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**Y & I**

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## VC speaks



### NSU VC Speaks...

Professor Amin U. Sarkar joined the North South University as its Vice Chancellor on June 11, 2013. Dr. Sarkar's academic leadership appointments in the U.S. included the positions of Dean of the Alabama A&M University's College of Business and Public Affairs for six years, Dean of the Black Hills State University's College of Business and Technology for three years, Chairman of the Georgia College & State University's Department of Economics, Finance and Marketing for three years, and Chairman of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Fredonia's Department of Economics for four years. Previously, Dr. Sarkar served in the BCS (Economic) cadre as Deputy Chief, Bangladesh Planning Commission. Sheikh Iraj of Y&I recently met him for an exclusive interview.

### **Please tell us about the recent academic developments of the university.**

North South University began 23 years ago with only 11 faculty members; we now have over 600 full-time and part-time faculty members. We began with only 137 students; we now have 18,000 registered students. Recently, we have reorganized the university into four schools and 16 departments. We have discontinued faculty overload teaching and raised faculty to give them more time and greater resources to contribute to student learning and to research. We have also discontinued undergraduate teaching assistantships to ensure greater interaction between students and faculty members, as seen in student centered bachelor/master degree-level colleges/universities in the U.S. Our full-time faculty members now have an allocation of their 40 weekly hours to teaching, research and service. For efficiency, recently we replaced the old course selection practice and introduced electronic registration so that students do not have to stand on long lines for long hours. We raised our annual financial support to our students to more than 100 million taka. We are trying to implement a broad-based undergraduate education in which in addition to becoming a competent graduate in a subject, students receive lifelong skill-sets, abilities and knowledge in written, oral and electronic communication; critical thinking and analytical ability; ethics and social responsibility; diversity understanding and tolerance; global perspectives and sustainability; community service; and use of technology strategically. I got my B.Sc (Hons.) and M.Sc from Dhaka University but we were not really given exposure to other disciplines except our major subject and two related subjects as subsidiary. It was narrow-based and specialized unlike in a broad-based education in which all students take courses in arts and humanities, social and natural sciences, mathematics and computers. We did not study history, government, society, ethics and philosophy, mathematics and statistics. In our society now we have shortcomings in ethics and social responsibility; tolerance and diversity understanding; community service and volunteering. A broad-based education is of utmost importance for Bangladesh and we include it in our undergraduate curriculum for all students. We leave required specialization for master or doctoral studies.

### **What type of new initiatives and subjects you are going to introduce?**

We recognize the need to reintroduce a uniform length for all undergraduate degrees irrespective of the subject in which the degree is offered. In the past, we had 3-year bachelor degrees with honors in Bangladesh. Later NSU started 4-year bachelor degrees like in the U.S. The year is now expressed in terms of credit hours or credits. One credit means one hour weekly teaching by a faculty in a classroom or lab. A full-time student means one who is studying a minimum of 40 hours a week, like a full-time employee who works 40 hours a week. For effective learning if a student takes 1 credit, she/he spends 1 hour in the classroom or lab should study at home and/or in a library for 2 hours. That means, a student taking 12 credits, needs to study 24 hours at home or library and to participate for 4 hours in co-curricular or extracurricular activity totaling 40 hours per week for a typical student. A student taking fewer than 12 credits spends more time in extra-curricular activity or enjoys more leisure time. On this basis, in the U.S., a typical 4-year BA/BS/BBA degree is of 120 credits for almost all subjects.

At NSU, we have recently standardized the length of all 4-year undergraduate degree programs to 120 credit hours (with the exception of 130 credit hours in Engineering and Law). We divided the 4-year undergraduate curriculum into 4 categories: (1) university-wide or general education curriculum, (2) common faculty/college/school curriculum, (3) department/subject/major required and elective courses, and (4) free elective courses chosen by students. We have also standardized the length of master's degrees to 30-36 credit hours. In this effort, we are the first in the country. Our recently revamped BBA degree now includes majors in Accounting, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, HRM, International Business, Marketing, Management, MIS, General Business, and Supply Chain Management. We have also developed new undergraduate majors in Media Studies, Criminal Justice, Organizational Communication, Counseling, Homeland Security and Ethics & Social Responsibility. We are now in the process of developing majors in Nursing and Teacher Education.

### **What type of accreditation is NSU looking for?**

Accreditation is about enhancing the quality of education; it's to improve the quality of education. I can say we are doing a great job but a third party has to say yes they are doing great job. That is what accreditation does. It is voluntary and peer-reviewed. We are regulated by our government; our UGC can say NSU is great, that doesn't adequately mean much to the outsiders, particularly the employers. They are not an independent third party body. Our degrees have to be recognized outside also. And to be recognized outside and our grade can be transferred outside and for that a foreign accreditation particularly from America is very critical that is valued world-wide. Because we say we are an American-style university, and that is what we sell to the students and to the parents. That is why we have to get an accreditation from America. American accreditation bodies have to say yes NSU education quality is comparable with American education quality. We are currently preparing for the peer-reviewed and voluntary accreditation from the US. both for the institution as a whole and for our selected professional programs. Our business programs and our engineering and computer programs are already in the process for ACBSP and ABET accreditation, respectively. We are in the ACBSP candidacy status and hope to be accredited within 2015. Our public policy (MPPG) and public health (MPH) programs are also preparing for NASPAA and CEPH accreditation, respectively. Again, for all the above mentioned initiatives, North South University is the first like it was the first private university in English medium that introduced the semester system, course credit system, and grading system in Bangladesh. Now, it has the same broad-based content of the U.S. bachelor and master degrees. We have just concluded our visit to several overseas institutions and inshallah we will later on pursue AACSB for our business programs and 1 of the 6 regional accreditation bodies for NSU-wide accreditation. Our endeavor for accreditation will enhance educational quality and allow our students to transfer credits freely between NSU and American universities and many other prestigious foreign universities. We have signed mutually beneficial MOU with many overseas universities. This will allow NSU students to study abroad and students of other countries to study at NSU.