

On-campus job opportunities (or lack thereof)

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Being a university student usually entails some degree of financial freedom, be it out of need or want. While most students resort to tutoring, some (read: very few) get lucky enough to land a job on campus.

Hold on a second. On-campus job opportunity? Is that even a thing? Clearly not in Bangladesh?

Most universities abroad play by a system that allows students to get many on-campus job opportunities, in exchange for which they are paid an hourly wage, given stipends, or enjoy a tuition waiver. Universities being a society of its own has many such sectors for students to work in.

Rafia Bushra, currently a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, USA speaks about her experience as an undergraduate at the University of Arizona, saying, "Anyplace I think of, student employees are everywhere. From working admin or reception jobs at different offices to university libraries and dining halls, there are numerous positions that specifically hire students of that university. Other than cleaning jobs, almost all opportunities are given to undergraduate students. While it's not much, they do get paid an hourly wage."

For postgraduate students, on-campus job opportunities serve more like real jobs as they come with health insurance, stipends, and so on. Rafia explains, "While masters students can choose to get these research assistantship jobs, it is somewhat of a requirement for PhD students. It is generally expected that postgrads will work under the supervision of a professor. While these jobs do have better facilities that come as compensation, they are also more time consuming."

As private universities like BRAC University, North South University, East West University and so on follow a similar structure of student employment; they offer on-campus job opportunities for students.

Although not as extensive as universities abroad, there is variety in these opportunities as well. Rubaba Iffat Archi, civil and environmental engineering student at NSU says, "NSU offers a few positions for students other than the conventional TA/RA positions. The posts are labelled as



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'student workers'. We have multiple sectors under this position, like the IT office, library, and PR office. Mostly undergraduate students work in these offices."

While students doing these jobs do not get tuition waivers, they do have an hourly wage system. As Rubaba explains, "The more you get the chance to work as a student worker the more you get paid. The TAs and RAs receive a fixed salary. Coming from a student worker position in my university, I wouldn't say that the amount is inadequate as it comes on to myself how much can I work. However, I think the hourly rate could be increased, so a lot of students won't have to look for tuitions or other jobs."

Unlike private universities in Bangladesh, most public universities do not have the culture of hiring students for on-campus work. Some faculty members from renowned universities like University of Dhaka will hire selected students to work as RAs, but this practice being unofficial, the work hours and monetary compensation completely depends on projects and/or faculty members.

BUET too followed the same pattern. However, recently it has been announced that on-campus jobs will soon be available to its students. They will be given a

varying degree of opportunities such as data analysis, internship opportunities, assisting in existing projects, working at the university library and more, depending on their skills.

Although it varies from one department to another, some universities like KUET and BUP do have research assistantship positions open.

Khadija Akter Onee, Lecturer from the Department of English, BUP, says, "Back when I was a student here, I worked as a TA and also informally as a proofreader. I was paid for the proofreading job, but it was not official. We also have the opportunity of working as student tutors under the STS program which is run solely by the English department. Although student tutors do not get monetary compensation, they receive coupons for buying books. So, in some way or the other, it is rewarding. TAs, in contrast, earn a handsome salary, in terms of it being a student job. We do not have RAs yet, but it would be better if such opportunities open up in the future."

The Bangladeshi education system, being conservative, often do not see students working part-time as a positive thing as it can hamper their main job of being a student. However, students who

have benefitted from the on-campus job opportunities tell a different tale.

Khadija continues, "These jobs were always accommodating as the department prioritises academia overall. Furthermore, it helped me learn a lot in terms of taking responsibility and becoming more organised. It also helps you develop as a professional."

Regardless of the exceptions, lack of structure, a limited number of openings and an overall aversion to the culture of having student worker does little to facilitate the large student bodies of these universities. Naturally, the question that comes to mind is, why not?

Associate Professor Dr Md. Mohoshin Reza, Head of the English Department at BUP identifies two main reasons, "The problem is mostly structural and cultural, not a financial one. Universities get adequate funding for research, but this does rarely prove to be fruitful as the culture of investing in research is almost non-existent. The more research-intensive the university, the more opportunities it can give to its students. So, the problem remains in the structure and culture of university as we fail to systematically utilise the funds we do get."

The same notion is seconded by Professor Dr Omar Faruk from the Department of Criminology and Police Science, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University. He asserts, "Not only is it disadvantageous to the students, but it is also a waste of government funds. Hiring students for different sectors in the university will save funds, be a great opportunity for students and help specialised skills development on a broader scale."

Universities being the liminal space where students evolve from learner to professional, it can serve its purpose better if it provides them job opportunities on campus. Considering the myriad of benefits that can come with this shift both for universities and the students, it is imperative that we make structural changes to turn on-campus job opportunities into a reality.

Tazreen considers reading "The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath" to be a calming activity. Question her sanity at tazreenzahan@gmail.com



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