

BENITEZ HALL



COLLEGE OF HOLLIVINS B

# Benitez Hall

## *(Re)Design Intervention: Rousing the Spirit*

*Conservation Management Plan by Markel Cesar A. Luna*

*Text by Markel Cesar A. Luna*

*The Benitez Hall is an icon, not only for being one of the first structures built on the UP Diliman campus but also for what it stands for. However, because of new spatial needs that must be addressed, the iconic building is in danger of losing its significance as a heritage structure. Thus, a Conservation Management Plan was produced to come up with an intervention that would preserve its relevance to the University.*

*This paper features narratives that establish the significance of the Benitez Hall, and the conservation approach to be applied in the hope of maintaining its essence or “spirit of place.”*

Walking on the floors that great educators had once trodden gives a glimpse of what they were accustomed to as young hopefuls, and provides an experience that they, too, must have had as they pursued their collective dream of being molders of young minds. More popularly known now as the UP Diliman College of Education, the Benitez Hall was, and still is, home to students aspiring to become innovators in the teaching profession. The building may be strongly connected to their academic journey; thus, the spirit that it exudes should never fade away.

Due to the steady rise of enrollees in the UP Diliman College of Education from 1939 to the present, the Benitez Hall has undergone many changes: from the conversion of rooms to the addition of spaces within the existing areas of the structure. Although the building retains much of its character, architectural responses to evolving needs may lead to renovations that can cause deterioration and alterations to its original design, which might make it unrecognizable and cause it to lose its familiar spirit.



## **Markel Cesar A. Luna**

*Markel Cesar A. Luna is an Architect specializing in Architectural Heritage Conservation. He obtained a Bachelor of Science Degree in Architecture and a Master of Architecture Degree in Architectural Heritage Conservation at the University of the Philippines Diliman College of Architecture, where he currently teaches. Having been a consistent University and College Scholar, he was inducted as a member of the International Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi.*

*Maintaining a private architecture practice, Markel Cesar A. Luna has been active in uplifting the Architecture profession as a member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Philippines and the United Architects of the Philippines (UAP), where he was elevated to Fellow. An Architectural Heritage Conservationist, Ar. Luna has been involved in Conservation Projects, with Paco Park & Cemetery being the latest that has been completed.*



Fortunately, the UPD Office of the Vice President for Development (OVPD) not only focuses on new facilities to upgrade the University's built environment but also values the rich architectural heritage of the campus. In 2021, the OVPD commissioned this author to produce a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Benitez Hall, which was due for redevelopment. A team was formed, and the document was completed in 2022. The Benitez Hall CMP then served as a guide to determine the appropriate conservation approach to be applied to the building, as responsive designs are developed.

