My Student Days at Bukit Timah

By Professor Basant Kapur, Class of 1970

I am sure that I speak for many of my contemporaries when I say that my undergraduate days were pleasant, fulfilling, and formative. With its open, green quadrangles and beautiful, wide, arched corridors, the Bukit Timah campus is probably the closest we have in Singapore to a traditional British college campus – a wonderful environment for scholarly reflection and contemplation. Covered walkways were not the norm in those days (and carrying an umbrella was simply not done), so upon moving to Kent Ridge around 1980 I recall reflecting that there was a trade-off between the aesthetic appeal of Bukit Timah and the functionality of Kent Ridge.

I belonged to the set of cohorts in the sixties and early-seventies who took only three years to complete their undergraduate (including Honours) education. In my first year, I read Economics, Political Science, and Sociology (two papers each), in my second year I read eight Economics papers, and in my third year I read six Economics papers and wrote an Academic Exercise. It was an engaging, and enlightening, combination of breadth and depth, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had fine teachers in all these disciplines, and, of course, had the good fortune to be exposed to more of them in my major, Economics. I would like on this occasion to highlight a Dr Beaglehole in Political Science, whose lectures on Political Philosophy – delivered in rapid-fire, and without recourse to blackboard, transparencies, or Power Point, were replete with insight and eloquence.

Like most graduates all over the world, I have very fond memories of the friendships formed with fellow-students during my undergraduate days, which have continued to the present. It was an enjoyable time socially. Between faculty members and students too, there was an easy-going informality, combined with mutual respect and a fondness for the subjects being taught/studied. The combination of outward casualness and light, good-natured humour and an underlying seriousness of purpose is one of the most endearing features of campus social life anywhere, and Bukit Timah was no exception.

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