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CAMPUS

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ILLUSTRATION: **NATASHA JAHAN**

MOVIES

Sinners is Ryan Coogler's MAGNUM OPUS

RAIAN ABEDIN

Around the second half of the movie, there is a scene involving the song "I Lied to You" in which one of our tritagonists shows off their skills as a blues player. The scene comes at the head of a capacious and meticulously built first half – which is filled to the brim with depictions of the Black South in the early 20th century, when racism ran rampant. It is within the established historical realism of this world that Ryan Coogler injects a measure of magical realism in a scene that celebrates the history of a culture's past and its future.

But there are layers to this narrative. The first half serves the task of establishing a world fully lived in by characters that are fully fleshed out. This is followed by a sharp turn in the second half, where the introduction of vampires completely shifts gears for this film. But the story of *Sinners* shines because of its insistence on straying away from genre conventions. Here, Coogler presents us with a mix of horror, drama, and magical realism.

It also does not hurt to see *Sinners* be adorned with some of the most colourful characters we've seen in film all year. The Smoke-Stack twins, both played by Michael B Jordan who is front and centre in all the marketing, clearly have a rocky history with the world around them. Returning to their hometown after swindling the Italian and Irish mobs in Chicago, the twins buy property from a racist white man to start their own Juke Joint. This is how we find Sammie, the heart and voice of the film, played magnificently by Miles Caten.

The way these connect to the themes of culture and the subsequent theft of it adds to the overall world of *Sinners* in ways that feel inventive and meticulous.

While the film is not inherently horrific the way horror films tend to be, there is something unnerving about the history Coogler has put up on display. From drawn-out scenes of cotton picking against a big blue sky and Country-Blues music to anecdotes of friends being lynched, *Sinners* is often more than what meets the eye.

Editor & Publisher
Mahfuz Anam

Features Editor and Head of Content Marketing
Ehsanur Raza Ronny

Campus In-Charge
Faisal Bin Iqbal

Campus Team
Syeda Afrin Tarannum
Abir Hossain

Photographer
Orchid Chakma

Graphics & Layout
TDS Creative Graphics

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

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For years, Bangladeshi students have continued to pursue global education – driven by the promise of academic excellence, better career prospects, and cultural exposure. Whether it's a degree from North America, the UK, South Korea, or Australia, global universities have been attracting bright young minds from Bangladesh. However, many have been unable to fulfill their dream of attending a foreign university to pursue higher education due to the soaring cost of tuition, high living expenses, and increasingly limited scholarship opportunities.

In the face of these challenges, many students are now exploring a modern and globally accepted model that will act as a smart bridge between high school and university. These programs will create a smoother academic transition, build confidence, critical thinking, and adaptability. Such traits are crucial for success in abroad. One of the most successful models of this approach is the Monash College Diploma (MCD), which is offered by more than 30 partner institutions globally. The MCD is now available in Bangladesh through Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD), the only Ministry-approved global education provider in partnership with Monash University. The university is ranked 37th globally and 54th in the Graduate Employability by QS World University Rankings.

Such a collaboration has redefined the university scene in Bangladesh. Now, with the help of MCD, students can complete their first year of an international degree from Bangladesh seamlessly. Instead of leaping unquestioningly into a new academic system and culture, students are now getting the opportunity to gradually get introduced to the global curriculum within a structured and supportive environment. Learners will get socially, emotionally, and academically equipped to ensure a smoother and seamless transition to foreign countries and curricula.

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Tram Nguyen, Director of Marketing, Monash College addressing UCBD students.

With the current global shift in education, particularly the recent reduction in funding for international students from the US government, programs like MCD are becoming increasingly critical for Bangladeshi students who wish to pursue higher education abroad. These programs are providing students with more secure, academically rich, and affordable alternatives to pursue their dreams. Graduating from MCD through UCBD opens up multiple doors for students to pursue opportunities at many foreign universities. They can go on to specialize in some of the most in-demand and future-proof fields in the world, like cybersecurity, software development, data science, game design, biomedical engineering, aerospace engineering, business analytics, and actuarial studies.

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"ISD became more than just a school. It became my home. It embraced who I was and who I wanted to become, and for that, I am forever grateful.

