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ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN



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MOVIES

A Real Pain traces tragedy through all its phases

AFRA ANIKA NAWAR KHAN

A Real Pain follows the story of two cousins, David and Benji Kaplan, who decide to take a trip down to Poland to visit their grandmother's home after her passing. While the film seems like a story that delves into the mere experience of loneliness and detachment from family, it does not fail to touch on the larger picture.

Eisenberg's directorial debut is funny, welcoming, and warm at first glance because the relationship between the two cousins has been depicted quite naturally. But the film also lets the viewer understand that if they take their eyes away from the story's two protagonists, they will fail to notice that the film's setting is in constant motion.

Benji Kaplan's character – played by Kieran Culkin – personifies this prevalence of motion. He seems to be someone who gives into melancholia because that at least allows him to feel something. In contrast, his cousin, David, is uptight and struggles with expressing his feelings.

However, the comfort children of immigrants receive does not sit well with the Kaplans because they both resort to coping

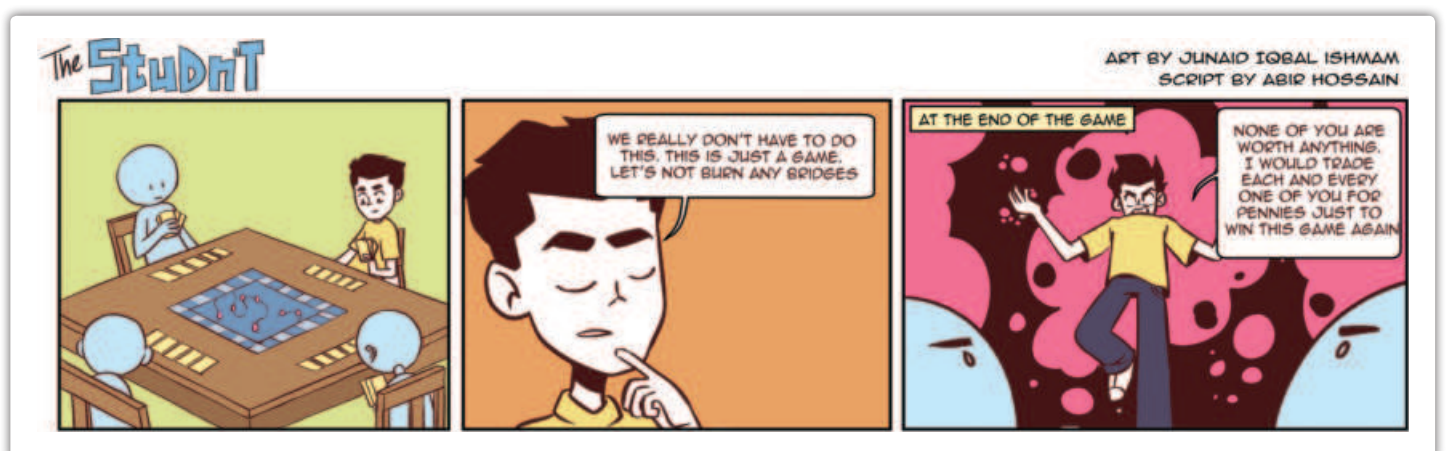


with it in unhealthy ways, albeit differently. For Benji to process the passing of a loved one and the atrocities that his grandma experienced, he feels that it is absolutely necessary to understand the Holocaust history. In contrast, David buries the emotional toll that his own problems pose, which he deems as 'unexceptional'.

The end of the film leaves its audience in awe as it depicts Benji sitting at the airport all by himself, while David goes back to his family in New York. In this way, the film allows

the agonising feeling of loneliness to linger and juxtaposes it with acceptance of one's brutal ancestral history. It also reminds its audience of the guilt that comes with moving on in life while the people we love remain stagnant. Perhaps it's the depiction of time passing that *A Real Pain* is able to capture which sets it apart.

A Real Pain may not have reached its audience with much noise, but it still manages to leave its viewers with a life-altering feeling.



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EDUCATION

ARE LATE NIGHT STUDY SESSIONS EFFECTIVE?

