



## A glimpse at Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology's mission of forging pioneers in the creative industry



Shamim Azad Shaion



Soheli Rana

**The urge to create is an innate one. Some opt for the paintbrush while others choose the pencil. Regardless of what utensil one wields, they are united by their overwhelming need to express themselves. As one of the first complete design educational institutions in Bangladesh, Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology (SMUCT) has carved out a space to house some of the brightest creative minds of the country – helping students foster their talent, find promising opportunities within the industry, and shape their career trajectory.**

ABIR HOSSAIN

Offering a range of degrees across a wide spectrum of mediums, with their flagship programme in Design and Technology, SMUCT has churned out some incredibly talented designers ever since its inception in 2003, most of whom are breaking new ground and contributing significantly in their respective industries. As a testament to the standards that the university has set, we sat down with two of SMUCT's alumni, Md Shamim Azad Shaion and Soheli Rana, and discussed how their careers have taken shape and what role their alma mater played in dictating its outcome.

**Md Shamim Azad Shaion's journey towards finding the true value of weaving fashion with narrative**

Md Shamim Azad Shaion, an alumnus of SMUCT with a Bachelor's in Apparel Manufacturing Management and Technology as well as a Master's in Fashion Design and Technology, has been working at Aarong as a Senior Design Manager for the past 13 years, leading the design for men's traditional and casual wear.

"In my role, I rely on a blend of creative thinking and leadership. From trend forecasting and concept development to fabric selection, technical detailing, and managing a design team, each part of the process demands both vision and coordination," he explained when asked about the skills required in his current role. Shamim, however, did underpin that it was SMUCT that laid the groundwork for his inclination to weave stories through fashion.

"It didn't just teach me the technical side of apparel and design, it taught me how to think like a designer. The environment pushed me to think creatively, handle pressure, and bring ideas to life, which are now part of my daily work. It was more than education; it was the beginning of finding my voice in fashion," he said.

Shamim also added that the lessons that were imparted weren't merely confined to design but could also be extended to many facets of one's life. "I was lucky to be guided by both local and foreign teachers, all of whom helped shape who I am today. They didn't just teach me how to become a designer, they also emphasised the need to become a better human. I still remember one of our faculty members telling us that it is

honesty and purpose that must dictate who we are before we sell any of our designs," he recalled.

One particular memory that Shamim looked back at was when students from across the university came together to organise a flood relief campaign in Uttara back in 2004. He also reminisced about a fashion show in a mobile van that students put together as well as picnics and late nights filled with fabric, sketches, and laughter.

As an institution that seeks to embolden individuals through the sheer force of creativity, SMUCT also offers spaces outside its classroom for its students to flourish.

"One of the most meaningful experiences that I took part in was planning a fashion show for an indigenous community. It reminded me that fashion can also be a vehicle for showcasing identity, culture, and heritage. Taking part in exhibitions, cultural events, and student-led creative projects allowed me to develop important skills such as collaboration, communication, and leadership in a real-life context. I learned that creativity is more powerful when anchored to people, culture, and values," he said.

As for the dynamic within the classroom, Shamim iterated that there were a number of courses that impacted him, specifically courses in Surface Design, Elements of Design, and Fundamental of Design. "These classes allowed me to find my sense of patterns, textures, and shapes. Amongst all my courses, however, Design 101 pushed me the most. It changed the way I think about design by teaching me that it's a problem to solve. More importantly, it is about taking that problem and turning it into an interesting story that makes one's design better," he reflected.

When asked to share some advice for the current batch students at SMUCT, Shamim urged them to chase their dreams and to not rush the journey. "Every sketch, every mistake, every long night is shaping you into the designer you're meant to become," he asserted. "Follow fashion forecasts and analyse global trends, not to copy it but rather to understand where the world is heading."

He also emphasised that in the professional world, designers tend to be defined by their first product, which reframes the importance of being able to present one self.

In between the reflection and

reminiscing, Shamim also spared some words for his younger self. While this act of grace may, at first sight, simply appear to be conversation with oneself, it reinforced just how much wisdom SMUCT and his professional life has instilled within Shamim.

"Embrace your journey. After all, it's your story that's unfolding. Keep it real, stay inquisitive, and be bold enough to be a trendsetter. Dream big, and explore ways to learn that excite you," he concluded.

**Tracing Soheli Rana's steps to building a solid foundation**

Soheli Rana, also a graduate of SMUCT with a Bachelor's in Graphic Design and Multimedia, currently working as the Head of Department at PR VFX, explained that he has to utilise a range of skills on a daily basis. These include crafting new ideas, managing projects, solving problems, and communicating with clients, amongst other demands. Naturally, it was SMUCT that played a vital role in developing these abilities.