I'll be attending The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to study Data Science and Technology. I'm excited to be part of a cutting-edge program in one of Asia's most innovative universities, and to live in a vibrant city like Hong Kong where tech, culture, and opportunity intersect. In the future, I hope to use my data analysis skills to solve real-world problems and drive meaningful change."

Vanisha Goel
Valedictorian, Class of 2025

CAMPUS LIFE

THE SORRY STATE OF WASHROOMS at Dhaka University

AZRA HUMAYRA

PHOTO: **ORCHID CHAKMA**

Let me tell you a story – two, in fact.

I was in the early years of my undergrad journey, still figuring out the ins and outs of university life. It was during this early phase that one day, the lights went out in one of the washrooms. Everyone avoided the bathroom like it was the plague reincarnated. I, on the other hand, saw an opportunity. It was the cleanest washroom in the entire building as the lights there were yet to be fixed and, as a result, no one was using it. It might have been pitch black, but at least it didn't smell like despair. So, I used it. Honestly, I was kind of mad when the lights got fixed. My secret hideout was ruined.

The other time, when I was still a clueless first-year student, I made the tragic mistake of going into the girls' common room's washroom at the Arts Building. I went in, did my business somehow, looked in the mirror, and immediately made a lifelong vow: never again.

At Dhaka University (DU), the state of a washroom can be personified. There are some you avoid, others you tolerate, and a rare few you mourn.

I visited 18 washrooms to write this article. I could write a review, but to truly encapsulate what the state of the washrooms is really like, I talked to students who have to use them regularly.

Alo Akter, a student of the Social Sciences Faculty, concurs, "The washrooms are dirty, inside and out. The stench is intolerable. The girls' common washrooms are unclean, the doors cannot be locked, and sometimes, there's no water supply. It really makes me suffer."

Junayet Rasel, a master's student at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, says, "The washrooms in the Social Sciences Building are quite good. However, they are not cleaned most of the time. The availability of soap or hand wash is also very rare. Compared to other places in DU, they are better."

Students are often reluctant to use the washrooms because of their tragic state. Sumaiya Tasnim, an undergrad student currently studying under the Faculty of Social Sciences, reflects on her anxiety about using the washrooms, "I have to use the washrooms; I stay on campus for five to six hours every day. It makes me anxious to use the washrooms because I know they are not clean."

Speaking to a few other female students in the girls' common room in the Social Science Faculty paints a similar picture. The anxiety of using washrooms sometimes forces female students not to use the washrooms at all, which can cause health complications such as urinary tract infections (UTIs). UTIs occur when bacteria make their way into the urinary tract. If one doesn't empty their bladder when required, the bacteria are more likely to sit and multiply in the bladder.

The washrooms in the Faculty of Science were in similar condition. The washrooms at Curzon Hall were antiquated, which was not surprising given that the building itself was built over a century ago. However, this does not excuse the building's poor condition while it is still in use by students and personnel.

Fahmida Jahan Ritu, a student from the Faculty of Science, has similar concerns about the Curzon Hall washrooms. She says, "The department washrooms are somewhat in better condition, but there's still room for improvement."

The male washrooms are not all that different either.

Junayet Rasel, a master's student at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, says, "The washrooms in the Social Sciences Building are quite good. However, they are not cleaned most of the time. The availability of soap or hand wash is also very rare. Compared to other places in DU, they are better."

Faiyaz Ahnaf Samin, another student at DU, reflects on the sorry state of the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) washrooms, "TSC washrooms are not only used by students; these washrooms are used by the people who visit TSC too. Not everyone has lavatory literacy, so it's understandable that the washrooms are dirty."

Out of all the washrooms inspected, TSC washrooms were in the most deplorable state. Both the male and female washrooms emitted a foul odour and had no soap either. The female washroom had a sanitary napkin dispenser, which earned it some points.

On the other hand, the state of the washrooms of the Business Studies Faculty (FBS) was relatively somewhat satisfactory. Some of the restrooms had soaps and sanitary napkins, but the cleanliness was consistently poor. Tahmina Chowdhury, a master's student at the same faculty, remarks, "The washroom facilities in our common room are inadequate compared to the number of students."

