



PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

The reality of internships for **LIFE SCIENCES STUDENTS**

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MOVIES

MATERIALISTS

Despite many promises, director Song's latest release leaves a lot to be desired



SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

When I heard that Celine Song was delving into the world of Hollywood rom-coms with an all-star cast, I was beyond delighted. I reached the theatres in New York the week after its release, with a bucket full of expectations and absolutely ready to walk out with a heavy heart. Unfortunately, I didn't. This is not to say that the movie did not meet any of my expectations. I was ecstatic that I was watching a fresh romance movie with many great attributes along with the added bonus of a tongue-in-cheek Marxist lens to look at the stunning scenes through. But something felt amiss.

Lucy Mason (played by Dakota Johnson), is a calculative young matchmaker in New York City. Quite early in the movie, she mentions that she will only enter a new relationship if she finds someone a viable financial match. We then observe her meeting a 'unicorn' match, Harry Castillo (played by Pedro Pascal) at one of her clients' wedding, where he begins to court her with subtle persistence, until they eventually begin seeing each other. Amidst all this, Lucy's ex flame, John Finch, (played by Chris Evans) is a quietly looming character who always finds himself around Lucy when she needs him.

While I will not spoil the very predictable ending, my issue was not with said predictability, but the lack of connection that led to the ending. In other words, the actions of the characters at the end felt uncharacteristic for each of them. I understood their actions, but I would have liked to have seen more of their motivations and who they were specifically, that led to their choices.

In *Materialists*, a lot is said and even more is done, but without the same level of investment, or the imperceptible longing that would inevitably lead to the sequence of events that unfold.

The movie does a great job of reviving a genre that has so much to offer, and deals with some extremely important social issues. It checks off all the boxes of a great romance film, and movies like these need to be made more common. However, even though it is just a romance film, it felt like the spark was missing.

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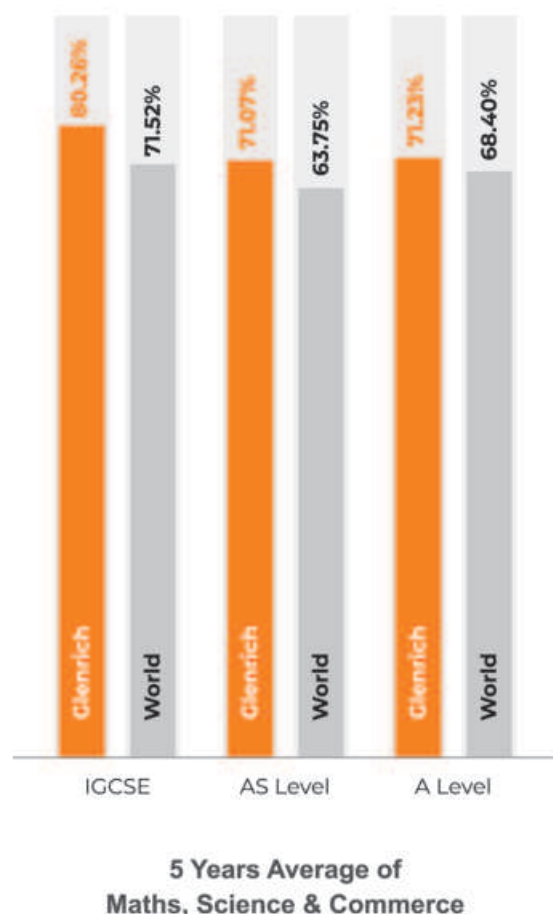
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Glenrich: Where academic brilliance meets the ‘School of Life’

At Glenrich, excellence is a habit, not just a goal—thanks to its ‘School of Life’ philosophy. The school has gradually risen to become a leading institution in Bangladesh by fostering high-performing students and competent learners who are ready to prosper in the global landscape.

