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# “Master’s should not be mandatory.”

## UGC’s step in the right direction

**TAZREEN JAHAN BARI**

Pursuing a postgraduate degree is not for everyone. And this is not an insult.

Although in Bangladesh, we tend to look down on people without a master’s degree, it is not and should not be for everyone. Not because everyone does not have the capability to pursue higher studies, but simply because people have different goals in life. And for those who do not want to go into research positions or pursue academia, it is redundant to get a postgraduate degree.

This is why I consider the University Grants Commission’s (UGC) recommendation of introducing an admission test for master’s, replacing the direct admission of undergraduates into the program, a step in the right direction.

In its 47th Annual Report, UGC has brought forth 20 issues regarding tertiary level education, one of them being the lack of resources and research opportunities in postgraduate education caused by the democratisation of master’s degrees in Bangladesh. This has been caused by perceiving master’s not as a step towards a more research-oriented higher education but rather a mere extension of honours.

Most students in Bangladesh move from honours to master’s like stepping from class seven to eight. However, master’s level falls into the category of postgraduate studies which is mandatory only for future researchers and academicians. For industry jobs or other popular sectors like bank jobs, civil services and so on, the highest educational qualification needed is an honours degree.

Previously, tertiary level degrees were offered in 3-year honours and 1-year master’s. But when the academic structure changed, employer expectations did not. As a result, most private sector

employers expect fresh graduates to have a master’s degree. Because of the misled expectations, students feel pressured to do a master’s rather than gain experience through internships and entry-level job opportunities. For them, this is a waste of time, energy, and money whereas for the universities it is a waste of already limited resources.

If implemented, students who are not interested in academia or research can utilise this year for starting their professional life. This can also serve as a second chance for students who failed to get into their dream university during honours. On the other hand, it will lessen the burden on ill-equipped research facilities in our existing universities. Most importantly, though, a master’s degree will serve its actual purpose of being a research-intensive step towards higher education.

However, there is a catch. If the job market and societal expectations remain the same despite the change in academic structure, then the sufferers will again be students. In this case, students will be forced to go through yet another admission test and waste a year doing a master’s to meet the unfair demands of society and the market. Worse yet, if a student fails the admission test, it will mean more time lost stuck in a dysfunctional system.

Although a master’s is not mandatory on paper, the flawed social expectations and illogical trend in the job market makes it so. It’s time we not just question but also remedy this glitch in our system.

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# Turning a Blind Eye, Literally

**RAYA MEHNAZ**

I often felt like Shuvro from Humayun Ahmed’s *Daruchini Dwip* and I was cut from the same socially awkward cloth.

While my previous idea of our similarities centred on being two introverts with hearts of gold, it was my 20th birthday when I realised our similarities didn’t just end there. I too had an eyesight that was slowly decaying. However, unlike Shuvro, my parents wouldn’t let me go on a life-changing trip.

In retrospect, the poor eyesight shouldn’t have been this much of a surprise. After all, the blurry imagery and distant figures looking a little too much like Slenderman should’ve given me a clue. Not to mention, the sporadic use of hipster glasses I claim for the aesthetic are really for clarity of vision. However, as I sat on the little stool at my eye doctor’s office, trying to ascertain whether the bottom row of the eye chart said “D H R O P” or “O F B U T”, I started thinking about eyes in a completely calm and rational manner.

So, I get to wondering, who is going to account for all the carrot-filled snacks I had to endure throughout my pre-school and primary school? Who is going to reimburse me for all the cartoons I missed in good faith? And who is going to take my case against my childhood doctor, who unashamedly said that my eyes will get better if I just keep wearing my glasses and not that it will only get worse as the years go by?

“But,” a voice sounding suspiciously like the rational part of my brain interrupted my violent musings. “You can always get Lasik surgery,” it weakly supplies.

I internally scoff, knowing that I can never get Lasik surgery after watching *Final Destination 5* at the ripe old age of nine. I violently shove that rational side of my brain into a dark pit of my mind and continue onward with my revolutionary musings about eyes. I’m sure I’m on the precipice of creating a legendary movement: Men and Women against Glasses.

I keep thinking: aren’t eyes supposed to be windows to the soul? What happens to the people who have to wear glasses? What would people see when they look into their eyes? How many more ways do our poor eyesight rob us of our inclusion in popular idioms?

Just as I almost convinced myself that poor eyesight is indeed a political issue, and an extension of identity that is subject to frequent discrimination and prejudice, my mother came up to me.

“You look like a very serious yet cute chipmunk when you wear your glasses,” she said.

I finally let out a smile. Just as I was getting a well-deserved hug and a head rub from my mother after a gruelling day, I admit to myself that a life as a serious yet very cute chipmunk wouldn’t be so bad. Still going to complain a lot.

*Raya likes to live life dangerously — one House MD episode at a time. Send help at fb.com/raya.mehnaz*

