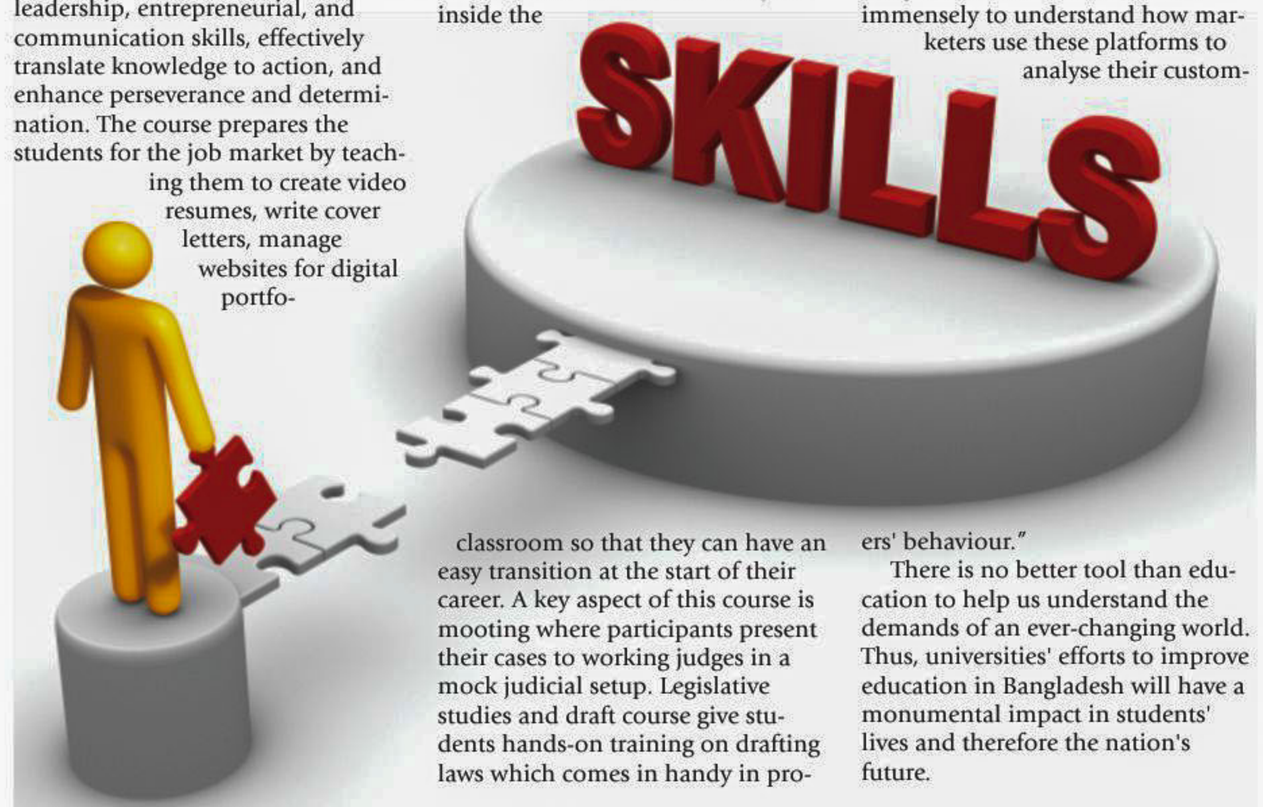
Of special note are the courses trial and advocacy, and legislative studies and draft. The former course prepares students as active lawyers inside the classroom so that they can have an easy transition at the start of their career. A key aspect of this course is mooting where participants present their cases to working judges in a mock judicial setup. Legislative studies and draft course give students hands-on training on drafting laws which comes in handy in professional settings such as ministries. Mr ABM Imdadul Haque Khan, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, Eastern University, remarks, "The well-structured and packed curriculum makes the programme more effective in serving its purpose for law students. Students are in constant touch with studies and maintain a consistent academic life. As a result, they can utilise their knowledge and skills in the practical world."

North South University

North South University, a well-reputed university in the country, strives to maintain comprehensive curricula for all its programmes so that they are at par with national and global education standards. Digital Marketing and Social Networks for Business, as the name suggests, is a course that deals with the massive digitalisation around us. "This course is one of the very few ones where we don't have to actively present contents to the students. The materials are relevant to our daily lives which makes student more curious and interested in learning about digital marketing," comments Mr Ehfaz Nowman, Lecturer, Department of Marketing and International Business, School of Business and Economics, North South University.