PUNOMI RAHMAN TITIR

As the world drifts into slumber, the quiet symphony of flickering desk lamps and rustling pages accompanies the solitary student studying late into the night. The solitude of the silent hours sets the stage for nocturnal study sessions, where late-night reading and practice tests replace sleep. Students regularly pull all-nighters as a coping mechanism to deal with the horrors of academic pressure. Whether a dedicated night owl or a last-minute crammer, staying up late to study is a staple of the student experience for all.

The appeal of night-time studying often stems from necessity rather than preference. The daytime usually pass in juggling class schedules and extra-curriculars, with most students finding it challenging to allocate sufficient time for self-evaluation. Thus, as burning the midnight oil to catch up on coursework starts looking like a fair exchange, sleep transforms into a luxury that feels almost unattainable. However, do late-night study sessions truly offer the environment conducive to learning and self-evaluation that individuals desire?

For many, studying during the night is their only option. The importance of comfortable, personal study spaces is undeniable; however, many students don't have access to these spaces. For instance, growing up in overcrowded households usually means there is an absence of quiet corners so maintaining focus turns into a constant battle against distractions. For those living in bustling metropolitans, their ability to concentrate is compromised by incessant vehicular noises and chaotic clutter. As a response, many turn to late-night studying as a final resort.

According to research conducted at the University of Notre Dame, people who stay up late perform better in terms of memory retention. This phenomenon is attributed to what experts call 'retroactive interference'. Studying during the daytime leads to interruptions and the continual influx of new information which increases the likelihood of forgetting previously learned material. The brain can understand information more efficiently before sleep, enhancing the ability to recall important details.

Furthermore, people with short attention spans and those who depend on last-minute work for their exams sometimes find themselves performing better during the after-hours. The adrenaline rush of working against a deadline heightens motivation, turning procrastination into a driving force for productivity.

When exam seasons loom, many students rely on cramming overnight to get by. However, studying during odd hours comes with significant health risks, primarily rooted in a lack of sleep disrupting a person's biological clock. Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to long-term



ILLUSTRATION: SANJANA SABAH KHAN

health problems. Research shows that consistently staying up late affects the body's circadian rhythms, which regulate sleep-wake cycles, hormone production, and metabolism. Over time, this disruption can increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity, and weakened immune function.

Sleep deprivation also takes a toll on mental health. Missing out on sleep temporarily boosts dopamine levels, constructing a feeling of short-term euphoria. This short-lived high can impair decision-making and lead to impulsive behaviour. For students who constantly rely on studying during the night, these effects may accumulate and lead to a decrease in overall academic performance and well-being.

Despite offering a short-term solution, studying past midnight often leads to diminished productivity throughout the following day. Lack of sleep makes it harder to build focus during classes, retain new information,

or participate fully in academic discussions. As a result, students may find themselves trapped in a cycle of exhaustion, where they are constantly catching up but failing to get ahead.

With the fleeting benefits of late-night studying weighed against its lasting toll, the question remains: is it a sustainable practice? The choice narrows down to whether the short bursts of focus at night are worth the long-term consequences. For those who feel trapped by the chaos of daytime, one approach could be shifting study hours to early mornings when thought processes sharpen and the surrounding environment is still calm. Studying in public spaces like libraries or reading cafes can also provide a focused atmosphere without the need to stay up late. Ultimately, the goal is to find a balance supporting both effective learning and overall well-being.

Titir is trying to catch a few Z's. Find her at punomirahman@gmail.com



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STUDY ABROAD

How the US funding cuts are affecting INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS

RAFID KHANDAKER

Academia in the US has been severely shaken after the second term of the Trump administration began in January. From federal funding cuts to demands for policy changes, many universities have been hit hard, with international students feeling the brunt of the effects.

Many US federal agencies have had their funds slashed or have been ordered to be slashed or frozen, including the National Institute of Health (NIH) which funds portions of medical research in many research institutions nationwide. This has, in turn, led to research grants being cut or threatened to be cut for many universities in the US, causing major layoffs and jeopardising research in the medical field, climate sciences, and social sciences. The Trump administration has been actively leveraging the NIH funding to force US universities to change their policies

regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and pro-Palestine sentiments on campus.

