■ CAMPUS LIFE ■

The hurdles of the course advising process and
THE PLANS THAT FALTER

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The open credit system in private universities across Bangladesh is often said to offer students flexibility and control over their education. In fact, it's one of the reasons why many students choose private universities, as the open credit system allows them to pick courses according to their schedule.

In theory, it sounds perfect. Yet, for many students, it's far from it. The process of course advising — registering for classes at the start of every semester— has become a major source of stress and frustration, exposing significant flaws in both the system and its management.

At some private universities, a key issue is a shortage of sections. This is particularly critical in departments with high enrollments, where popular courses fill up almost instantly. If a student fails to register for a course they need, it causes further complications that could lead to the disruption of an entire academic plan.

As many courses are prerequisites, missing one may prevent a student from taking others in the next semester. This issue can even lead to one's expected term for graduation to be prolonged, causing further complications. A final-year student, for example, may end up spending an extra semester or two, simply because they couldn't secure a seat for a required course. This issue has broader implications for students, who may face additional financial burdens and delays in starting their professional careers. In departments with a relatively smaller number of students, the situation can be even worse since courses aren't always offered every semester due to limited faculty or resources.

"It's already tough to keep up with credits in an open credit system," said Sk Mustarin Muskan Mortuza, 23, an alumna of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). "For smaller departments, not every course is available each semester. If you miss one, you might have to wait a year. This disrupts whatever planning you had."

This situation makes long-term academic planning nearly impossible for students. The lack of consistency in course offerings adds another layer of difficulty, as students often have no clear roadmap for completing their degrees on time.

Technical failures compound the issue. Students frequently struggle with their university's online registration system, which often crashes or freezes, especially during high traffic phases. This adds unnecessary anxiety to what should be a straightforward process.

"The website and allocation are to blame. Increasing course sections requires logistical support, but at least the registration process could be improved with a better website," added Mortuza.

However, technical teams argue that the issue isn't solely system related. An anonymous IT department employee at a renowned private university highlighted their challenges, "The advising portal works fine – you can log in at your allocated time with minimal crashes. The problem is students can't find sections because they're all booked. We don't have the authority to create new sections; that's up to the departments. Our hands are tied." This underscores a deeper issue: the disconnect between university administrations and technical teams. IT systems may function well, but without proper planning and resource allocation by the administration, student issues persist. Universities often

treat the advising process as a routine administrative task rather than recognising its critical role in shaping the student experience.

In most universities, advising involves two stages: pre-advising and advising. Pre-advising, which happens near the end of the ongoing semester, is often the main focus. "You're given a slot based on the number of credits earned, and have to choose courses within that slot," explained Ibtedat Fatin, 22, a Biotechnology student at BRAC University.

"But problems arise when students can't get the courses they need. The credit hierarchy makes it harder for those with lower scores or those retaking failed

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courses," added Fatin. While students may adjust choices or retake courses, opportunities are limited and come with strict deadlines. Moreover, students with lower academic standings are disadvantaged in this system, as their credit scores directly affect their ability to secure preferred courses.

Academic advisors are meant to ease this process, but their availability and effectiveness vary greatly. Fatin noted, "It's sometimes hard to figure out who your advisor is, but they do help if there's a problem."

Unfortunately, at many universities, advisors are inconsistent and often inaccessible.

Students frequently have to approach department heads for assistance, an impractical and inefficient solution. Advisors also change frequently, leaving students without continuous or reliable support. This lack of guidance exacerbates the stress and frustration of an already chaotic advising process.

The inefficiencies in course advising extend beyond inconvenience. For commuting students, a poorly organised schedule can mean waiting long hours between classes. Many students end up registering for

whatever classes are available, regardless of timing, resulting in wasted time and added exhaustion. Instead of planning their semester, students often scramble to secure whatever is left.

These problems become even more critical in the final years of study, where missed courses or failed registrations have greater consequences. With the pressure to complete degree requirements on time, any disruption feels like a significant setback. Delays in graduation can also have financial implications, as students may have to pay additional tuition fees or forgo job opportunities while they wait to complete their degrees.

What is particularly frustrating is that these issues are avoidable. Advising problems are not new, and students have voiced their frustration for years. Investing in better IT systems, increasing course sections to match demand, and improving communication between departments and technical teams could significantly ease the chaos. Additionally, offering more consistent advisor support and training could help students navigate the complexities of their academic journeys more effectively.

At its best, the open credit system empowers students, giving them the freedom to structure their education. It offers the flexibility to tailor academic plans according to personal needs and professional goals. However, without proper infrastructure and support, it becomes a source of stress and frustration. Students deserve better than to be stuck in a cycle of inefficiency and mismanagement.

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