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University libraries



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If lighthouses are compared to educational institutions in terms of showing humanity the way to knowledge, then the libraries they contain would be the powerful beams of guiding light. Libraries have sustained and contained human knowledge for thousands of years. We still talk about the great ancient libraries of Alexandria, Athens, Cairo or Timbuktoo of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages whose magnitude is overwhelming, even by today's standards.

These days, there are a number of aspects that interests a student to take admission in a university and the library is one of them. A library can depict a number of positive or negative aspects of a university. This week, Y&I looks at some of the well-known private and public university libraries to find out what type of services and facilities they have to offer.

Dhaka University Library

The Dhaka University Library, housed in three separate buildings, is the biggest in Bangladesh. The library holds a collection of more than 617,000 volumes, including bound volumes of periodicals. In addition, it has a collection of over 30,000 manuscripts in various languages and a large number of microfilms, microfiche and CDs. It also subscribes to over 300 foreign journals.

“When it comes to managing our library work, we are using two software. One was made by us and the other is the Koha software. Our repository is made by another open source software, so

that our resources, especially our theses, are preserved online and one can access or download them from any part of the world,” said librarian (acting) Prof SM Zabed Ahmed.

Koha is an open source Integrated Library System (ILS), which is used worldwide by public, school and special libraries.

“In the last one year, we have purchased 30,000 e-books. All the latest e-books from reputable publishers are in our collection. The benefit of e-books is one can access them from anywhere. Sometimes, when we buy paper books, due to limited budget, we are not able to buy more than one copy,” Prof Ahmed added.

There was a restriction that users could only access the library resources while on the campus, but in the last two years, that has changed. Now, students and faculty members can access the library from outside the campus.

“We have provided individual usernames and passwords to them. We have started a journal system, all the departments of Dhaka University have journals now. On an experimental basis, we have uploaded six journals online,” said Prof Ahmed.

Library Facilities

Computer printing service is available in the library’s reprography section. Only old and rare manuscripts, microfilm and microfiche in digital form are available for CD/DVD write. Carrels or cubicles for studying are available in the main library that can only be reserved by faculty members or researchers for higher studies. Computer terminals are available for faculty members and students to search the library OPAC (online public access catalog).

A modern and international standard resource centre for visually impaired students is located on the ground floor of the Library Administrative Building. The centre works in collaboration with Sight Savers International. The centre has Braille books, computers with specialised software and Braille printers.

The library subscribes to all well-circulated daily newspapers in Bangladesh. Users can read these newspapers from 8am to 9pm in the main library and science library. Old and rare newspapers are preserved on the ground floor of the administrative building. These newspapers are only available in bound volumes. The library houses 30,000 handwritten manuscripts in various languages, many from the 14th and 15th centuries, and a large number of tracts (booklets, leaflets, pamphlets and ‘puthi’) which are also preserved in microforms and CDs. Users can use their own laptops in the library.

Jahangirnagr University Library

Jahangirnagar University (JU) has a large library, with a huge collection of books. Established in 1985, the JU central library is located behind the monument of ‘Sangshaptak’. There are more than 110,000 books and 14,000 hard bound journals and 22,000 online journals in the library. More than 270 students can seat and study in there. There is also a cyber centre on the premises and the whole area is covered by Wi-Fi technology. Moreover, the teachers and students of JU will soon enjoy digital facilities as the university authorities have taken all necessary steps to digitalise the library.

“All necessary steps to digitalise the JU central library have already been taken, now it’s just a matter of time to declare the library a digital one,” a source in the JU administration said.

The JU administration has installed ‘Koha’ software to digitalise the library. It will help users to find all kinds of books and journals at the central library. After completing the technical procedures, teachers and students will not be able to read books and journals available from

inside the library, but also from any part of the world, said library in-charge Prof Ajit Kumar Majumder.

“Almost all reference books of different department and renowned journals are available at the JU library and we also collect the books students require for study,” he added.

Several initiatives have been taken to digitalise the library, over 100 seats for first-year students have been increased on the ground floor and introduction of a digital library card with password is just a matter of time, Prof Majumder said.

Rajshahi University Central Library

Rajshahi University Central Library is situated at the heart of the university. The library has started its automation process and has recently started online services on and off campus. To partially meet the demands of a modern library, it is accumulating e-books and e-resources and the available materials are offered to users on the campus. It has also a significant amount of subscribed access to online services like Project Muse, Synergy and Blackwell.

It is one of the oldest and largest libraries in Bangladesh and has been providing library support to students, teachers, researchers and general readers for more than six decades. The library has a collection of more than 350,000 books, 40,000 volumes of journals and periodicals. The books and journals cover all areas of knowledge and information and reflect the nature of a general university with equal emphasis on humanities, social sciences, business administration, sciences and applied sciences. The library has also a huge archive of newspapers and other ‘ephemeral’ publications.