As a result, universities are having to shrink department sizes, reduce student intake, slash funding for students, and even rescind offer letters. This has created immense uncertainty for current and prospective international students, who already face more barriers than domestic students, and may have far-reaching consequences for the future of academia.

“Despite their prestige, US schools feel increasingly inaccessible. It’s hard to commit to a programme when financial uncertainty constantly looms over the experience,” says Anika Tabassum Amreen, a US graduate school applicant. Higher education in the US is notorious for being incredibly expensive, more so for international students, but this was alleviated by the generous scholarships given by US schools. However, now that those scholarships

are far fewer in number due to funding cuts, they have become much less reliable. Students who had hoped for these scholarships to fund their higher education now face the unprecedented challenge of navigating other ways of securing funding.

While domestic students can still work and pay for their tuition, international students don’t enjoy the same freedom. “As an international student, employment is restricted to on-campus jobs, making the search even more challenging,” says Amreen. Furthermore, graduate assistantships and other on-campus opportunities can be highly competitive, making them inaccessible to most students.

So what other choice are international students left with? Not much. Financial burdens and visa uncertainties are leading many to reconsider the US as their study destination. “I am not going to be prioritising US

programmes for the time being until there is more clarity regarding the situation surrounding higher education there,” says Hamza Mohammed, a prospective PhD student, who had initially intended to study in the US but is now considering other regions as well, such as Europe.

Many students applying to US schools have also reported that their admissions or scholarships were rescinded. “Cornell is trying to make sure the current students have secured funding before taking in new students,” says Nabila Nawar Binti, a graduate research assistant at Cornell University. More than one billion USD in funding for Cornell was frozen according to the White House. While it is only right that universities prioritise supporting their already existing students before they can fund incoming ones, this puts prospective students at a disadvantage as it makes admission and securing scholarships that much more difficult.

“Two of the universities where I had obtained funding informed me that they will no longer be able to provide the promised funding due to cuts to their research budgets,” says Hamza. As the US is the premier study destination for students around the world, this will certainly put the academic aspirations of many international students in jeopardy.

The funding cuts are not only affecting prospective students in the US but also current ones. “A lot of the students who expected funding were still doing rotations when they found out about the cuts, so they had to find additional rotations while their funding was frozen,” says Nabila. Rotations are short research experiences, usually spanning a few weeks, that graduate students cycle through in order to gain experience and find which research areas are best suited for them. Having to do more lab rotations, because the funding for their own research got frozen, spells delays for these students’ own research work, which is a significant hurdle for students who want to complete their degrees in a timely manner.

Universities themselves have also been struggling to manage, with massive damage being done to research efforts. Todd Wolfson, president of the American Association of University Professors, told The Guardian, “Members of mine are having to lay people off and having to close their

labs. It’s been a complete, utter, destruction of the United States research infrastructure.”

This not only affects students’ education but also on-campus employment opportunities for current students, as many international students rely on research assistant and teaching assistant positions to pay for their tuition. If laid off, they will be left without this support, and the financial burden may become unbearable.

The Trump administration’s demand for scrapping DEI programmes that supported underrepresented and underprivileged groups can also have a significant impact on international students. An example of DEI programmes that support international students is the International Mentoring Program at Brown University which pairs incoming international students with mentors from within the student body to guide them in academic and social matters.

Another example is the Associated Students of the University of Washington (ASUW), a student association at the University of Washington which provides students identity-based support, access to legislative advocacy, and inclusive programming. If the DEI scrapping measures target programmes and organisations such as this, international students will be left at a disadvantage.

The administration also demanded that institutions change their admission processes “to prevent admitting international students hostile to the American values”, without clearly specifying what is exactly meant by “American values”. This is certain to harm many international students from around the world, whose academic careers could be harmed by such arbitrary notions. Additionally, the government’s demands that universities must report students engaged in political protests and overhaul their campus protest policies in order to address “anti-semitism” will not only negatively impact many current students but also deter many international students from applying to American universities in the near future.

