



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

UNADDRESSED STRUGGLES

of freshmen at public universities

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

The first year of university can be a crucial time as it often sets a precedent for a student's upcoming years. The resources offered by a student's university can help catalyse new habits they forge and strategies they adopt to keep up with the changing tides of life. Insufficient amenities and a lack of a vibrant campus environment can stifle the transformative experience that freshman year is meant to provide for students.



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

Durdana Chowdhury, 19, an undergraduate student at the University of Dhaka, made a deliberate choice to not stay at Rokeya Hall. She laments about the miserable state of her allotted hall, "Students don't get their own seat at the dorm until their final year. First-year students are required to share a single bed or live in crowded 'gonorooms', which are poorly maintained and lack hygiene. Meals at halls are subpar and seniority is strongly exercised."

Besides infrastructural shortcomings, there are complications like students staying in their residence halls even after their academic affiliation with the institution is over, as well as unfair seat allotments. Amidst dwindling

amenities controlled by various groups misusing power, freshmen end up getting the shortest end of the stick.

Amir Alam*, a student at University of Chittagong, elaborates that first-year students are not allotted accommodation at dormitories without political patronisation, "Seniors belonging to political student bodies persuade freshmen to join their groups in exchange for residential facilities. This helps increase the number of political participants from each hall. In return, juniors are expected to attend weekly meetings, partake in rallies, provide help during conflicts, and openly endorse political ideologies of the ruling political party."

Students moving into halls must show fealty to seniors and their rules. As Amir mentioned, resident freshmen are mandated to attend their seniors' personal events or run errands for them whenever they are asked, unless they want to endanger their residency and risk punishments.

Living off-campus can be a way out of such dilemmas but it still comes with strings attached.

Durdana shares, "I co-rent a flat near my university with female roommates. I have to be cautious about my safety and spend a lot on basic necessities. We encountered difficulties in finding an apartment as landlords were hesitant to lease to unmarried females. Our landlord charges us more rent than our neighbours simply because we are female tenants."

The culture of revering senior students has become so uncompromising that freshmen are now forced to tiptoe around a maze of regulations imposed by senior students on campus grounds and dorms. Most rules are touted as important measures to demarcate appropriate boundaries.

Faiza Alim*, a second-year undergraduate student at the Military Institute of Science and Technology, reflects on dealing with seniority on campus, "During our first year, we had meetings where we were told to memorise the names of our seniors. We then had to narrate them perfectly from memory. In certain departments, freshmen were compelled to stand under the scorching sun during break time. Moreover, there were strict prohibitions against taking photographs at specific locations on campus. Any unnecessary

interaction with seniors, such as using the elevator with them or even accidentally brushing past them, was deemed an offence."

"If a student violated any rule or failed to greet a senior, the entire class got summoned for meetings to be admonished. At times, we got held up at these meetings, arrived late for class and faced punishment from teachers. But we couldn't disclose anything to our faculty, as it would only put senior students in trouble and we would bear the brunt of it," Faiza adds.

Although experiences may vary across institutions, interviewed students attest to a common pattern in the way seniority is imposed. It usually begins with being forced to add seniors on social media. Students are then coerced into getting themselves acquainted with their seniors. All students are provided with a set of rules to abide by. These regulations range from seemingly trivial to more stringent measures, such as designating specific areas on campus grounds as off-limits to freshmen and barring them from food stalls and/or shops around campus, putting restrictions on attires and grooming habits. Juniors have to prioritise helping seniors with their assignments when asked or avoid friendly interactions with them altogether.

In a similar vein, Md. Pritom*, a freshman at Khulna University of Engineering Technology, shares, "Male freshmen are mandated to have short hair and be clean-shaven on campus. We can't wear round-neck T-shirts. There are rules in the common room and cafeteria that specifically prevent freshmen from availing certain facilities."

On the other hand, some students become subjects of hazing, more commonly known as ragging, which is a practice of humiliating newcomers.