Glenrich’s academic results have been above global standards for years. In Cambridge IGCSE, students from the school averaged 81.10 in Accounting, 77.79 in Business Studies, and 80.64 in Economics, compared to the global average of 69.01, 66.68, and 70.44, respectively. Science scores are strong too: Physics 82.02, Chemistry 81.90, Biology 80.22—all above global averages. The learners also outshone the average score in Mathematics with 80.51, compared to the global average of 68.96.



Glenrich's Excellences at a Glance

IGCSE & A Level scores consistently above global averages

100% placements in the top 100 global universities, incl. Harvard & Oxford

Smart classrooms with Interactive Flat Panels & Performance Enhancement Classes boost academic outcomes

Global award-winning student innovations & projects



This success isn't just for IGCSE—students also do better than the global average at AS and A Levels in all major subjects. These results show a culture of academic excellence and modern learning tools. Classrooms use Interactive Flat Panels to make learning more engaging and collaborative. The school keeps launching new ways to support students, like Performance Enhancement Classes (PECs). PECs happen during or after school. Students from grades 10–12 get one-on-one sessions in winter for exam preparation.

Glenrich's top academics lead to great university placements. With a 100 percent acceptance rate in the top 100 universities, the recent graduates of the school have received offers from universities like Harvard, Oxford, UC Berkeley, the University of Toronto, and the London School of Economics. Students get into top universities and win scholarships. Example: Fahmida Aftab (2023) got a 96% scholarship to Harvard and an offer from Oxford. These achievements say a lot about both students and the school.

Beyond academics, the school also promotes imagination and innovation. In 2025, a nine-student team won first place in the NSS Gerard K. O'Neill Space Settlement Contest with a project that envisioned a sustainable space colony near Ceres. From world toppers to scholarships, Glenrich shows that purposeful learning leads to success.

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▲ Graduates of Monash College at Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD) mark the occasion with a ceremonial toss of their mortarboards during the Monash UCBD Graduation Convocation 2025

MONASH-UCBD GRADUATION CONVOCATION CELEBRATES FUTURE GLOBAL LEADERS

“Joining this Monash programme was one of the best decisions I’ve made. The experience was intense, challenging, and undoubtedly gave me a head start.”

As Bangladesh evolves into a hub of quality education and expanding opportunities, the demand for international credentials and exposure also grows. Many students are opting for international pathway programmes that enable them to begin higher education locally with the option of transferring to top universities abroad later.

Monash University, Australia is a leader in this global trend. Monash is ranked 37th in the QS World University Rankings 2025 and is the only top international university that offers guaranteed places to students who complete its pathway programmes. Universal College Bangladesh (UCBD) offers two Monash fast-track programmes that enable HSC, IGCSE, O, AS and A2 Level students the opportunity to transfer to international universities in less than one year. The Monash University Foundation Year (MUFY) is a fast-track that takes IGCSE and O Level students direct into the first year of their university studies. The Monash College Diploma (MCD) for HSC and AS Level students is equivalent to the first year of a Monash degree, so students transfer into the second year of their degree overseas.

The success of these programmes was celebrated at the 4th Annual Monash UCBD Graduation Convocation, held on 28th June 2025. The event honoured 130 students who graduated from the MUFY and MCD programmes in Business, Engineering, and Information Technology.

It was attended by members of the UCBD Board, Professor Md Ismail Hossain, Dean of Academic Affairs at UCBD, and Manas Singh, CEO of STS Group, along with students, their parents, friends, and families.

As graduates received their certificates and tossed their caps in the air, it was clear that UCBD is a gateway to global success. With the upcoming July and August intakes, followed by January and February intakes UCBD continues to offer students unparalleled international opportunities—fostering academic excellence and preparing graduates to thrive in today’s interconnected world.



With a 98% pass rate and most students achieving top grades, I am delighted to say that UCBD students in Dhaka attain better results than students in Melbourne. All of tonight’s graduates leave us with a world-class qualification that will enable them to transition seamlessly to top international universities. We are sad to see you go, but proud of your achievements, and happy that your dreams of international education have become a reality.