BRAC University Library

Ayesha Abed Library of BRAC University (BRACU) has approximately 40,000 printed books in its collection and has access to over 60,000 e-books and 50,000 e-journals and databases. The library provides both on-campus and off-campus access facilities to online journals and databases.

The BRACU library aims to become a world-class knowledge resource centre and provide innovative new services and collections to support academic and research activities of the university. The development, organisation and maintenance of collections in multiple locations; access to world class resources; and personalised assistance in the use of library and information resources have made this one of the richest libraries in the country.

“I can say that BRAC University library is now playing a crucial role to support teaching, learning and research communities of the university by improving access to the resources and providing quality services using latest library technologies,” said librarian Hasina Afroz.

Moving towards a next-generation library, it has introduced a number of new technologies, such as Koha, discovery tool VuFind, MARC 21 (cataloguing standard), a website using Drupal, a mobile phone interface and SMS notification service.

The library integrates appropriate technology with skilled and experienced staff. It also conducts workshops and training programmes on Koha, MARC 21, VuFind etc, for increasing capacity building of library professionals working in other university libraries (public and private).

United International University Library

The United International University (UIU) library offers regular services such as circulation, reference, counselling, indexing, bibliographical documentation, retrospective searches, backup etc. Facilities like computing, periodicals and publications, digital research, audio-visual

equipment are also provided.

Due to the explosion of knowledge in both traditional and digital forms, the library has developed a system to serve its users better.

“We are trying to provide the best services to our students. Every day, at least 100 students visit our library. Although we provide all kinds of latest technology, students still prefer paper books. We are trying to encourage the students to be more internet-friendly,” said library in-charge Deeba Farkunda Banu.

The UIU library is working closely with faculties to integrate resources, and to ensure that their collections meet with the needs of their teaching and research programmes.

Southeast University Library

Southeast University Library has a significant collection of printed resources and e-resources which are accessible to users. Apart from regular services, the library provides assistance to staff and students in their field of study and research. Facilities include circulation service, reference and referral service, readers’ service, access to e-resources, internet and online database searching facilities, photocopy service, and a newspaper and periodical corner.

“We are using Koha software. Our students and faculty members can access the information from anywhere in the world, so it is not necessary for one to be physically present in the library. My observation is that nowadays, students prefer to use online facilities rather than paper books,” said deputy librarian Hazera Rahman.

“There are exceptions where we allow general people and professionals access to our information. We have this option where they can apply for receiving such facilities online. And if they come to the library, they can read and borrow any book,” she added.

Stamford University Library

The Stamford University Library is a resource centre with 50,559 books, 3,582 reports and journals, 150 audio-cassettes, and 3,000 internship reports covering humanities, pure sciences, social sciences, commerce and engineering.

“Right now, we are trying to install upgraded software for our library. We are emphasising on making our facilities more available online. Everyday, 500 plus students come to our library and during the exams, their number doubles,” said assistant librarian Muhammad Abdul Karim.

At present, library facilities include lending, reference, reader guidance, internet, news clipping, database searching, audio-visual and reprography services. The Wi-Fi and broadband internet connection of the library help users to access online resources easily. The library has open access, which mean readers can access shelves to browse and borrow books. Books that are rare, costly or for reference are not issued from the library. But students and faculty members can borrow such items for photocopying for a short time by submitting ID card /library card.

All leading national daily newspapers are preserved in the library. In addition, the library subscribes printed issues of Readers Digest, Economist, Times etc.

North South University

According to its website, North South University (NSU) library is the country’s first fully automated university library using Bilingual Library Management System, which supports web-based online lending and receiving; browsing databases of books, audio-visual materials, journals, newspapers and magazines; searching full texts online; maintaining RFID (radio-frequency identification) self check and book drop records; auto email alert services etc.

The library consists of six floors, with over 70,000 sqft area, on the NSU campus at Bashundhara in Dhaka. It can accommodate over 1,200 students at a time in its reading rooms. On an average, 2,000 users use the library every day.

The library's 49,500 books, reports and bound journals, over 50,000 online e-books, 40,000 online journals, 1,890 CD ROM books and databases, 226 DVDs and videos, 159 audio-cassettes and other resources cover all branches of knowledge. In addition, the library subscribes print issues of 46 foreign and 19 local journals, 18 foreign and 22 local magazines, two foreign dailies and almost all leading national dailies of Bangladesh.

The library also offers a 14-week training programme, titled 'Certificate Course in Digital & Online Librarianship'.

Joni Alam contributed to this report.

Photos: Parvez Ahmad