

Congratulations! You have been rejected.

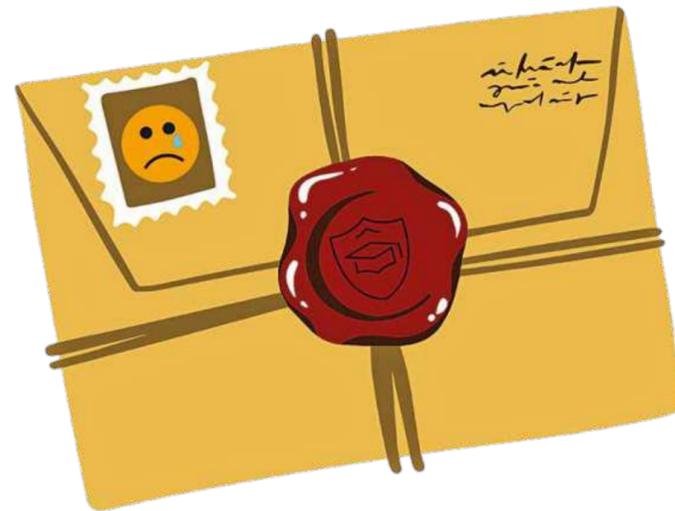
ROSHNI SHAMIM

Dear applicant,
Firstly, thank you so much for applying to our program. We have had a particularly rigorous year of the toughest pool of applications received and we were thoroughly impressed with your application. For real.

Now, if you have reached this far, then I have more or less convinced you that you have most likely been accepted. Alas, I must bring out the small needle pin that I keep handy in the admissions committee's desk, and proceed to burst your happy and optimistic bubble. While we were thoroughly taken with your credentials, we unfortunately cannot accept you into our final batch of students for this year. We, however, encourage you with feigned positivity to try again next year and if we may so please, to "surprise" you once again with an uneasy plot twist in the end.

We wish you all the very best in your future endeavours, because of course, we really do pretend to care.

For most students, the first half of the new year brings forth a charged atmosphere of motivation and determination. The months of March and April in particular emit many emotions in hopeful candidates who apply with big dreams and defined future plans. However, not all great stories start with a great bang. For many of us who applied late last year and even early this year for undergraduate and graduate admis-



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

sions abroad, it has not necessarily brought forward the best of news.

In the pandemic era, there seems to be enough gloom being passed around to feel deflated and morose over where life's upcoming course will take us. Top it with a little sprinkle of rejected applications and you have a well-rounded session of moping

joining your nights soon. Like other candidates in the same boat, I too, felt the same tightening in my chest while going through letter after letter of rejection. The irony of it all is that even when I was submitting these applications, I made sure to mentally brace myself up ahead (forgive the mind of an overthinker here) that regardless of what-

ever decisions these grad schools give me, I will not let it deter my future plans. Despite all the mantras, I still felt the rejection letters settle deep within me.

If you too have been rejected by the school of your dreams, I can accurately assess how fast the current abyss of unease must be spiralling around you. Although you have probably already tried to convince yourself by now about life's greater plans and that everything has its own reasons, it is completely okay to still feel the full weight of how much this obstacle has left you unsettled.

Perhaps in many ways, it is very critical for you to allow yourself to feel the full impact of this blow and process it within you. The greatest advice I can provide is the same one I am trying to desperately cling to everyday; if Plan A hasn't worked out, try for the 25 other letters. Maybe venture into something so unknown that you never dreamed you would gather the courage to do it.

Most importantly, throw away the atypical social media quotes about "figuring life out by 25" and building a business empire even before you hit your thirties. In the end, you are, and should be, the only one allowed to change the strings as you please.

Roshni spends her time dreaming about cakes and scenic waterfalls. Send her your thoughts at roshni.shamim@gmail.com

NEW TEACHERS VS THE PANDEMIC

BUSHRA ZAMAN

As a student myself, I often think of and sympathise with new students joining university, and how different such a crucial part of their lives are compared to what was the norm, on account of the pandemic. What I failed to realise up until recently was how this also held true for teachers and faculty members, especially those who recently began a career in academia. How has the wave of online education treated them?

Online classes/exams were a first for many teachers in our country, since previously almost all educational activities were conducted in person. To adapt to such circumstances and learn how to teach effectively online despite struggling themselves during the pandemic is a feat in itself. To further do so at the beginning of their teaching career with the added anxiety of taking classes for the first time perhaps requires one to summon up even more mental strength.

Mahnaz Ahmed, English Literature teacher at Adroit International School, recalls her online teaching experience with different age groups of children, "I never knew my first day at work would be sitting on my desk at home. The first time I logged into the classroom, all the students greeted me with a big smile and were extremely supportive. I could sense the student's eagerness to learn although it was through a screen. I was nervous but extremely happy as I was doing something I absolutely love. The whiteboard was replaced with a Zoom screen, diaries were replaced by Google Classroom, and books were replaced by PDFs as we went along with the flow of the pandemic."

"I teach from kindergarten to Class 7 and it is a whole different experience dealing with various age groups. We study and have fun learning new things. It feels as if children have become used to the new normal of online teaching," she adds.

Mahnaz discusses how she attempted to capture students' attention during class, "For classwork, we provide them worksheets for the month which are completed and submitted at the end of the month. We take regular class tests and oral tests to ensure complete learning, and teach via both books and video for visual learning which enhance the children's knowledge."