PROFESSOR HEW GILL

President & Provost
Universal College Bangladesh



The collaboration between UCBD and Monash is a shining example of how education can bridge nations and foster a lasting global impact. I wholeheartedly congratulate the graduates and feel proud to witness the journey of future leaders and ambassadors of the deep-rooted friendship between our two nations.

H.E. CLIFTON POBKE

Acting High Commissioner of Australia to Bangladesh
Chief Guest, Monash UCBD Graduation Convocation 2025



At first I was unsure and didn’t know what I was signing up for. But in hindsight, joining this Monash programme was one of the best decisions I’ve made. The experience was intense, challenging, and undoubtedly gave me a head start.

NISHAT TASNIM NOSHIN

Valedictorian, Monash UCBD Graduation Convocation 2025
Monash College Diploma Graduate, Universal College Bangladesh



My UCBD journey is unforgettable. The friends I made and the faculty I knew helped me overcome every challenge. From caffeine-fuelled nights to chaotic group projects, I have learned far more than just academics. These nine months have shaped me for the better, preparing me for the future. I wouldn’t trade this experience for anything.

TUAN MOHAMED RAKSHAN JAYAH

Monash University Foundation Year Graduate
Universal College Bangladesh

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OFF CAMPUS

Has online dating made the pursuit of relationships easier?

TINATH ZAEBA

Whether it's through a dedicated app, or just sliding into social media DMs, it's undeniable that online dating has completely changed the dating scene. Dating apps promise us a brave new world of romance, where the indignity of being rejected to your face is no longer a risk. Now, you can meet your potential soulmate in your pyjamas, right in the middle of the third rewatch of your favourite sitcom. Modern romance is just a funny thing.

However, it has been made easier. It's easier to meet people, strike up a conversation, and even ghost people with vague excuses. While the mechanics of dating are literally at our fingertips, the actual connection feels more elusive than ever.

The matchmaking aspect about dating apps starts with the swiping: the endless, dopamine-fuelled scroll of faces. Every ding of a match becomes a small reminder that you're still in the running – still likeable, interesting, and worth noticing. Conversely, every match hinges on a description of just a few words that's carefully curated to be funny but not trying too hard.

The irony is that swiping turns into a mutual eligibility screening: you only swipe right if you think someone's cool enough for you, then wait nervously to see if the feeling is mutual. Subconsciously, however, it becomes more of a test to see if someone's in your league, instead of wanting to talk to someone because you're interested (which is supposed to be the point).

It's an endless ego slot machine. Nonetheless, very rarely does that match turn into a conversation that goes anywhere. When dating becomes an exercise in ego maintenance, it stops being about another person and starts being only about yourself. It's also like a brutally honest mirror: one swipe and you compare yourself to meticulously curated profiles. What this leads to is a pattern where everyone else seems more put-together, more attractive, and maybe even more "dateable"?

Even worse, this whole setup has kind of messed with our social instincts. Once upon a time, we had to talk to each other face-to-face, making eye-contact and small talk. Now, we skip straight to weirdly invasive questions as icebreakers. And while convenience is great, we've lost a little of that charming awkwardness that makes dating human. Putting in effort to spark the initial conversation



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

with butterflies in your stomach is part of the charm of romance.

Of course, an obvious perspective is that people on dating apps are different than in real life. Texting on screen is not always the same thing as talking to someone in person; you might form a connection to the personality that's texting you funny things but is completely different when you decide to meet. It can also be the other way around when someone is much easier to connect to in real life than on an app.

