

OPINION

Was the six-month semester a good idea for Private Universities?

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM

Last year, the University Grants Commission (UGC) mandated private universities shift to a six-month semester system, citing the need to bring uniformity into the educational system and give slack to private university students' schedules, allowing them some off time to enrich themselves through ECAs and other opportunities. However, such a massive shift was bound to create some issues.

North South University (NSU), the largest private university in the nation, was the only to shift from a trimester to a bi-semester system. After months of internal speculation and rumours, authorities confirmed the news via a brief and vague email a few

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days before the spring 2023 semester commenced, leaving students scrambling to figure out how things would move forward. You would expect such a massive structural change to have a lot of forethought and planning before implementation. But, the lack of forethought that went into NSU's system change became evident quickly.

The teaching plan was left mainly the same to accommodate a larger term, and the same content taught in four months was stretched out across thirty-six classes throughout six months. However, the workload for students also increased, as most took at least five courses per semester to finish on time. Consequently, there were more quizzes, assignments, and assessments, all piled up at once

on students. Unlike public universities, there isn't any dedicated midterm week, and many faculties string out multiple midterms throughout the semester. Furthermore, students got no leeway during Ramadan and a brief seven-day Eid-ul-Fitr vacation.

The most perplexing part of the new system is its inflexibility. While the authorities allowed tuition fees to be paid in installments, choosing an installment plan nullified pupils from dropping courses. Students only get about three weeks of break between terms. Yes, you read that right, only three weeks. This arguably nullifies the entire system change's premise, as students aren't getting any extra time for research or extra-curricular activities, let alone take a break. There was an announcement about an optional two-month intersession where a limited amount of courses would have been offered. It was mentioned once and never acknowledged again, once more leaving students in the dark.

NSU's hurried implementation of the new system has had its worst impact on students nearly done with their degrees. The sudden announcement didn't leave time for any planning. Hence, many final-year students took on unbearable workloads to avoid graduating late. The new system has also created a looming threat of session jams, something previously unheard of in private institutes.

As of summer 2023, NSU has decided to conduct classes over a four-month long period under the bi-semester system, rather than dragging out classes for six months. While it may be a step in the right direction, students still face issues with the ambiguous intersession and lack of flexibility. The revamped system, lack of transparency, and many of the university's longstanding problems create a very suffocating environment for students.

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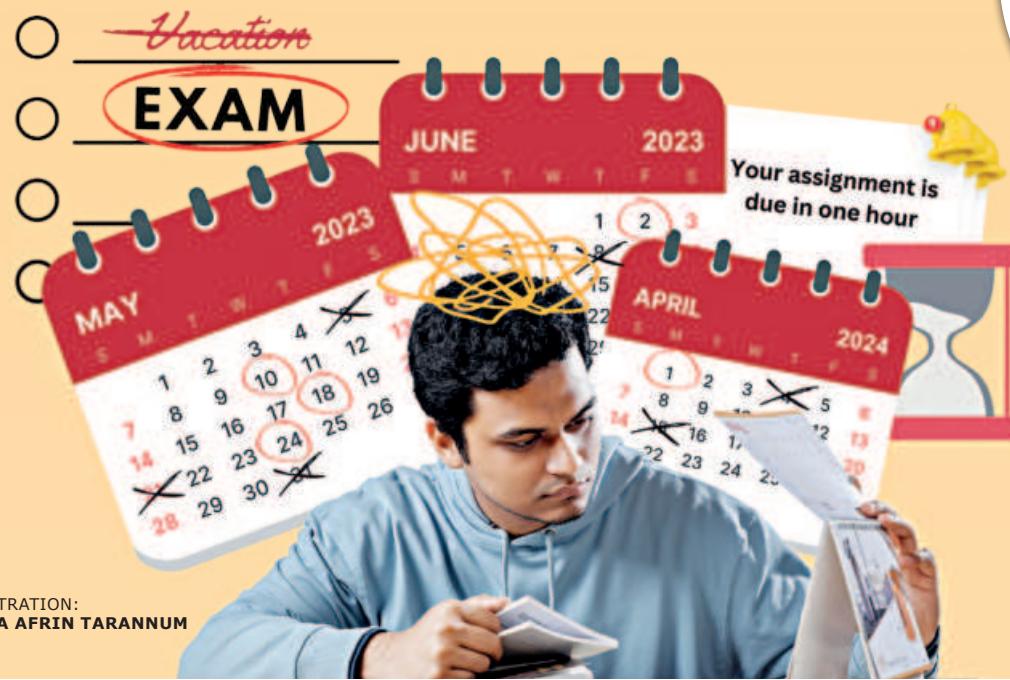


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Why must there be a mandatory minimum university attendance?

NAWSHIN FLORA

The main reason behind compulsory class attendance is to ensure that students come to attend classes. In many universities, this accounts for five to ten percent of the final grade.

Here's the thing though, university is not only about academics. This is a major transition period for students as they start taking responsibility for themselves. As adults, they need to be trusted to manage their priorities.

Many students only attend classes as they dread lower grades. A major flaw of this policy is that it values physical attendance over actual engagement. If attending a class isn't a priority, chances are students are less likely to pay attention anyway.

It's true that attendance policies are made with the goal of improving academic performance. Whilst it is not an easy task to do well in tests without attending classes, if a student somehow manages to accomplish this feat, they shouldn't suffer for it.

A huge reason behind students' lack of motivation to attend classes lies in professors' inability to teach course materials in an interesting manner. On top of that, public universities in Bangladesh have no faculty evaluation system. Professors face zero accountability in the classroom. Students' tendency to attend classes depend on the class environment and teaching quality. Teachers need to make classes worth attending, instead of relying on a mandatory attendance mechanism to ensure student presence.

Furthermore, such policies are far away from being inclusive. Many professors do not excuse absences due to physical or mental health issues, or other life crises. To create an inclusive environment for all, attendance in universities should be voluntary. Shifting the focus towards lesson quality instead may push up class attendance rates, leading to a win-win situation for all.

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