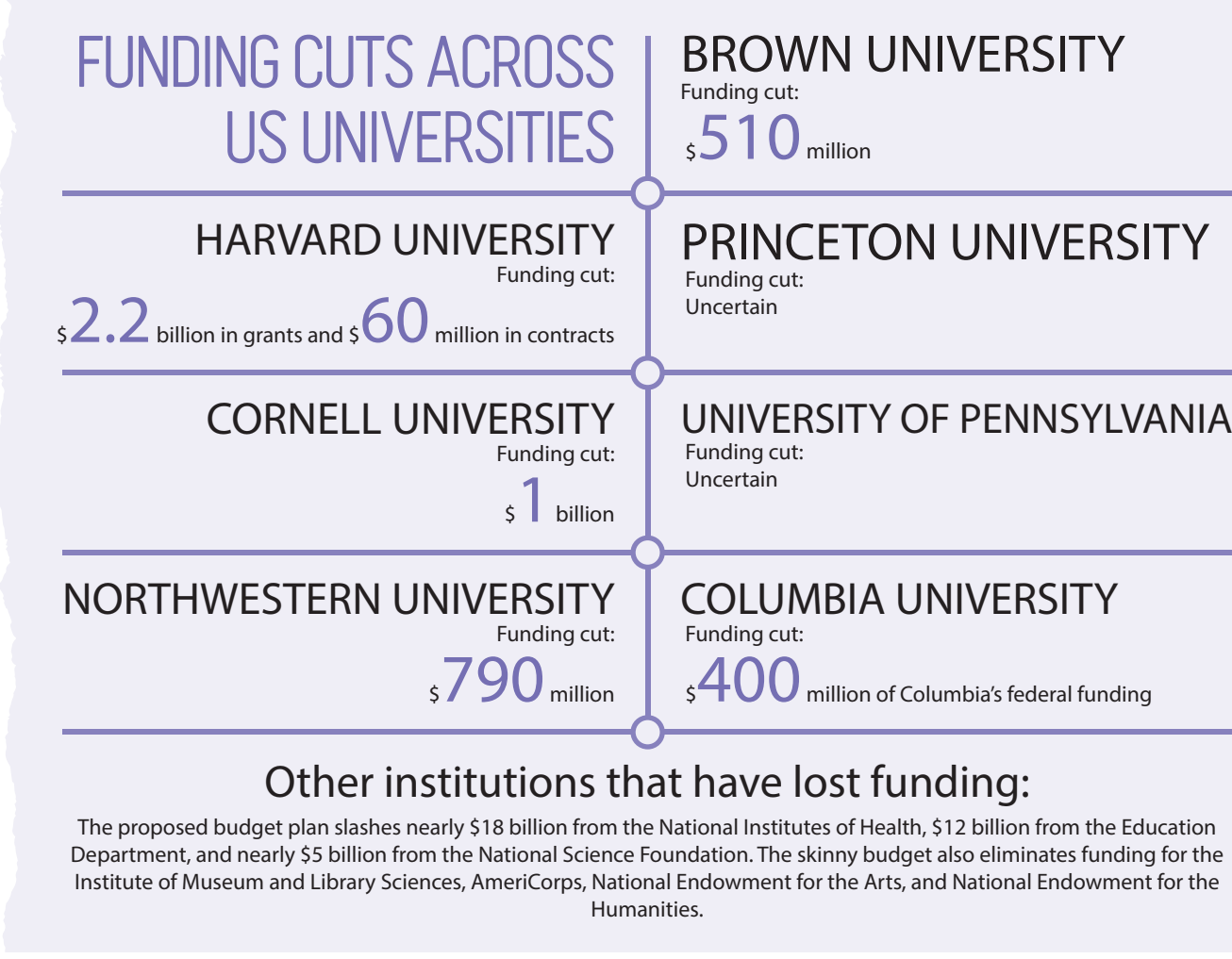
Columbia University has yielded to many of the administration’s demands, in hopes of restoring funding worth USD 400 million. On the other hand, Harvard University has refused to budge despite threats of massive funding cuts, with its president Alan Garber asserting

Harvard’s commitment to autonomy as a private institution. Following Harvard’s lead, a collective of other elite schools have joined forces to combat the demands made by the Trump administration, with their leaders reportedly having discussions on how to effectively resist said demands. Other prominent universities, such as Stanford University, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Michigan, have also been targeted by the administration.