Tahmina also says that although there are washrooms in other buildings, students from across the entire faculty use the common room washroom. As a result, the quality and maintenance of the washroom require significant improvement.

Another FBS student, Sajid An Nafiew, says, "The male washrooms in FBS are comparatively better than those in TSC or other faculties, but they still fall short in terms of cleanliness and hygiene standards."

Sajid also points out that essential items like tissue, sanitisers, soaps, and hand washes are missing in washrooms. He did, however, have a few positive things to say about the condition of the FBS male common washrooms.

The chorus of student voices offers no ambiguity. Across faculties and buildings, the accounts are nearly identical: soap is a rare find, water supply is unreliable, and cleanliness is a matter of chance. The budget allocated for these issues is insufficient. What emerges is not just a sanitation issue but a pattern of institutional apathy. Students, particularly women, speak of anxiety, discomfort, and calculated strategies to avoid using the facilities at all.

It raises a larger, disheartening question – how can we envision institutional or academic progress, or equitable reform when the infrastructure fails at such a fundamental level? If the upkeep of a washroom, a basic and essential facility, is too much to ask of our universities, what does that signal about the priorities of those in charge?

Yet the burden does not lie solely with the administration. Washrooms are shared spaces and shared spaces demand shared responsibility. Several students note that poor conditions are often made worse by the careless behaviour of their peers. Tissues flushed improperly, footprints on toilet seats, unflushed toilets – these speak not to a lack of resources but to a lack of consideration. Cleaners can only do so much in the face of daily misuse. If students want better, they too must treat these spaces with the respect they demand from the institution.

Azra Humayra is majoring in Mass Communication and Journalism at the University of Dhaka. Find her at: azrahumayra123@gmail.com

CAMPUS LIFE

Is accessibility an afterthought at our university campuses?

TINATH ZAEBA

Universities are often considered places with the most opportunities. It is supposed to be a place where dreams take flight and people from all backgrounds come together to learn, grow, and shape their futures; an emblem of progress, fairness, and belonging. Yet, for students with disabilities, this perception often collapses under the weight of a harsh reality. Instead of being empowered, they find themselves navigating spaces that seem designed to challenge their very existence. These spaces are not actively hostile to their needs. Perhaps the root of this issue lies deeper, in something more ingrained: ableism. It is the pervasive belief that being able-bodied is the norm, and anything outside of that is an exception.

Ableism shapes how society dictates its priorities and measures worth. Naturally, it also determines how spaces are designed as it enables the authority to treat accessibility as a luxury and not a right. This prevailing mindset does more than just neglect disabled students. It stifles accessibility and almost entirely erases visibility.

Nashita Islam, a graduate of Dhaka University who is 27 years old, recounts her experience, "In my first semester, I suffered from a major brain stroke that was completely unexpected. I'm lucky that I came out of it alive, with my neurological functions mostly intact, but I've suffered from paralysis ever since. The experience that I've had is proof that disability is something that can happen to anyone of any age at any second. Yet, it seems like asking for basic rights and accessibility is some sort of first-world problem."

Although Nashita's words are a reminder not to take our health for granted, it is a sentiment that appears to be overlooked as campuses remain largely unchanged and thus, inaccessible. This is not just an oversight, it is a form of systemic ableism.

"It's bad enough to be stared at and pitied, but there's nothing more humiliating than not knowing how to get to class because not a single infrastructure is friendly for wheelchairs." Nashita adds, "Many classrooms have few steps in front of them, randomly placed with no use, and the open campus has cobblestones everywhere. I always thought studying here was supposed to be something distinguished, yet every day used to fill me with dread. As if it was not challenging enough that I had to get used to not using my legs, I also had to get used to the fact that even my campus was bent on testing my limits every day."

Her words underscore the indifference that so often surrounds this issue, exposing barriers that deprive students of mobility on an everyday basis.

Afia Kabir Anila, a graduate of North South University, shares her own struggles in navigating a campus that seemed designed to exclude her, "The most challenging part of my journey as a person with disabilities was facing attitudinal barriers. My fellow classmates didn't want to include me in their group, as they thought that I might be slower in submitting assignments or participating in social activities. On the contrary, if they required any notes or guidance about studies, they would come to me for necessary support."