That said, let's give credit where it's due. Online dating is a lifesaver for people who are shy, busy, or just aren't too extroverted. It's also strangely romantic that two people can find each other through the power of algorithms. Since dating apps use algorithms to match people with common interests, it also has a higher probability of better compatibility, which probably explains the dating app

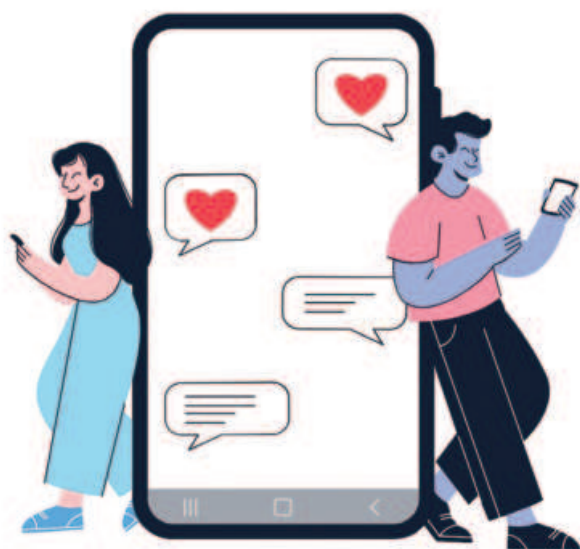
success stories every now and then.

But the downside can be daunting, which materialises through "option paralysis". This is a phenomenon where there are so many people to choose from, it's tempting to keep swiping in search of the next best thing. This makes actual commitment harder because no matter how great someone is, it's still superficial when we keep looking for something better.

So has online dating made dating easier?

If by "easier," we mean more accessible, slightly addictive, and occasionally bizarre, then it definitely has.

Even with all that's shrouding online dating, we still swipe, try, and hope for that one match who makes it all feel a little less like a game. And since there are successful stories, I would say the chance of finding love is beautiful enough to give it a try. At the end of the day, human beings are wired for connection. If nothing else, there's a different experience that comes out of it.



NEW TO ONLINE DATING? Remember these four things

Protect your personal information

Never share your full address, financial details, or work location early on. Scammers often ask for sensitive data under false pretenses.

Watch for inconsistencies

If someone's story keeps changing or feels too dramatic or perfect, it may be a red flag. Pay attention to gaps, odd language, or evasive answers.