At this point, it is a lose-lose situation for international students, because if the universities yield to the demands, it will make higher education a lot more tumultuous for them as the DEI measures will have to be scrapped, they will be scrutinised more heavily during the admission process, and there will be a looming threat of losing funding should the universities accept more of the Trump administration’s whims in the future. However, if the universities decide to resist instead, they will probably have much less money at their disposal, thus many international students will be left without funding or even admission offers.

International students make invaluable contributions towards research in the US. Thus, considering the difficulties they face now and are likely to continue facing under the current administration, the future of American graduate education looks grim. With a smaller pool of researchers, a shrunken budget, and the general volatility of the political climate, a perfect storm beckons over the horizon.

It is still difficult to tell exactly how detrimental the Trump administration’s actions will be to academia, but there is no doubt that they will be severe. And yet, hope cannot be lost, and there are practical measures that can be taken to mitigate the onslaught of funding cuts.



“Not only budget cuts, but visa revocation of many international students in recent times, along with some other probable policy changes will grossly impact the future of graduate education,” says Dr Tanvir R Faisal, an assistant professor at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

On top of all this chaos, the visa application process is already mired with a great deal of uncertainty. Even if you get offered admission and somehow manage to secure sufficient funding, there is always the possibility that your visa will be rejected and your dreams of attending graduate school in the US will be shattered. This is nothing new, but it piles up with all the other obstacles that prospective international students are facing.

It is still difficult to tell exactly how detrimental the Trump administration’s actions will be to academia, but there is no doubt that they will be severe. And yet, hope cannot be lost, and there are practical measures that can be taken to mitigate the onslaught of funding cuts.

According to Dr Faisal, “One possible option is (for universities) to negotiate with state legislators to increase state-level funding, increase industrial ties for funding, and discuss/raise the issues with congressmen/~women and senators of respective states/congressional districts to reinstate or increase the federal budget for higher education.”

Needless to say, the recent measures taken by US President Trump have caught the world of academia off guard, especially international students. Arguably, they are feeling the worst of the effects, from slashed funding to fewer opportunities to even being targeted by authorities. Only time will tell how much longer these conditions will persist, and much will depend on how university authorities decide to tackle the administration’s demands and what they do to counteract them.

Rafid is on a quest to romanticise the crushing mundanity of life. Annoy him at rafidkhandaker@gmail.com.

NOTICE BOARD

AIUB hosts talk with EU Ambassador Michael Miller

American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) hosted a special event titled “Let’s Talk with the EU Ambassador”, featuring Michael Miller, the Ambassador of the European Union to Bangladesh, at the university’s campus on April 29.

Themed “EU-Bangladesh Relations in a Changing World: Youth Perspectives on Partnership and Progress”, the event provided an engaging platform for AIUB’s young future leaders, where students and faculty members from various departments participated in a roundtable discussion with the EU Ambassador. Key topics discussed included education and skills development, climate action and green transition, governance, democracy and human rights, and global security and contemporary challenges. Following the roundtable, the AIUB Performing Arts Club (APAC) honoured the EU Ambassador with a special performance.

Also present at the event was Jui Chakma, Programme Manager for TVET and Erasmus+ at the EU Delegation to Bangladesh, who shared valuable insights into the wide array of opportunities available under the Erasmus+ scholarship programme.

The event was graced by the university’s top leadership, including Nadia Anwar, Founder Member and Chairman of the Board of Trustees; Ishtiaque Abedin, Founder Member of the Board of Trustees; Shania Abedin, Member of the



Board of Trustees; Prof. Dr Saiful Islam, Vice Chancellor; Prof. Dr Md Abdur Rahman, Pro Vice-Chancellor; Gp Capt (Retd) Dr Mohammad Zahidul Islam Khan, Registrar; and Dr S A M Manzur H Khan, Proctor. Deans, associate deans, directors, and senior officials of AIUB were also in attendance.

During the official meeting with Michael Miller, future collaboration between AIUB and the European Union were discussed, which may be implemented by expanding academic cooperation through greater participation in

Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and Jean Monnet programmes, strengthening climate and research collaboration via joint platforms on sustainability and environmental law, reducing barriers to mobility, and deepening cultural and educational ties.

