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In the domain of education, fifty years is not that long a period of time. As the Chinese saying goes – “While it takes ten years to grow a tree, it takes a hundred years to nurture a fine man.” Nonetheless, for the HKBU Science Faculty the past 50 years has witnessed so much change and progress that, at this point of time, there is a wealth of substantial experience for us to reflect upon the past and search for answers to the question of “how can our past benefit our future?”.

The achievements of the past 50 years are made possible by the contribution from many individuals, including but not limited to the staff of the Faculty as well as those from the central administration, the students, the alumni, academic peers from other institutions and many well-wishers and supporters from the community.

During that period of time and especially the first half of it, the Faculty and the Institution as a whole had to face countless challenges and difficulties. At one point of time, even its continued existence was threatened. Yet, the Faculty stood up to all these difficulties, many of them seemingly insurmountable at the time. This spirit of persevering, forging ahead and never giving up in adversity is an important lesson to the Faculty’s future.

Another important lesson, in my view, is the place of the students in the heart of the Faculty. Over the years, many staff members in the Faculty have been willing to approach their teaching tasks with a caring and supportive attitude towards the students, despite limited resources for teaching facilities and for providing them with competitive rewards. Staff-student relationships have been cordial.

Most fortunately, such a situation has not changed even with the acquisition of the university title by the Institution in 1994. I say this because I am reminded of the quotation* that “*A university is what college becomes when the faculty loses interest in students*”. While the Faculty has hitherto not fallen into the trap depicted by this quotation, I believe there is a sharp warning that the Faculty must heed with all seriousness. When the contemporary world of higher education appears to be so pre-occupied with competition and the chase for status and ranking, there is a real risk of losing sight of the central purpose of education.

I consider it a privilege of mine to have been able to associate myself with the Faculty and to grow with it for a good part of my entire career. In offering my very best wishes to the Faculty in celebration of its 50th birthday, I have every reason to believe that a bright future will hold for it in the next 50 years and beyond.

* by John Ciardi (1916-1986)