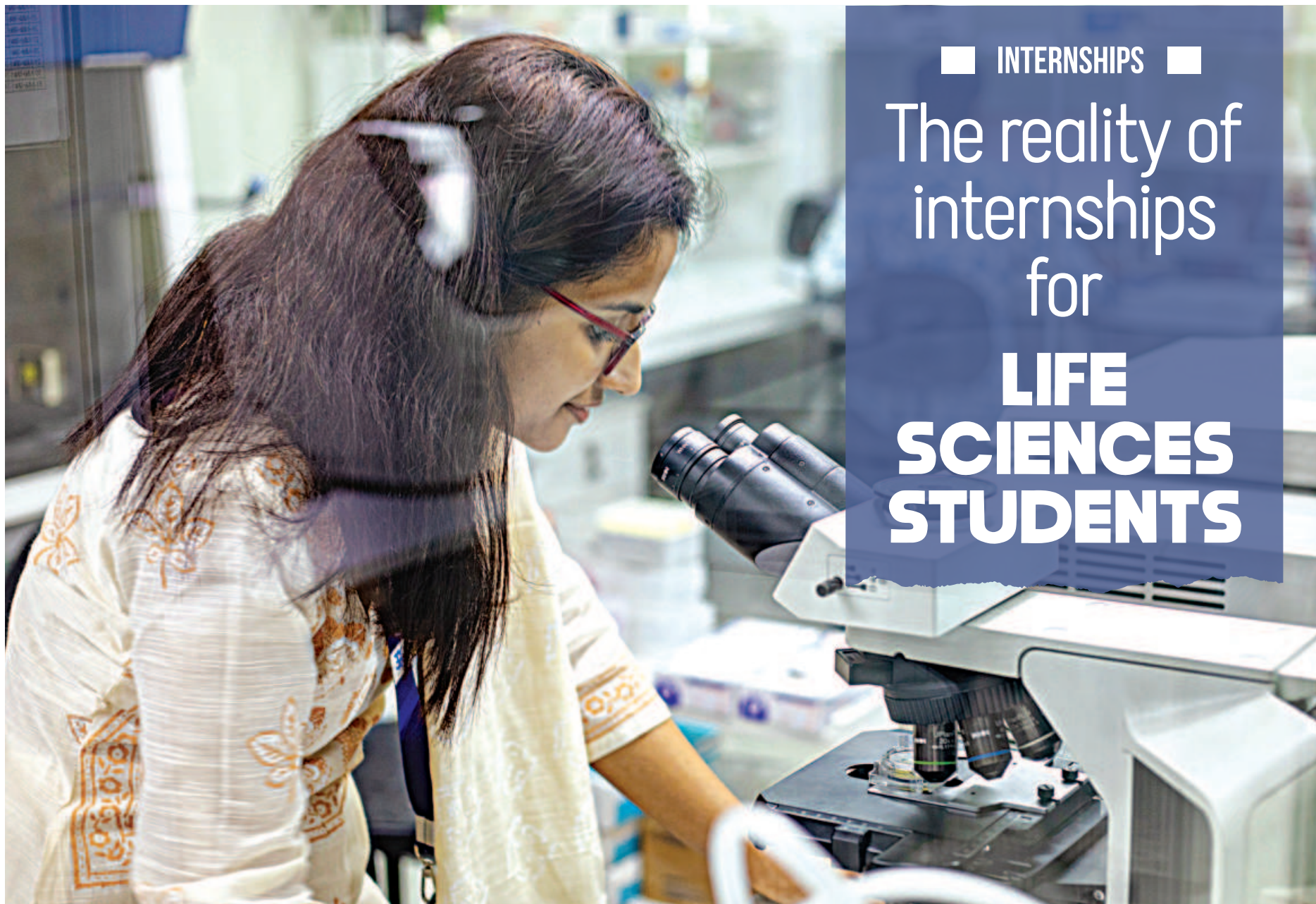
Never send money

No matter how convincing the story, never send money

to someone you have met online. Romance scams often involve fake emergencies.

Verify their identity

Use video calls early in the conversation. A real person will be open to a face-to-face chat. Even if video isn't possible, a voice call can help you gauge someone's tone, reactions, and sincerity. Also, ask them for their social media handles. Most real people have at least one active social media account and should be open to share that information if they have nothing to hide.



■ INTERNSHIPS ■

The reality of internships for LIFE SCIENCES STUDENTS

PHOTO: ORCHID CHAKMA

RAIAN ABEDIN

By the time your journey as an undergraduate student in a field pertaining to the Life Sciences – that is, your usual suspects of Biochemistry, Microbiology, Zoology, Genetic Engineering, Biotechnology, or any adjacent field – comes to an end, the big question of ‘where do we go?’ pops up in every students’ head.

The question itself can be rather loaded, as Biological Sciences in itself is a rather niche field dedicated almost entirely to research-based work. To that end, many students who wish to continue down this line find themselves facing major setbacks looking for employment or, more preferably, an internship.

For students nearing the end of their degrees, internships come in handy both as a way to connect with scientists currently working in Bangladesh while also allowing them to obtain hands-on knowledge on how lab work is carried out in a professional setting. As such, many students use this as an opportunity to branch out and obtain knowledge from different sources. Sometimes, these internship opportunities may enable the students to learn about more cutting-edge technology that simply isn’t available in a university setting.

Fatema Zannat Zerin, a final-year student at North South University, is one such individual according to whom, the scope for internships is very limited. “I recently did a training programme at Child Health Research Foundation (CHRF), which really enabled me to learn a lot more about the field I’m interested in. The frustrating part, though, is that the whole thing was a paid programme,” she laments, adding that she wants to move forward with another internship as soon as she graduates, but finds her

opportunities to be very limited.

In Bangladesh, perhaps the biggest issue warranting the most discussion is regarding the nature of paid programmes for laboratory-based training or internships. The field of Life Sciences, after all, exists almost entirely within laboratories, working with expensive equipment and chemicals that are not easy to come by. As a result, what students have to face is paying a significant sum just to gain exposure to laboratory spaces and scientists working there.