The event highlighted AIUB’s ongoing commitment to fostering global academic relations and providing a platform for youth engagement in international policy and cooperation.

North South University commemorates “World Intellectual Property Day” with seminar on IP law

The Department of Law, North South University (NSU) celebrated “World Intellectual Property Day” with a seminar on contemporary intellectual property (IP) law on April 30. The keynote speaker for this session was Prof. Niloufer Selvadurai from Macquarie Law School, who joined virtually. The featured speakers included Advocate Saquib Rahman, Senior Lecturer, Department of Law, NSU, and Mahua Zahur, Director, Center for Learning Intellectual Property (CLIP).

Prof. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, Vice-Chancellor, NSU, chaired the session. The Special Guest was Prof. Abdur Rob Khan, Treasurer and Pro Vice-Chancellor (IC), NSU. Faculty members and students from the Department of Law attended the session.

Prof. Selvadurai spoke on the topic “The IP Issue of Our Era – Patent Protection For AI-Generated Inventions”, where she discussed the issues surrounding whether AI shall be acknowledged as an inventor in patent law. She further analysed statutory reforms in the context of using personal pronouns to exclude AI inventors.

Mahua Zahur spoke on the topic “IP and Music: An Assessment of the Prospects of the Music Industry in Light of the Copyright Act, 2023”. Her speech highlighted the work done in public domains and the protection



of folkloric works, while also criticising the inadequate security measures for audiovisual performers.

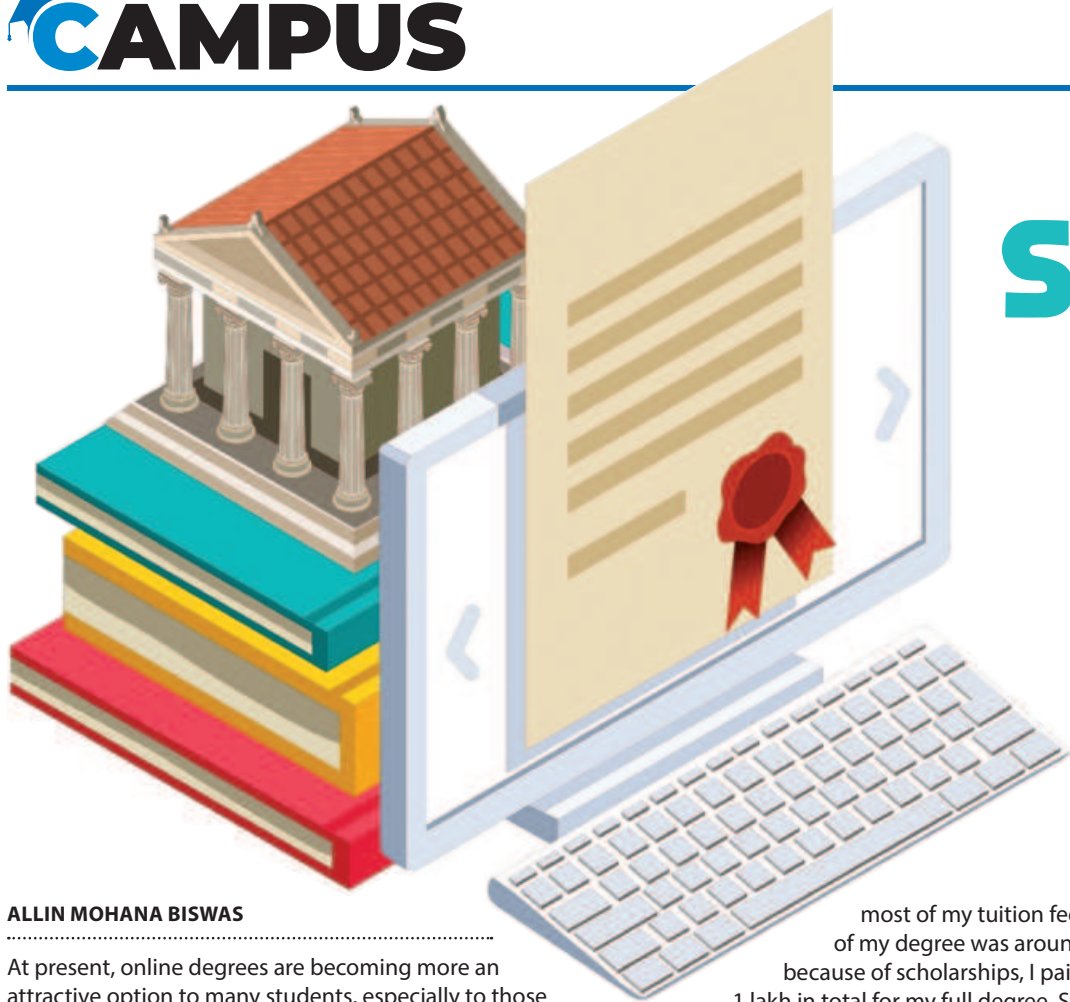
Advocate Saquib Rahman spoke on “Dilution by Blurring: Bangladesh’s Ignorance”. He described why dilution-by-blurring is a conceptually difficult area of trademark law, and that the courts in Bangladesh have

