



# The "REAL" alumni debate

**WISDOMTOOTH**

**SANIA AIMAN**  
Sub-Editor, Lifestyle  
The Daily Star



It is natural to feel possessive about things we love, and the sentiment applies to people, things and universities, and everything in between. Thus, it is natural that the thousands of students of the centenarian University of Dhaka will have similar emotions about their beloved alma mater. However, just like all other aspects of life, the emotion is often not problematic, but it's degree or form of expression might become so.

Every time a few (or any number) of DU related people converge or form a group or association, the familiar debate of "real" vs "fake" students of DU raises its head. The usual arguments start with claims that only those who were regular students of the actual university and completed their bachelors there are the "true" students of DU.

This leaves out the numerous master's degree holders, some regular and some executive/evening courses, also run by the university on its actual campus! In theory, this also excludes the alumni who pursued their master's at DU at departments which, at that time, did not even offer bachelors programmes yet, and of course makes no sense. Banal arguments range from 'they do not love DU as much as we do,' 'we struggled harder and deserve this, they don't,' 'we deserve it as we were here longer.'

Of course, there is a certain level of legitimate pride to be taken in making it through the tough competition to

the Dhaka University, to sometimes misleadingly imply that they are ex-students of the main DU as well. How much of it is to falsely benefit from the prestige associated with the country's premier university, and how much from the intent to avoid the derision sometimes faced otherwise, is of course a case by case issue.

My personal observations as a graduate of DU, with the obvious limitations of scope, leads to the conclusion that a significant number of people adamant about not letting others claim DU studentship often take heritage pride to a toxic level. Here, it appears that the DU community becomes a microcosm of the national situation, where



through a tough competition is what makes public university education unique/prized. Secondly, buying a degree with money and claiming to be a student of the university is unacceptable, said one H. Sikder, in the same thread.

The fallacy of the statement is self-evident. If a student is enrolled in a university, sit through the curriculum, and is awarded a degree, regardless of whether or not they paid for it, they are literally students of the same university!

On the other hand, although they are studying at Dhaka University against the fees paid, but none of them are receiving the degree without completing the curriculum or sitting for and passing



ASM Fakhru Islam, an alumni of the Applied Chemistry said that the entire debate arises due to two factors — the prestige associated with being a student of Dhaka University, and the tendency of some people to deceive others by claiming to be so. For example, he cites the example of some doctors writing MBBS (DU) as their qualification. Yet, upon inspection, it appears that they are not graduates of the Dhaka Medical College as they intended to indicate, rather some other less aspirational medical college also considered under Dhaka University, and that is just deception.

On the other hand, all students of Dhaka University are technically ex-students at some point. But a reality relevant to Bangladesh is some people's tendency to take false pride and if possible undue advantage, he added.

I agree. Of course students from colleges and institutes affiliated with Dhaka University are not direct students of the university in the traditional sense. But the elitisms and toxic pride against any direct students of the university is a reflection of extreme narrowmindedness. Your place of pride or devotion etc. does not give you the right to deny a formal student in any capacity their right to belong to the university. There is of course a legitimate argument for clear demarcation of who can claim studentship of Dhaka University, and that line is frankly quite evident to every student who went there, and everyone who did not. It all comes down to personal ethics.

**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**



secure admission to the university. But an observation of many proponents of this stance will show that a large number carry a toxic level of pride and sweeping disdain for those who "failed to enter DU" and went to other public universities, or god forbid, to a private one.

On the other side, there lies a tendency in many others, who complete education from the various colleges affiliated with

justified national pride is often conflated with toxic jingoism.

In case of the university, I feel it is perfectly exemplified with the phrase, "Agey bharti hoye dekhao," roughly translated as "you are a loser cuz you could not get admission/I am superior cuz I did." The worst of all discriminating attitude seen in a large section of "regular" ex-students of DU with the kind of vitriol spewed against the same university's students who enrol in the evening courses, which are much more expensive than the "day" or regular courses.

Graduation is what matters. So only those who pursue professional or evening courses should not be considered real ex-students of the university, one A. Rahman said in a public discussion within a Facebook group of ex-DU students. His is one of the less vitriolic comments. "Firstly, the very fact admissions have to be won

the exams. The university has offered and executed the course, so why should the students be discriminated against, said Aharar Hossain, an alumnus of DU Journalism, on the same thread.

Ironically, even regular DU students do pay a certain fee, although it is a paltry amount, as most expenses are subsidised. Consider this from one M. Khan then: To give one member of the family an opportunity based on merit and the other based on money is unacceptable. In that case, securing a job by bribing recruiters is also fair, and not just jobs, but all else as well.

I assume he meant the larger DU community with his use of the word "family."

However, hearteningly, amidst the large number of often conceited and otherwise narrow minded individuals I have come across online and offline, there are plenty of reasonable ones as well.