

EDUCATION

Of passion, practicality, and pursuing AN UNDERGRADUATE MINOR DEGREE

As an undergraduate student who can barely deal with the pressure of a single major, witnessing some of my peers pursuing a minor programme, an option allowing students to venture outside their primary course of study, is intriguing. Why is a minor degree sought by some, knowing an extra discipline is going to impose an additional chapter to an already stressful academic life? Is it a calculated move to embellish their resume and boost their employability? Or is it driven by an intrinsic quest for knowledge reinforced by sheer passion?

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Moonim Ahsan, a fourth-year student at BRAC University, currently pursuing a minor degree in Computer Science, says, "Choosing a minor programme was easy for me. From a young age I have been fascinated with computers. While my love for my major, Economics, knows no bounds, I couldn't help but feel a sense of "what if" whenever I thought about learning more about computers and software."

"My interest and curiosity were the most significant factors in making this decision. Yet, I believe that my employability will be greatly enhanced once I am done with both degrees," he adds.

Faculties have the unique perspective of observing just how instrumental a minor programme can be in the vocational progress of students. Dr Wasiqur Rahman Khan, chair and professor at BRAC University's Economics and Social Sciences department, clarifies, "The option of a minor programme is there for students interested in the pursuit of a more specific subject. It is a complementary qualification. Students must decide to what extent they intend to use it. I've had students who went on to pursue their master's based on their minor rather than their major, simply because the former caught their interest more."

Additionally, Dr Wasiqur remarks, "If the objective of the minor is career-centric, students should select a minor programme based on their desired field or industry. Particularly in Bangladesh, employers, especially those in MNCs, look at the broad aggregates. They don't scrutinise your transcript. They'll prioritise your skillset, which can be augmented by a minor degree."

He further states, "The content of a major programme is never fully utilised at a job setting, at most 20 to 30 percent of it is used. Hence, students should pick a minor programme which adds to this percentage."

Nonetheless, not everyone seeks a minor degree for career prospects. For Ibshar Khan, a fourth-year student at North South University, pursuing a minor degree in English Literature has become a comforting endeavour. "Reading has always been a cherished tradition in my family. When I was younger, every month, without fail, my mom would take me to the local bookstore to pick out a new book. Fast forward to sophomore year, when everyone around me advised against choosing Literature as a minor, I let my inner rebel make the decision for me. I opted for something that soothes my weary soul instead of a more conventional route," she says.

The perks of going for a minor degree are not just limited to academic enrichment, though. Ibshar shares, "I have a better rapport with the people I met through my minor than with those I've known for four long years in my major courses. Moreover, this minor curriculum has probably done more for my personal growth than I ever anticipated. It has taught me to peel back the intricate layers of a book and see them as more than just stories. Literature now feels like context, history, and, most of all, truth. It has given me insights about not just the world but also myself. Safe to say, this minor programme has certainly boosted my emotional

intelligence and that's far more valuable for me than intellect alone."

For faculty members like Dr Nazia Manzoor, assistant professor and chair of North South University's English department, the enthusiasm of students pursuing Literature as a minor is a joy to witness. "I have had students repeatedly express that the endeavour feels like a warm welcome, being able to talk about texts in an inclusive manner within a classroom. As an instructor, it is really gratifying to know that we have been able to cultivate an environment which is comforting to students from all backgrounds."

worlds. Dr Wasiqur notes, "When it comes to virtual learning, I would suggest students to focus on requisite knowledge, not something already covered by their minor or major programmes. This way they can keep on broadening their skill sets. Students must practise wisdom when it comes to exploring these options."

Even so, balancing two different curricula is not without challenges. Dr Wasiqur reveals, "Students often want to take courses from other departments such as Anthropology or English because they are intrigued by the content or want to boost their grades. However, having a minor degree can restrict students from



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She adds, "University is perhaps the last opportunity you're going to get to experience and explore things that you are excited about. Once you finish it, your education becomes very specific as you start focusing more on becoming an expert, instead of having a general education in anything. It really is the last opportunity in life to do something just for the fun of it, just for the joy of it. So do it. Take that art class, do that English minor or whatever you've set your heart to."

Yet, in the digital era, where a world full of knowledge can be accessed with just a click, is a minor programme a viable alternative?

Moonim says, "I have enrolled myself in countless online courses and invested a hefty sum of money. The outcome is always zero because I struggle to stay committed. It's difficult to hold myself accountable after failing when there is nothing apparent at stake, like grades. On the other hand, a proper academic setting, bonding with your classmates, connecting with the faculty members, getting productive feedback, and trying to meet their expectations is more rewarding and fulfilling for me. I always perform a lot better under such circumstances."

However, instructors encourage the blend of both

doing so. For instance, if a student is doing a minor in Mathematics, it will be difficult for them to also take their desired courses in Sociology, Biology or any other department because their remaining credits will mostly be consumed by their minor courses, leaving limited options for other courses to be explored. Hence, these trade-offs must be considered carefully."

In a similar vein, Dr Nazia shares, "Some students are unable to prioritise both major and minor curricula. Depending on the requirements of the major, the chosen minor programme can sometimes be a bit of an overreach. Additionally, if the minor is a passion project, which is often the case for English Literature, students end up enjoying the discipline so much that the major starts feeling like a chore and efforts toward it seem to dwindle."

Realistic expectations must be considered when pursuing a minor degree on the basis of passion according to Dr Nazia. "Enjoy yourself and have fun while pursuing a minor, but students must remember that they have to put in the work, do the labour and take the assignments seriously. Passion-driven minor programmes may seem like a fun escape class but it is ultimately a class," she said.