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

As for the challenges, Mahnaz states, "One of the biggest difficulties we come across is for the junior kids. It's difficult to ensure whether they have written or understood what we have tried to convey. At times, the internet connection is also a matter of concern and many students keep getting disconnected but I ask them to hold their copy in front of the camera to check their regular classwork. The parents sometimes assist in taking out the worksheet and logging into class."

Newly appointed private university lecturer in Dhaka, Abu Taher*, expresses his thoughts on how online classes posed difficulties for him. He says, "For someone like me who is only starting their teaching career, online classes can be a big obstacle to falling in love with this profession. Online classes take away the joy of in-person interactions and make it quite difficult for

teachers to assess the quality of their delivery. A teacher needs to ensure that every student is properly comprehending the entire lecture. Particularly, in an online setting, this task becomes extremely difficult. Firstly, the teacher cannot be sure if the lecture material is clear enough for all students to understand. Students who are having trouble understanding the lecture rarely respond in online classes. Secondly, the teacher has no way of knowing if the delivery is interesting enough to hold everyone's attention. So, the teachers do not get the opportunity to adjust and improve their delivery."

*Fabiha Khan, lecturer at Daffodil International University, also comments on the challenges faced in terms of interaction in online classes, "Adapting to online teaching wasn't as hard for me, since I didn't have prior experience that I needed to forget. However, connecting with students has been especially difficult since I can't read their body language and adapt my teaching to keep their attention. Despite using every interactive platform and methods under the sun, it's a good day if I get a student to say 'yes' or 'no' to any question I ask. I don't necessarily blame them since they don't really have a relationship with me beyond a face on the screen. I've tried building a good mentor/mentee relationship with students during one-on-one sessions, and those have been very successful, but not everyone is eager to attend those sessions."

As indicated by those who shared their experiences, online classes generate few responses from students, making it difficult for faculties/teachers to judge how well the lecture has been understood. Continuously staring at a screen and

speaking with no response potentially generates a feeling of speaking to yourself without being heard by anyone else, not to mention the physical problems that arise due to staring at a screen for lengthy periods of time and the network issues, all of which can be even more trying if your teaching career begins with such experiences.

However, all is not doom and gloom. Challenges are there only to be faced, and sometimes a little bit of gratitude towards a profession born out of passion goes a long way, like how Mahnaz describes the joy in teaching.

"It's delightful being a teacher. My time spent with the children is something I cherish and look forward to every day. When my KG 2 students tell me 'Miss, you're the best, we love you!', it's truly heartwarming and keeps me motivated. Although I started my journey during the pandemic, not for a single moment did I feel as if the kids were far away from me. The teacher-student bond is one of the best relationships and I'm glad that it's a big part of my life," she shares.

Given how class attendance is usually recommended unless legitimate excuses are present, the perseverance of good teachers and faculty members in attempting to effectively deliver academic information against all odds makes attending classes more doable for students during these difficult times. And for that, to our teachers, including the new ones who are only just adjusting themselves, thank you.

*Names have been changed upon request

Bushra Zaman likes books, art, and only being contacted by email. Find her at bushra-zaman31@yahoo.com

DIAL BACK ON THE POSITIVITY

DURDANA KAMAL

Turns out, 24/7 good vibes aren't so great after all.

In an internet-driven world where you can get lost in the sea of new words, references and "cancel culture", it is easy to rule yourself out as an unproblematic individual. To be honest, social media is exhausting and a good option is to just avoid everything that is going wrong with the world. Ignorance is bliss, as the saying goes. One might try to give their mental health a break by distancing themselves from negative situations and surrounding themselves with positivity, which is always a great way to relieve stress.

So, if positivity is a good thing, why does a term like "toxic positivity" exist?

Imagine a scenario where you are confiding in your friend about your depression, about how it is decreasing your productivity or some other similar situation about which it is not easy to open up, and your friend's immediate response is, "Stop being so sad. You have it better than most people. Others are suffering way more than you but they are not complaining about it. You should appreciate what you have and count your blessings."

While that might be a true statement, a factual declaration actually causes more harm than good. This is

an example of toxic positivity, which can make people feel a certain pressure to be happy and push their sorrows deep down within themselves.

One can also impose this on themselves. For example, a lot of people might try to deal with grief by burying it down, rather than deal with it. They might avoid facing their own realities because of societal pressure, self-conflict and a desire to not seem vulnerable in front of anybody. It is often as simple as trying too hard to set a "happy" image of yourself, to be known as the jolly person and trying too hard to present a version of yourself that is inauthentic.

Some examples of toxic positivity include saying things such as "Everything happens for a reason", "Just focus on the bright side", "Try to forget what happened" and many more. These are all variations of different words but have the same effect on a person - it isolates them with their thoughts, makes them feel guilty for feeling sad, and essentially deters them from opening up to anyone again.

Not only does toxic positivity facilitate isolation, create communication issues and make someone feel worse about their own feelings, it can also backfire in incomprehensible ways. Constantly assuring someone that everything is okay and there is nothing

wrong with their current situation, might give that person a false sense of security, which might worsen the state of their mental health in the long run due to lack of treatment. Additionally, it might enable a person to continue to stay in toxic and abusive relationships where the person has a great chance of being severely harmed.

It is important to realise that experiencing negative emotions, while unpleasant, is a part of being human. Stifling them only creates more harm to

the mental state. As humans, it is very natural to not always be perfect. We are all guilty of imposing toxic positivity to ourselves or to others, at some point or another. Instead of having a positive response to every problem, it is better to learn how to be a better listener and let someone be free with their feelings.

Durdana Kamal likes to engage in activities which mostly do not serve any purpose whatsoever. Contact me through kamal.durdana@gmail.com



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