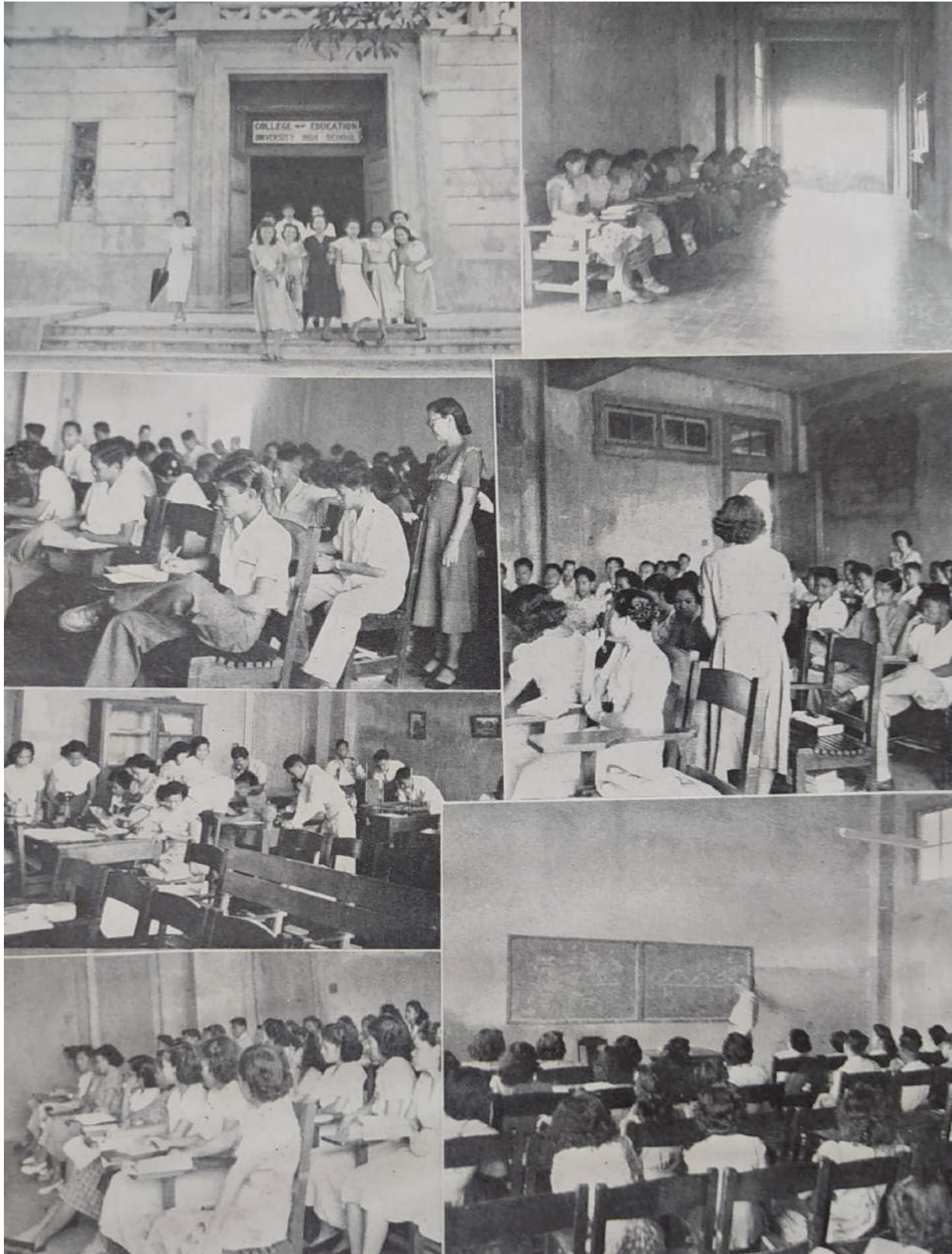
The Conservation Management Plan for the iconic building is composed of several parts, and it highlights Benitez Hall's history and why it is significant not only to the University of the Philippines but to the whole country, as well.

In the CMP, the Benitez Hall is presented as an Icon, a structure that is symbolic of the birth of the Philippines' premiere University, and the physical manifestation of a vision for a new city. Through the featured narratives, the iconic status of Benitez Hall is justified.

The building may not be as imposing as those constructed in this current era, but to many, especially students whom it provided shelter for, it is an **icon of excellence**.

Figure 1. The Benitez Hall, University of the Philippines, Diliman (2022). Source: Author's own.

Figure 2. College of Education classrooms and hallways (1950). Source: College of Education Yearbook Archives. (opposite page)