The course is very popular among the students of North South University so much so that students ranging from marketing to engineering departments choose this course as an open elective. The course is more relatable for students who work part-time or as interns whose work revolves around the technology behind digital marketing. It is equipped with lessons on Google dashboard, Google adwords, and other online platforms. Seminars and talks on analytics and data mining conducted by digital marketing professionals are also included in the curriculum. Khandaker Muhtasim Rafi, a final-year student of Marketing and Finance at North South University, expresses, "Because of this course, I learned about Google Analytics and Facebook Insight, and that has helped me immensely to understand how marketers use these platforms to analyse their customers' behaviour."

There is no better tool than education to help us understand the demands of an ever-changing world. Thus, universities' efforts to improve education in Bangladesh will have a monumental impact in students' lives and therefore the nation's future.



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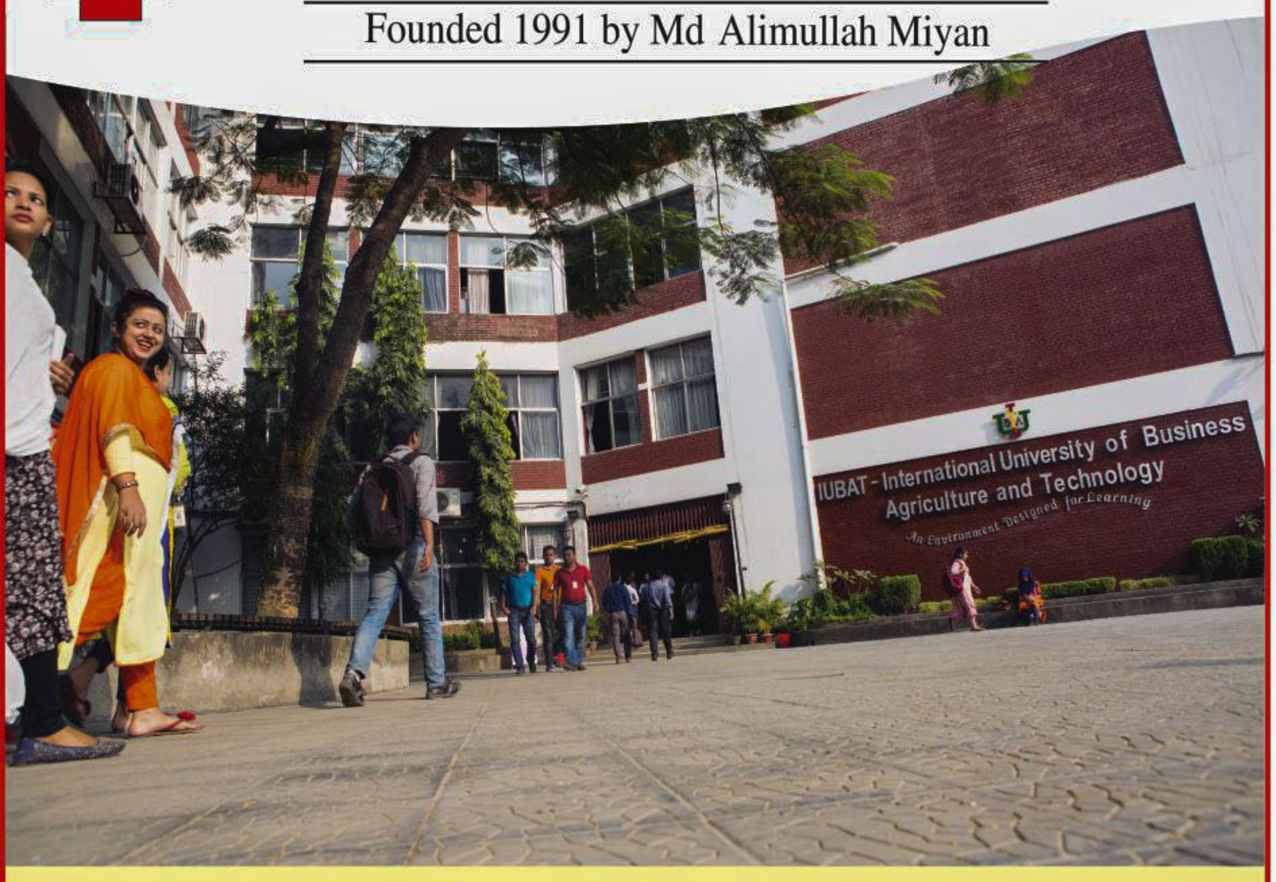

Programs

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BSEEE : Bachelor of Science in Electrical & Electronics Engineering
BSME : Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering
BAEcon : Bachelor of Arts in Economics
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