Afia's experience reveals another layer of the problem: the attitudes of peers. Discrimination extends beyond just physical barriers; it also includes social ones that isolate students with disabilities. Yet, the physical obstacles she encountered were equally crushing.

"The infrastructure is not disability friendly. I could not even reach my department as it's on the eleventh floor and the lift only goes up to the tenth. The toilets labelled accessible for wheelchair users are not functional either. I had no choice apart from not drinking water and staying dehydrated just so I didn't have to use the bathroom. The auditorium (Audi 801) also needs to be more accessible," she says.

> For too long, inclusion has been treated as an option – one that has been dismissed. It is time to acknowledge that inclusivity and accessibility is a moral and legal imperative. Universities must go beyond token gestures and actively dismantle the barriers that prevent disabled students from fully participating in campus life.

Her experience illustrates the daily hurdles faced by students with disabilities. Reducing such issues to mere minor inconveniences reflects the systemic failures that diminish the humanity of those affected.

So why do universities continue to fall so short?

Accessibility is too often treated as an afterthought, something to be addressed if and when resources allow. What results is a combination of half-hearted measures – ramps that are too steep, lifts that stop short of crucial floors, and toilets that are labelled accessible but remain unusable.

Afia highlights the superficiality of these efforts, "Whatever initiative the authorities have taken is because of my continuous hammering on social media." Her statement represents the mindset of most authorities, who treat disability not as a priority but as a problem to be managed only when it becomes too visible to ignore.

However, not all campuses are blind to the needs of disabled students. BRAC University (BRACU) stands as an example of how inclusivity and accessibility can be achieved. Jannatul Ferdous, a 23-year-old student of Computer Science at BRACU, shares her positive experience, "Though my disability was temporary, and I recovered after a few months, I felt genuinely supported during that time. The accessible toilets were functional, and when there were issues, help was always available to address them. The ramp was also adequate, but I do wish the elevators were more spacious to accommodate everyone."

Accessibility is not just about accommodating a specific group; it is about creating spaces where everyone can thrive. But beyond its practicality, accessibility sends a powerful message: that education is a right, not a privilege, and that every student deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.

For too long, inclusion has been treated as an option – one that has been dismissed. It is time to acknowledge that inclusivity and accessibility is a moral and legal imperative. Universities must go beyond token gestures and actively dismantle the barriers that prevent disabled students from fully participating in campus life. And this starts with listening to the voices of those most affected. Their experiences must shape policies and practices.

However, it also requires a fundamental shift in how universities view accessibility – not as an expense, but as an investment in their values and communities. Campuses have been built with exclusion at their core, designed primarily for able-bodied individuals at the expense of everyone else. It is time to change that.

Accessibility in universities should reflect society's commitment to equality, where barriers are not just removed but actively prevented. Only then can campuses truly become spaces where all students have the tools to succeed. Universities have a responsibility to be more than places of learning; they must also be spaces of hope and opportunity. The demand for accessible campuses is not just about ramps or lifts – it is about creating a culture of inclusion, where every student feels seen, valued, and empowered.

Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of 5 and a student of Economics at North South University.

INTERVIEWS

MEHEDI MAROF'S journey to one of America's top journalism fellowships

PHOTO: COURTESY

NAZRUL ISLAM MOZUMDER

Mehedi Hasan Marof, an alumnus of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), is set to join the University of Maryland's elite Investigative Journalism programme after receiving a fellowship at the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism.

His acceptance email confirmed Marof's selection for a fully-funded spot in the Master's in Data and Investigative Journalism programme at the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism, along with the highly coveted fellowship at the Howard Center for Investigative Journalism. Marof is one of only six students from around the globe to have received the fellowship which includes a USD 70,148 stipend over two years, full tuition coverage for the master's programme, and health insurance. But for him, it wasn't just about the funding.

Marof had also received offers from several leading journalism schools including the University of Missouri and Ohio University, both with full funding, as well as UC Berkeley and Boston University with partial tuition scholarships. But for him, Maryland stood out.

"I was looking for a hands-on programme that focuses on computation and data – things like scraping, mapping, and analysing public records," said Marof. "There is a vacuum for that kind of work in Bangladesh's media, but it's essential for high-impact investigative journalism today. What drew me to Maryland more was the fellowship at Howard Center where student fellows work alongside top-tier US journalists on exactly these kinds of projects."