"The university's hands-on design assignments, access to creative tools, and guidance from experienced faculty members helped me build a solid creative foundation and prepared me for real-world challenges in the creative industry," he said.

Soheli also stressed that his time at the university shaped him both in a professional and personal capacity. Not only did it help him grow in areas like creativity, self-discipline, and communication but also reinforced the values of collaboration and continuous improvement.

Nonetheless, it isn't just these lessons that he continues to carry with him but also the memories that he has created. "Some of the things I cherish the most are collaborating with friends on group projects, learning from inspiring faculty members, and participating in campus exhibitions

and design contests," explained Soheli. "These experiences made my time at university enjoyable, while also helping me foster skills that I rely on today. The friendships and lessons from that time continue to have a positive impact on both my personal and professional life."

Alongside academics, SMUCT also allowed Soheli to delve deeper and explore his creativity by offering a range of intriguing extracurricular activities. He recalled participating in exhibitions, cultural events, and inter-university creative competitions. The benefits such integral interactions offer are vast. One of which included improving his presentation skills and thus, the ability to showcase his own work. The extracurricular activities also gave him the opportunity to engage with students from other departments and institutions, which in turn, broadened his perspective and enhanced his creative thinking.

Within the classroom, there were courses that were offered which had a major impact on his artistic expression. In particular, he referred to a 3D animation project, which focused on storytelling through animation, that influenced him.

"I created a TV channel programme's 3D intro animation. From modelling and animation to texturing and final rendering, I was involved throughout the process. It was challenging, but also the first time I felt completely immersed. I enjoyed telling a story through movement and solving technical problems creatively," he explained.

In fact, it was through this course that Soheli realised how much he resonated with animation and narratives. In many ways, the course was perhaps the most important factor in shaping his aspirations.

The opportunities that SMUCT offers are vast and varied. The culmination of its effects are

manyfold. Current students and alumni alike are not merely talented in their respective fields but also embody values that the institution has instilled in them. Soheli emphasised that it was the environment, in particular, that taught him how to manage pressure, adapt to feedback, and stay committed to long-term goals – attributes that are of significant importance in any area.

To reiterate the knowledge that SMUCT has imparted, Soheli spared a few words for the current student body.

"My sincere advice is to stay focused, stay curious, and keep creating. University life is the perfect time to explore, experiment, and make mistakes. Don't be afraid to step outside your comfort zone. Take your classes seriously, but also engage in extracurricular activities, personal projects, and internships," he asserted.

"Stay updated with industry trends, build a strong portfolio, and learn to take constructive criticism positively. And most importantly, believe in your abilities, even when the road gets tough. Success doesn't happen overnight – it's the result of consistent effort, passion, and perseverance. Keep dreaming, keep doing, and never stop learning – your journey has just begun."

He also said that if he could give one piece of advice to his former self it would be to believe in himself more and explore new ideas. "I used to doubt whether I was good enough or creative enough. I have now realised that confidence grows through experience, and the only way to find your strengths is by trying. I would encourage myself to speak up more in class, take on side projects, and not be afraid of failing, because every mistake is a chance to learn and improve," he concluded.

## How to connect and communicate with alumni for guidance and opportunities

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Begin by introducing yourself, ask open-ended questions, try to get to know them better, and be a good listener– you might be surprised by how much you will learn already. Beginning a conversation by speaking about a recent update to your university campus or shared course instructors may be a great way to break the ice.

Social media groups or communities are also a great way to present yourself as an active member of the community. These informal spaces often share job postings, mentorship opportunities, and industry news– all of which you can benefit from. Interacting with posts in an informative and helpful way, sharing useful articles and taking the time to congratulate members on achievements are a few simple ways to help prove to other alumni

members that you are open to building a relationship in the long run, and aren't just trying to gain opportunities yourself.

**Follow up without being pushy and stay connected**

One of the biggest mistakes is going silent after the first conversation, or following up only when you need something. Send an occasional update about your progress, congratulate them on recent achievements, or share relevant resources. While there obviously is a limit to how much you should reach out, it is important that you don't completely vanish after one good conversation, or once you're done asking for advice.

It is also extremely crucial to follow proper etiquette, as a sloppy email or text may undermine your credibility immediately. Begin by extending

a short greeting with genuine concern for their well-being, make your intentions clear, and keep the first email (of a thread) or text (in a conversation) brief. Being professional is crucial, but people appreciate it if you also carry a warm tone.

The strongest alumni relationships aren't purely transactional. Celebrate their milestones, engage with their posts, and keep in touch even when you're not job-hunting or seeking advice. People are more inclined to help those they know and like, so nurture the relationship long-term.

Connecting with alumni is not about extracting favours– it's about building genuine, mutually beneficial relationships. Start with curiosity, respect their time, and offer value whenever you can. Over time, these connections can evolve into mentorships, collaborations, and even lifelong friendships.

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