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Standard of Education at DU

Sir, Our respected Senate members have expressed their concern over the declining standard of education at Dhaka University as reported in the DS on the 14th of July. It was reported that, a majority of senators have "alleged that many teachers of DU were engaged in consultancy outside the university hampering their academic activities." Some of them also suggested that "such teachers should be terminated from the university and sent to the schools."

No doubt the teachers who are found to neglect their academic duties should be put into punitive actions. Many other academic-minded teachers and I are all for accountability, not only for teachers but also for all publicly funded jobs. But if our respected senators say that external consultancy is the only reason for the decline in academic standards, I must say it is a very narrow-minded and deliberately misleading stance.

Let us just go back to the process of election of the senators completed recently. The whole process took more than two months. These elections were held in a staggering manner at 3-4 centres outside Dhaka followed by 3 days at Dhaka University itself. Nearly 30,000 registered DU graduate voted which was preceded by zealous registering of the graduates themselves by soliciting of teacher-volunteers of the existing 'political' groups within the university. Teachers involved in the electioneering were seen to be absent from departmental activities (except perhaps theoretical classes) for nearly entire period. The number of teachers involved in the above activities are probably more than those involved in consultancy activities. Apart from Senate elections, there are Dean elections, DU Teachers Association elections, DU Syndicate elections and Academic Council elections. In recent years, it has become almost a customary for the potential candidates vying for posts to these bodies to move from door to door not only in the various departments but also to residences of the teachers. I would like to ask our respected senators: don't you think that the above 'political' activities hamper the academic standard of DU as well?

I am not supporting consultancy. However it worries me that for their own convenience, the senators (particularly DU teachers) are putting up a narrow view of the ailing condition of DU.

It was also reported that many teachers were not giving the due share of their consultancy money to the university. I know of many teachers who have attracted foreign grants for research purposes. These grants usually are given in the name of DU and the university has been duly subtracting 10 per cent overhead charges. In the case of foreign-funded consultancies also I would expect that foreign agencies would recognise the DU as the administrative authority for the sake of transparency and accountability.

Local consultancies may of course operate more through personal contacts. In any case, I am sure the administration can easily obtain the necessary information from respective departments and arrange to obtain overhead charges. I would also like to suggest here that consultancy per se does not necessarily detract one from academic activities because we can see that the Institute of Business Administration at DU has an excellent academic record despite the fact that most of the teachers of the IBA are engaged in consultancies.

The news also stated about a press release that a Senate session would be solely devoted to 'ways of upgrading the education and research programmes of the university to make it international standard'. This is commendable.

The teachers first need to identify the problems they are facing before a broader body can suggest steps for rectification. For instance, does the public know that there is incentive for DU teachers who become student advisors, house tutors, etc., but nothing for attracting research grants or establishing laboratories? All over the world there are positions of research associates/fellowships leading to Ph.D., but there's nothing as such at DU and other Bangladeshi universities.

A Concerned Teacher of DU