

# Why universities should have student newspapers

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Illustration: Abir Hossain

Student-run newspapers have the potential to amplify student voices, highlight campus issues, and drive social change. For instance, in 2014, *The Columbia Daily Spectator*, the student-run newspaper of Columbia University in New York, ignited a national debate by covering the story of Emma Sulkowicz, a student who carried a mattress around campus to protest the university's handling of her alleged sexual assault case. The mattress symbolised the weight of trauma that survivors of sexual assault bear in their daily lives, and major media outlets soon picked up the story, sparking nationwide discussions on the handling of sexual assault cases, institutional accountability, and due process on American university campuses. This incident clearly delineates how campus newspapers can play a vital role in advocating for students' causes.

A number of student-run newspapers across campuses in Bangladesh have also demonstrated that student-run publications can have a meaningful impact, contributing to personal development and strengthening campus community engagement.

Regarding the importance of campus newspapers in a university setting, Tagabun Taharim, the former Editor-in-Chief of *The BRACU Express*, believes that such publications provide a valuable platform for students to express their voices. She explains, "Student newspapers give students a real voice. At university, we meet so many different people, and things happen every day. In our newspaper, we capture those moments, share opinions, and keep everyone informed. It connects the campus to the wider world, sparks conversations, and highlights student talent and concerns in a way nothing else does."

Besides building a community within the university, a student-run newspaper can also benefit the university and its students in terms of career growth.

Saqib Bin Raschid, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *TheULABian*, says, "I think a student-run publication can help the university a great deal. Students with great potential in writing, editing, and literature in general end up working for top news portals from a very early stage of their studentship. This also enhances and strengthens a university's alumni hold in the journalism sphere while also offering encouragement to the upcoming ones."



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Working for a student newspaper can have a profound and positive impact on students' personalities as well. Rishov Aditya, Editor-in-Chief of *BRACU Express*, says that working for the campus newspaper has taught him to be more tactful. "Sometimes, the topics we write about may not be viewed in a good light by the authority or even by some individuals," he explains. "For example, I once wrote an editorial about the reemergence of student politics, specifically within private universities. As it is a sensitive topic, I had to navigate it in a delicate manner. At the same time, I had to make sure my writing isn't too vague but does answer the important aspects of the topic."

Additionally, managing a newspaper within the campus can help students garner crucial research skills. Tabassum Haider Risha, former Head of Communication for *The ULABian*, says, "Being part of a student newspaper has helped me become a better researcher. When I used to write about specific topics, I had to conduct thorough and well-rounded research on them. This required both patience and curiosity. That's one of the lessons that I took away from my time at *The ULABian*. The more I grow, the more I appreciate its value."

Despite having the potential to make a positive contribution to both the campus community and individual students, the circulation of student-run newspapers is scarce in Bangladesh. Mrityika Anan Rahman, a lecturer at the Media, Communication, and Journalism (MCJ) programme at North South University (NSU), believes that the reasons behind a lack of student-run newspapers across campuses may range from the prevailing political culture to declining interest amongst young people towards print media.

"There could be multiple reasons why student-run newspapers are not common in our country. These include a lack of encouragement for freedom of expression in our culture and insufficient university funding," she says. "However, there may be other reasons as well, such as a decline in interest in reading print newspapers amongst young people. It may also be attributed to a reduced interest in pursuing journalism as a future career."

Student-run newspapers have significant potential in building community and nurturing the personal and professional growth of students. However, the culture of maintaining a student newspaper continues to be an anomaly due to logistical and cultural constraints. The transferable skills and community benefits generated by student publications should compel us to rethink the absence of student newspapers across most of our campuses.

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