

■ EDU GUIDE ■

Why do we have so many GED COURSES?

TAASEEN MOHAMMED ISLAM, MASHIYAT NAYEEM

General Education Courses, also known as Gen Eds or GEDs, are a range of subjects that the American university system requires students to complete. General Education Courses are designed to supplement and enrich student's undergraduate learning experience, and impart them with essential knowledge and skills outside their major or concentration to thrive in the future. Even though there are discrepancies from institution to institution, General Education courses typically span basic mathematics and language comprehension to history, humanities, and natural sciences.

Similar to America's liberal arts education system, numerous tertiary-level institutes in Bangladesh have implemented General Education courses as well, with the same end goal of producing well-rounded university graduates. North South University (NSU) has 12 courses equating to 36 credit hours allocated towards mandatory language, social science, natural science, humanities, math, and computer courses. Similarly, BRAC University requires students to complete 13 Gen Ed courses equating to 39 credit hours of study, and Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) has 40 to 41 credits in Foundation courses covering similar educational ground.

Even though the necessity of studying General Education for budding undergrads can't be overstated, they still pose unique challenges to pupils. Given most undergrad degrees are around 120 to 130 credits, general education courses account for around a whopping one-fourth of courses pupils take. This sometimes leads to the belief that general education courses are a tactic universities use to inflate the prices of their already expensive degrees.

A common complaint among students from both national curriculum and English medium schools alike is the repetition of high school level content in the form of GED courses, such as basic language, Mathematics and History, leading to many students to view these courses as redundant. Morshadul Alam Abir, an SCM graduate from NSU and intern at Nestlé PLC, feels that there could be better use of credits allocated toward general education courses. "I would rather have used my credits allocated to general education to take courses more relevant to my major," he stated.

In cases such as this where a student has completed a particular set of subjects before enrolling into university, a waiver system may be introduced based on high school transcripts or even admission exams. Fatima Ibrahim, a final year engineering student opined, "I think a more comprehensive approach would be to combine the social sciences into one or two courses specifically tailored for STEM students"

Another problem is the limited choices when it comes to courses. When we look at the universities around the world that offer a liberal arts curriculum, most of them have requirements to do one or two courses under each subject area, thus there

are no mandatory courses, it is up to the students to fulfill their requirements as they wish. However, due to limited capacity, universities in our country are not equipped to provide a range of courses under a certain subject area thus students are stuck with whatever introductory course is offered for everybody. Furthermore, sometimes a proper teaching approach is lacking in these subjects. Instead of inspiring students to gain a bigger worldview, teachers tend to shove down facts.

From assigning weekly assignments, taking multiple tricky midterms to impromptu presentations and group assignments, many General Education faculties are known to be so demanding that students go the extra mile in their subjects. And with tough grading thresholds, many students are unable to get out unscathed, leading to retakes, which adds further financial burden.

There's no doubt that students can gain multi-tasking and time-management skills juggling all these commitments in addition to extra-curricular activities, but there is a sentiment of general education courses adding unnecessary pressure to already overworked students.

"As a double major, I'm already overwhelmed with major courses, thus the added pressure from GED courses feels unnecessary," says Zarrin Tasnim Binta Hossain, a final year student at NSU.

In universities following a liberal arts based curriculum, there seems to be a general discontent among STEM students about the number of requirements outside of their major. A lot of these students already come from science backgrounds but are still required to take each of sciences separately along with labs which can feel tedious. But there can be more benefits to General Education than what meets

the eye, particularly for the humanities and social sciences.

As technology advances at a rapid phase, it is of utmost importance to be educated about the repercussions of new technology, which is where ethical theories like Utilitarianism from a Philosophy course might come into play. Similarly, a Sociology course may equip budding engineers and entrepreneurs the necessary research and interview skills for user research prior to engineering a product. Thus, it is important that the education system produces technologists who understand society and not just churn out cogs in the machine.

Dr Hasan Muhammad Baniamin, Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Political Science at NSU shared, "From an individual perspective, studying these subjects expands your critical thinking capabilities. For a CSE student, a Political Science course may help understand policy making and governance about data harvesting to prevent wide scale misuse of data and spread of misinformation such as the 2016 US election where there was some manipulation to tip the scales in Trump's favour. When you can combine both your technical knowledge and world knowledge, you can have an impactful career. For a business student, studying about people, culture, and political systems will help to be successful in international trade. And from a societal perspective, in order to be a good citizen it is important to have holistic knowledge about your country and the world."

In short, knowing about a wide variety of subject matters helps to communicate and mingle with people from all walks of life. Without exposure to different subjects and departments, it limits a student from making meaningful connections with students from other disciplines.

Taaseen
Mohammed Islam
is a student at
NSU.

Mashiyat
Nayeem is
a student
at NSU.