Aanushka Tupur, a postgraduate student currently at Georgia Tech University, says, “During my internship at CHRF, I was shocked to see how much it cost. It helped me connect to the greater world of science and figure out what my research interests were, but there has to be a better way for students who can’t afford such large amounts to also find opportunities.”

According to Ahnaf Yeanat Tazwar, a third-year student at North South University, the problem isn’t just in the expenses, “Unless you hear anything about these opportunities from a friend, senior, or faculty, you’d have no idea about it. This is because the Life Sciences field is still growing here. So there is no streamlined process in Bangladesh for students to follow.”

This brings up the topic of how the Life Sciences is treated in Bangladesh. While it is understandable that Life Sciences in general stands as a rather niche field, demand for it certainly exists, and will continue to grow in order to abet the needs of healthcare research.

Dr Md Kabir Uddin, an assistant professor in the Department of Biochemistry & Microbiology at North South University, says, “There’s a huge gap in how much money there is available for research, not just in universities but in organisations and research institutions, and the number of

students who are getting into this field. In the last few years, the demand for this field seems to have skyrocketed.”

As a result, the situation stands as Life Sciences being in a precarious position. Paid programmes, a lack of direction for students, and a gap in funding and employment, or even internship, opportunities for students all paint a somewhat messy picture. Changes to how Life Science as a field is handled in this country are overdue. But until serious steps are taken, the scenario will remain frustrating for all students who dream of making something out of their degrees.

One hopeful alternative comes in the shape of internships that are offered globally. While these are readily available, they are also highly prestigious and meant for students who have fully dedicated themselves to conducting research in this field.

Naz Afreen, a second-year student at BRAC University, says, “I’m more interested in the clinical side of things, so I applied to some internships in South Korea that were related to this. Unfortunately, I got rejected, but considering how limited my options are over here I thought it was worth a shot.”

With cutthroat global competition and a lack of streamlined infrastructure locally, students often find themselves questioning where to go and whether their degrees are even worth it. The reality of the situation points towards the need for the development of systems that can promote these fields and provide support for students looking to make something of their degrees.

The, onus, thus falls on both academia and the industry to work together in order to provide for young researchers looking to integrate and dedicate themselves fully into the world of Life Sciences.

INTERVIEWS

Inside the journey of a Bangladeshi academic chasing a PhD at Texas A&M

RAIYAN BIN SARWAR

Md Hasan Al Banna is a two-time recipient of the Gold Medal and Chancellor's Award from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), and a nominee for the Prime Minister's Gold Medal. He is a member of the first graduating batch from the Department of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at BUP.

After serving as a faculty member for four years at BUP – currently holding the position of Assistant Professor – Banna is now pursuing his PhD in Computer Science and Engineering at Texas A&M University, a top public research university in the US.

Campus caught up with Banna to delve deeper into his PhD journey, the decisions that shaped it, and the lessons he's gathered along the way.

Campus (C): Could you walk us through your academic journey from being a student and lecturer in Bangladesh to becoming a PhD scholar and a research assistant (RA) at Texas A&M?

Banna (B): I studied at BUP as a part of its ICT department's very first batch. That came with a sense of responsibility; we were not only shaping our own futures but also building the department's brand in the job market. From the outset, I was deeply involved in extracurricular activities. I helped establish the BUP InfoTech Club, a platform for students to share tech-driven ideas. The experience helped me build networks beyond BUP, and it even led to early collaborative research with professors from other institutions.

During the final year of my undergraduate life, I focused on research and succeeded in publishing my first paper. That was the turning point; it clarified my career trajectory. I realised that I found joy in academia, which led me to pursue a master's degree, and, eventually, a PhD.