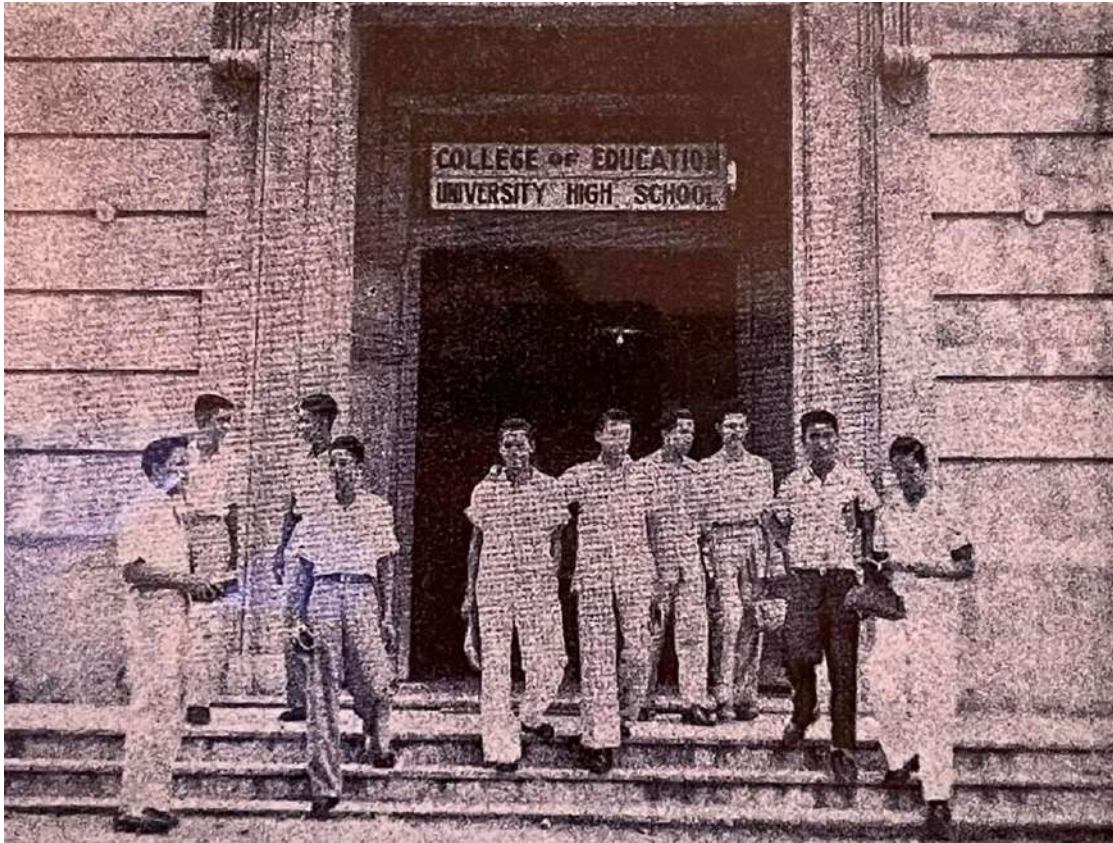


Figure 3. College of Education students at the entrance of the Benitez Hall (1950). Source: College of Education Yearbook Archives.

The Benitez Hall is a source of pride and inspiration to those who were molded within its hallowed halls. It has been known as UP's College of Education, which was responsible for producing competent graduates. In a sense, it served, and still serves, as a second home to future teachers, designed by an esteemed Filipino architect, Juan Arellano, and named after a respected educator, Francisco Benitez, who valued what the building stood for Honor and Excellence.

To many, Benitez Hall is a landmark, not only as an educational institution but as a resilient structure, as well. It is relevant to the University of the Philippines, as it marked the beginning of its existence. In a way, it defines UP Diliman's architectural history, being one of the first to be constructed on the campus. It was reflective of the American colonial period: a timestamp of an era. Adding to its impressive track record when it comes to resilience is the fact that it was able to bounce back after being taken over by various military forces during the Second World War. It was the center of action