not recognised blurring as of yet, concluding that the concept’s inclusion in the Trademark Act of 2009 is a crying need.

Dr Ishtiaque Ahmed, Associate Professor and Chairman, Department of Law, delivered the introductory remarks, where he expressed gratitude to the distinguished guests for gracing the occasion with their presence and the continuous evolution of IP law in the legal and social context.

Prof. Md Rizwanul Islam, Dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Professor, Department of Law, observed that Bangladesh should not view the protection of intellectual property from a binary point of view, which entails protecting the interest of foreign intellectual property rights holders at the expense of the consumers of Bangladesh. He opined that Bangladesh should emphasise enforcing intellectual property rights, inter alia, to encourage creativity and attract foreign investment.

The Session Chair, Prof. Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, recognised the valuable insights surrounding IP law from the seminar. Prof. Abdur Rob Khan acknowledged the Department of Law for organising such an academic event.



SHOULD YOU CONSIDER PURSUING AN ONLINE DEGREE?

ALLIN MOHANA BISWAS

At present, online degrees are becoming more an attractive option to many students, especially to those looking for flexibility and affordability. While this mode of higher education is still new in Bangladesh, it is slowly drawing attention.

Online degrees offer the freedom to study from anywhere, often at a fraction of the cost needed to pursue the same degrees in person from traditional universities. More importantly, they let you gain real-world experience while still in university.

We reached out to three students, all of whom have experience in pursuing online degrees, to hear what they have to say about this mode of higher studies.

Faizah Lubaba Shristy, who began her online degree in Computer Science at the University of the People, said, "During the Covid-19 pandemic, most public and private university admission exams in Bangladesh were suspended. Besides, the tuition fees for a Computer Science degree were high, and I did not want to take out a loan that could lead to financial strain. I had good grades and a clear goal to earn a degree that would help me pursue meaningful work or entrepreneurial ventures in Bangladesh."

Sharmin Akter Jany had studied Management at a university in China for two years before the pandemic changed her plans. "A friend recommended that I consider an online degree. Studying in Bangladesh would have meant starting over and spending another four years at university. In contrast, online education was a more efficient and practical solution for me, as a four-year degree can be completed in as little as two and a half years."

Prasun Bipra, who is attending an online BSc programme in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence at the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, said, "I chose the degree because Data Science, which I wanted to pursue, is not widely available as a major in Bangladesh. Also, it gives me a lot of flexibility to learn at my own pace while maintaining other commitments."

For all three students, affordability and time are major factors as to why they opted for an online degree. Regarding the affordability aspect, Bipra said, "My degree costs roughly around BDT 4.5 lakh. The fee is paid in instalments, so I do not feel much pressure."

Jany enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, consisting of 40 courses, at the University of the People. "Each course usually costs around USD 120. There is a USD 60 admission fee, but sometimes it is waived. I was fortunate to receive a full scholarship from the beginning, so I did not have to pay anything at all."