I also engaged in several research projects during my master's, including ones funded by the ICT Division here in Bangladesh. Although the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted normal routines, it also gave me uninterrupted time for writing and publishing. I co-authored several papers in reputed journals during this period. After completing my master's, I joined BUP as a lecturer, a position I held for nearly four years. Teaching, for me, was a fulfilling chapter where I was able to mentor students and help some of them chart their own paths in academia.

C: What motivated you to pursue a PhD, and why did you choose Texas A&M in particular?

B: My motivation stemmed from a desire to delve deeper into research and contribute meaningfully to my field. After gaining teaching and research experience, I felt ready to take the next step. Applying for PhD programmes while working full-time was certainly challenging, but it also helped me focus.

When reaching out to professors, I was intentional; I discussed specific research alignments and even offered constructive criticism of their published work. Texas A&M stood out not only for its reputation but also because the professor I contacted had a project that aligned perfectly with my interests. Moreover, having a close friend already studying in Texas added a personal layer of comfort.

I was fortunate to be offered a graduate research assistantship for a National Science Foundation (NSF) funded project. That opportunity made Texas A&M an ideal choice.

C: What does a typical day look like as an RA? How do you manage your coursework, research, and overall well-being?

B: Though the formal contract mentions 20 hours per week, most RAs will tell you that it usually exceeds that. I easily spend 40 or more hours per week on research, but it's manageable if you're disciplined.

I recommend using weekdays for focused work and keeping weekends for rest and recovery. Physical health is also crucial; there's no one to care for you if you fall ill, so I make it a priority to stay fit.

Coursework, while manageable, requires consistent attention. Completing assignments on time and maintaining good grades are essential, especially since scholarships and assistantships often depend on academic performance.

For Computer Science students, especially, I would advise practising regularly on online judges and platforms like LeetCode or Codeforces since they significantly help with future job placements.

C: What strategies helped you prepare a strong PhD application, particularly your statement of purpose (SOP), recommendation letters, and research portfolio?

B: The SOP is perhaps the most important part of your application as it tells your story. Don't copy from others. A compelling SOP is cohesive, authentic, and reflects your academic evolution.

Of course, your profile must support your narrative. Publishing in top or Q1 journals, maintaining a quality

GitHub repository, and engaging in impactful extracurriculars all matter. I was fortunate to have a few journal publications, ongoing research projects, and some involvement in tech-focused clubs. These lent credibility to my SOP.

Recommendation letters also play a vital role. It's important to give your referees enough time and context so they can highlight your strengths genuinely and in detail.

C: How different is the research environment at Texas A&M compared to what you experienced in Bangladesh?

B: The most notable difference is in the availability of resources. At Texas A&M, we have easy access to powerful GPUs and cutting-edge lab equipment. Students are given dedicated desk space within collaborative labs, which fosters continuous knowledge exchange.

Another key distinction is the research culture; here, it is open, debate-driven, and idea-centric. You're encouraged to challenge assumptions, even your advisor's, as long as you have the evidence. That kind of academic freedom pushes innovation.

C: What are the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of your current research work?

B: The greatest reward is seeing your idea work in real-time. When experiments succeed or a model gives the expected results, it's incredibly satisfying. But research also involves a fair share of struggle. You'll often get stuck, and it can feel frustrating.

My strategy is to take breaks when needed and return with a fresh perspective. The key is to remain patient and resilient. If you've made it this far, you have what it takes to push through.

C: What advice would you offer to Bangladeshi students dreaming of higher education and research opportunities abroad?

B: Start early and be deliberate. Identify your passion and begin aligning your academic journey with it. Work on your SOP with care, diversify your university options, and, most importantly, be honest with yourself.

Also, take part in meaningful extracurricular activities, build a strong research portfolio, and maintain good relationships with your mentors. These connections will be vital for recommendation letters. Keep learning, stay consistent, and don't be afraid to take risks.

And remember that it's okay if every attempt doesn't work out. Each experience teaches you something. Stay true to your goals, and success will follow.

Raiyan Bin Sarwar is a Campus Ambassador for The Daily Star from Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).



PHOTO: COLLECTED