Saima Tamjid*, a first-year student of Jagannath University, recalls, "On our first day of classes, our seniors made us sing, dance, recite poems or perform ridiculous acts under the pretext of an introductory ceremony. Our physical traits were made fun of. One of the girls was told to propose to a senior. In recent months, I have had to fend off uncomfortable advances from senior students. Even sitting down on the university transport was forbidden in the presence of seniors."

According to accounts of a first-year student from Chittagong University of Engineering Technology, seniors often summon freshmen to guest rooms where ensuing interactions can be dubbed almost ritualistic. Students get intimidated into delivering self-introductions maintaining a strict pre-instructed script. They are interrogated or told to perform absurd acts in an attempt to prove their obedience. If a student has offended their senior or violated their instructions in any way, they might face verbal harassment.

Alarming cases of physical harassment at universities that make headlines fester from subtle bullying that incidentally turns ugly.

Pritom says, "Most seniors are very helpful and disapprove of mistreating juniors. But there is a chain of command to be followed. Seniors instruct their immediate junior batch to control their subsequent juniors. Rules are stricter for hall residents. If you're careful enough, it's possible to avoid following rules every day. But if a senior notices disobedience, juniors can get called to dormitories to answer for their actions."

Showing respect based on age and maintaining basic decorum should be a two-way street. But when these become oppressive demands that encroach on an individual's well-being, it is crucial to admit the notoriety of hierarchical power dynamics.

"Although we were never physically harmed, such behaviour was very distressing. Our seniors told us to dismiss what they did as a way to break the ice," recounts Saima*.

When these issues go unaddressed and unresolved by authorities that wield the power to make reforms and implement a course of action, helpless students learn to brush off unfair treatment as a rite of passage into university. At a certain point, this creates a cycle of abuse and freshmen who enter these reputed institutions with dreams and demands of their rightful provisions, continue to get denied and disappointed.

**Names have been changed upon request*

Find Nuzha at nuzhaoishee1256504@gmail.com

Making a study playlist that works for you

People's opinions vary significantly on the effectiveness of listening to music while studying. While some find themselves unable to focus without listening to some sort of music, others might consider it to be a distraction. There is no hard and fast rule regarding study methods. Every method is valid if it works for you. If you are someone who finds music to be an appropriate supplement to your daily study routine, creating your own study playlist can be a fun and effective way to boost your focus and productivity while studying.

BIPRA PRASUN DAS

Here's a step-by-step guide to help you make your personalised study playlist. **Identify what works best for you** Consider what type of music helps you concentrate best. Some people prefer instrumental music, while others find ambient sounds or specific genres like classical, lo-fi, or acoustic tracks more helpful. You can gather information from existing study playlists on platforms like Spotify, YouTube, or Apple Music. Take note of the songs that resonate with you and add them to a list of potential tracks

for your playlist.

Choose songs wisely

Make sure the songs you select have a calm and non-distracting vibe. Avoid tracks with explicit lyrics or sudden changes in volume as they may interrupt your focus.

Check the tempo of the songs you choose. Songs with a tempo of 60-70 beats per minute (BPM) are often considered the most conducive to focus and relaxation. You can use online tools like getsongbpm.com or other apps to check the tempo of your songs. You might also find that variety is key to keeping your mind engaged. Mix up different artists and genres to maintain



ILLUSTRATION: FAISAL BIN IQBAL

interest throughout your study session. **Organise the playlist and consider the length**

Arrange the tracks in a way that helps you maintain a steady flow of concentration. For instance, you might begin with slower-paced, softer songs and gradually build up to more energising ones or vice versa.

In addition, determine the ideal length of your playlist; it can be as short as 30 minutes or as long as a few hours, depending on the typical duration of your study sessions.

Customise for different subjects and experiment

If you study multiple subjects, you can create multiple playlists to cater to each subject's specific requirements. For example, you might consider more soothing music for reading and writing tasks, while faster beats could help during maths or problem-solving sessions.

Add new songs, remove the ones that don't quite fit. It is okay to modify your playlist as you discover what works and what doesn't. Keep changing and modifying till you find your perfect combination of melodies.