Scholarship support also motivated Shristy to continue her degree. "We only pay an exam fee and there are no admin or book fees. I received scholarships which covered

most of my tuition fees. The total cost of my degree was around BDT 5 lakh, but because of scholarships, I paid around BDT 1 lakh in total for my full degree. Students have the scope to secure 70 to 80 percent scholarships in some online degree programmes if they can write a strong admission essay."

Apart from affordability, the flexibility offered in such online programmes is unparalleled. Traditional in-person classes see students spending hours commuting to and from their universities. For those pursuing a degree abroad, the logistics are even more difficult – from relocating to a different country to adjusting to the culture there. Besides, in-person classes also restrict students from attending to other activities, including part-time work.

The flexibility of online education, however, eliminates most, if not all, of these problems. As the classes can be attended from anywhere remotely, the need to commute, relocate, or sacrifice part-time work opportunities is no longer necessary.

Besides, as Shristy points out, students are granted free access to various premium tools and resources that help them with their courses as well as academics in general. The faculty members' diversity in these online programmes also add value to the studies. "Our faculty members come from around the globe like India, the US, Africa, the Middle East, and so on. As our university is accredited by WASC – the same prestigious body that accredits Stanford – the standards are world-class," said Shristy.

Adding to this, Sharmin said, "The teachers are very supportive. If I ever receive lower marks, I can talk to them and they will look into the matter fairly. We also have a personal programme advisor who responds to our queries within one to two days."

An online degree does not mean the academic standards are any lower. Apart from being accredited by various councils and institutions, the faculty members at these programmes maintain integrity and stick to certain standards.

"Teachers mark according to detailed rubrics, and any shortcuts, like using AI incorrectly, can result in academic misconduct. Everything has to follow proper APA citation rules, and only scholarly, reputable references are accepted," said Shristy.

All that being said, online learning comes with its own challenges.

"Staying motivated while studying online takes a personal commitment to excellence," said Shristy. "I know deadlines are coming, and with no room for extensions, I have to approach my work with dedication and perfection. There's no second chance – if you miss a week, you fall behind."

Bipra added to this, saying, "While you can study from

anywhere, online degrees also require a lot of self-discipline and time management since there are fewer face-to-face reminders or interactions with teachers."

Besides, when it comes to online degrees or education, concerns surrounding isolation and missing out on campus life are always there. "At first, I did feel a sense of isolation, wondering if I was missing out on the traditional university experience," said Shristy. "But over time, my priorities shifted. I needed to work, not just to be another graduate in Bangladesh, but to truly grow. I gained real-world experience, explored fellowship programmes, and also ran a business that funded my education. By my fourth year of studies, I had no regrets."

Bipra pointed out another drawback, "What I hate is the complete lack of interaction with the institution offline. Students might feel a bit isolated because they do not meet classmates in person, and group activities or discussions can feel less engaging through a screen."

He added, "In-person university offers a more traditional experience where students go to a campus, attend live lectures, and meet their classmates and teachers face-to-face. It is easier to make friends, ask questions immediately, and join clubs or events. The environment feels more social and active."

Despite the isolating academic experience, people pursuing such online programmes manage to find community in their own way, as was the case with Jany. "Even though we do not have the traditional campus life, it never felt like anything was missing. We build connections virtually through peer discussions, private messages, and feedback on assignments."

The shift to online learning also transformed how they approach education. Shristy now follows a fixed routine, usually studying from Thursday night to Saturday night. Jany, on the other hand, believes that online learning made her more disciplined and helped improve her research and time management skills.

Still, a major challenge remains, which is perception. "Some people still think online degrees are not real or that you did not earn them properly," said Shristy. "But I was lucky to work with people who understand how times are changing."

Shristy did face some pushback. "I did have one tough experience, where an interview for a role questioned my online degree, and they seemed shocked by it." Despite that, Shristy went on to do an internship at Chaldal and is now working there full-time as a product operations associate.

Bipra too believes that online education has a strong future, but not without limits. Jany agrees with this, saying that attitudes need to change. According to her, many people still do not understand how structured or credible online education is. But once they learn more about it, their opinion usually changes.



IN FRAME

A kaleidoscope of colours at **JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY**

PHOTOS: MAHAT HASAN