From Dhaka newsrooms to global bylines

At the age of just 25, and one and a half years into journalism, Marof has already been published in global news outlets such as *Al Jazeera, NBC News, The Diplomat, Scroll, The Wire,* and *Dialogue Earth*. His reporting spans political violence, security forces misconduct, climate crisis, minority rights, and institutional failures in Bangladesh. But his path wasn't paved through privilege. "I didn't come from a media family or have elite connections," he said. "Everything I have done is built on brainstorming, finding the right editors, and emailing and pitching to them, the majority of which went unnoticed."

Marof's journey started in Dhaka with *The Business Standard's* online news desk when he was an undergraduate student. He eventually moved to *Netra News*. His reporting, sometimes on sensitive or risky topics, earned him praise but also put him under a lot of pressure.

"I am particularly proud of how I covered the July uprising as a journalist," he said. "I was filing stories for multiple international outlets, tracking the protests in real-time, and became a source of ground information for over a dozen media outlets worldwide. I also appeared in on-air interviews with *The Independent, BBC World Service,* and *ABC Australia*."

Rooted in ULAB

Marof graduated from ULAB in 2023 with a CGPA of 3.98 and the Summa Cum Laude distinction. He also received the highest academic awards from both the university's Vice Chancellor and his school's Dean.

"ULAB gave me the space to grow," he said. "It taught me to think critically, to question, and to report fairly. The mentorship I received there helped me sharpen my skills not just as a journalist, but as a person."

Marof's interest in data-driven investigative journalism also began at ULAB.

"We had a Data Journalism course," he said. "Even though it was an introductory one, the course sparked something in me. I realised how data, open-source techniques, and interactive storytelling can elevate a well-reported story to a whole new level."

The application phase

Before he even started his application, Marof spent months considering where to apply. It's a crucial decision, he said, as it depends on what you want to do in the next few years, whether it's in academia or the newsroom.

"A lot of journalism schools in the US are actually part of communications departments, which are often research-heavy and academic in nature," he explained. "They are great if you want to teach or go into the communication sector. But if you want to be out in the field – digging through records and participating in investigative projects – only a handful of programmes are built for that. And those practice-based programmes are expensive. Most don't offer funding. There are often no teaching assistantships at these programmes because of their intensive, hands-on nature."

That's why getting full funding from Maryland and the fellowship felt even more meaningful for Marof.

When it came to preparing the application materials, Marof said that he kept his statement of purpose (SOP) straightforward and honest.

"Graduate programmes, especially in practice-driven journalism, want to see that you have done some work and aspire to do more," he said. "They want to know that you have met deadlines, made ethical decisions in your reporting method, and filed stories under pressure. Most importantly, they look for a genuine interest in learning and contributing. Your individual story matters."

In his application, Marof had shared why he entered journalism, what he had done so far, and linked a few key stories. His aim was to communicate his commitment to amplifying underreported issues. Hence, the writing samples he submitted weren't chosen based on the outlet but for their significance and impact.

Among the writing samples Marof provided with his application, one was published in *Al Jazeera* that investigated violence tied to student politics after a shuffle in power. This particular story was picked up and carried by dozens of media outlets across South Asia, including *Prothom Alo* and *Times of India.* Another, for *Dialogue Earth*, examined how climate disasters were pushing rural families to marry off their daughters early.

"I wanted them to see that I care, dig deep, stay with stories even when they get complicated, and remain fair to all subjects," he said. "You don't need bylines in *Al Jazeera* or *NBC*. But you do need depth. They should be able to understand your methods by reading your work. Show that you're not afraid of difficult questions or tough circumstances."

What comes next

When asked about the future, Marof's answer was simple.

"I want to tell stories that matter, stories that serve the public interest, resonate globally, and give voice to the voiceless," he said. "I hope to work alongside the best in the business and contribute to investigations that change lives."

Eventually, Marof hopes to return to the classroom.

"Maybe twenty years from now, I will be teaching in a Journalism school," he said. "I would love to pass on what I have learned while reporting to the next generation of journalists."

Nazrul is a Campus Ambassador for The Daily Star from ULAB.