

■ **EDU GUIDE** ■

# Building a scholarship profile for higher studies abroad

Do you really need an academic break for achieving overseas scholarships? This Erasmus scholar says no. But you need to start working on your scholarship profile early.

**FAHIM ABRAR ABID**

A commonly accepted idea among most Bangladeshi students looking to pursue higher education abroad is that securing an overseas scholarship necessarily requires professional work experience after their undergrad in addition to strong academic merit. As a result, there is a high tendency to take a two to three-year break from education to build a scholarship profile. Often, such academic breaks last longer than initially anticipated as students get trapped in the web of their respective professional lives.

Every scholarship has its own assessment criteria. In fact, scholarships like the Chevening or Commonwealth Scholarships indeed look for candidates with at least two years of work experience. However, securing various other reputed scholarships is no longer impossible right after completing a bachelor's degree. Among them, the most prestigious one is the Erasmus Mundus. While this particular scholarship also prioritises candidates with practical experience, it can be cracked without any academic break if proper strategies and tactics are applied.

As a scholarship awardee of not only the Erasmus Mundus but also three other scholarships in the very next admission cycle right after my graduation, I found immense potential in the Bangladeshi youth to represent the country on the global stage. The journey was challenging but also very rewarding. I remember my peers being concerned. Most of them claimed that I was being 'too ambitious' specifically because I had not even completed my bachelor's and was targeting top universities. Although my confidence was a bit shaken at first because of their concerns, I focused on crafting my application, and eventually secured a fully-funded scholarship worth BDT 95 lacs in a programme consisting of a top 50-ranked Law university.

The first step towards breaking the myth is early preparation. I was fully determined about my goal and decided early on what I wanted. The preparation starts with finding the desired and best-fit programmes and potential scholarships, and critically assessing the requirements. One can visit the designated websites or reach out to alumni of those programmes or scholarships via LinkedIn to better understand the requirements. Unfortunately, most applicants usually give up at this stage because the gap between their profiles and the requirements for securing scholarships is often too wide. And that's where the first

point comes, and the 'myth' continues.

The most significant advantage of starting early is having enough time to cover up the gap by participating in relevant activities according to the requirements. Nowadays, university students in Bangladesh are actively involved in co-curricular activities in addition to their academics. Almost every mainstream university provides facilities for club and subject-oriented activities that are evaluated as voluntary or leadership experiences.

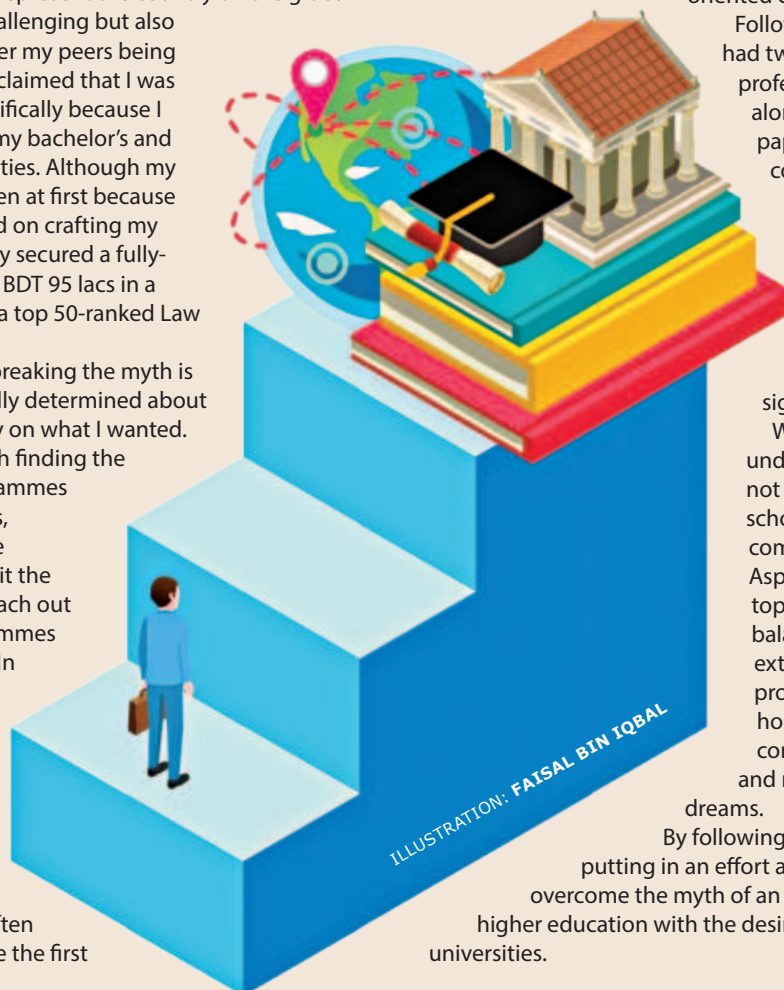
Moreover, some universities have incorporated mandatory internship completion at the end of their degree programmes to provide valuable experience to their students. However, not all these activities necessarily provide one with professional work experience, so one must put effort beyond the university-provided facilities to make a compelling case since all the scholarships are highly competitive.

Hence, to strategically prepare for prestigious scholarships like Erasmus Mundus from the onset of undergraduate studies, potential applicants should seek opportunities to gain real-life work experience relevant to their desired programmes and scholarships. This may include research assistantships, attending conferences, participating in relevant online or summer courses, writing for journals or newspapers, and taking part in subject-oriented competitions.

Following this pathway, I already had two-and-a-half years of professional work experience alongside two conference papers, one international competition award, and three research awards by the time I graduated. Finding such opportunities can often be difficult, but steadily growing a strong LinkedIn network in one's own discipline can significantly alleviate this issue.

While academic merit is undeniably important, it is not the sole factor in securing scholarships in today's competitive landscape. Aspiring students aiming for top institutions must strike a balance between academics, extra-curricular activities, and professional experience. This holistic approach is crucial for competing on the global stage and realising their academic dreams.

By following an early approach and putting in an effort accordingly, they can overcome the myth of an academic break and pursue higher education with the desired scholarships at top universities.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fahim Abrar Abid is a Law graduate from BRAC University and was an OSUN undergraduate visiting scholar at the Central European University in Vienna, Austria.

Currently, Fahim is an Erasmus Mundus scholar of the International Law of Global Security, Peace and Development programme at the University of Glasgow, the United Kingdom, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI), Spain, and the University of Tartu, Estonia.

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