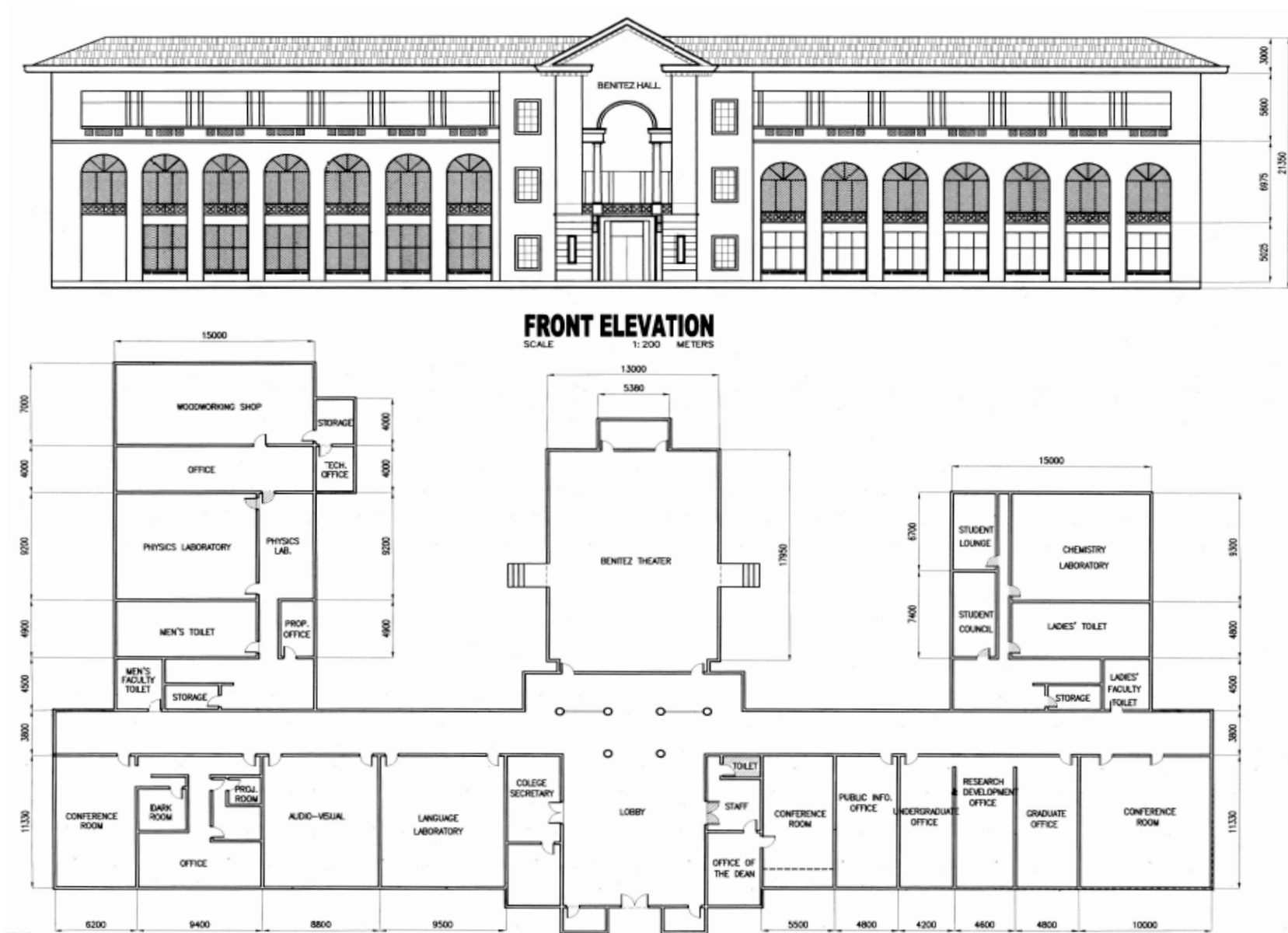


Figure 4. As-found drawings. Source: UPD-ODPI



Figure 5. Classroom Activity, the Benitez Hall (2015). Source: Author's own.

Figure 6. The Benitez Hall as a popular venue for academic events (2015). Source: Author's own.



Figure 7. College of Education students (1950). Source: College of Education Yearbook Archives.



Figure 8. The Benitez Hall Auditorium (2022). Source: Author's own.



before, during, and after that infamous armed conflict. Still standing, Benitez Hall keeps these memories within its walls. (Luna et al, 2022, p. 96, par. 3-4)

To those who have seen and experienced Benitez Hall, it is regarded as a thing of beauty and an expression of elegance. To them, it is **an icon of style**.

The Benitez Hall is of the Spanish-Colonial Revival style. A unique style, it was even made more interesting by the merry mix of architectural elements that Juan Arellano was known for. Viewed from the Sunken Garden and the



Academic Oval, one would immediately notice the balance and symmetry of the structure, emphasizing the embellished center of the main facade flanked by grand columns and crowned by a pediment. To some, it is an imposing structure that screams authority, while to others, it is a delicate work of art, lined with soft arches, and laced with delicate balusters. Many agree that the facade is highly impressive, making Benitez Hall one of the major attractions around the Academic Oval. The Benitez Hall is the “twin” structure of Malcolm Hall, and together, they subliminally frame the Sunken Garden, as many would acknowledge.

Figure 9. The Benitez Hall main facade (2022). Source: Author’s own. (opposite page)

To those who have had the opportunity to explore the interiors of the Benitez Hall, the high ceilings and wide staircases are welcome features, as these exude formality, while open spaces such as the courtyards provide a casual ambiance.

The Benitez Hall’s design cleverly blends opposing qualities, and that is what makes its Architectural Character noteworthy, as many would agree. (Luna et al, 2022, p. 97, par. 1–3)

One of the goals of an academic institution is to provide an environment that is conducive to learning, and one that promotes social interaction. The Benitez Hall was able to achieve this; thus, it is just fitting that it be called an **icon of unity**.

The Benitez Hall is a place of convergence. Located along the main artery of the UP Diliman campus, its image had been etched in the minds of members of the UP community and those of its regular visitors. Its immediate environment has become a preferred meeting place and recreational area. Furthermore, it continues to serve as a shortcut from the Palma Hall Annex to Vinzons Hall, as a quiet location for studying with classmates, as a playground for young children waiting to be fetched, as a venue for academic conferences, and many more. As a result, Benitez Hall has earned the reputation of being a space for social interaction.

This does not come as a surprise since the building features a spacious lobby, wide corridors, open hallways, an auditorium, and courtyards. So whatever paranormal activity the structure is rumored to have, the people will keep on coming. (Luna et al, 2022, p. 98, par. 1–2)





Figure 10. The Benitez Hall's right wing staircase (2022). Source: Author's own.

Figure 11. Eave details (2022). Source: Author's own.



Figure 12. Ornamental relief (2022). Source: Author's own.



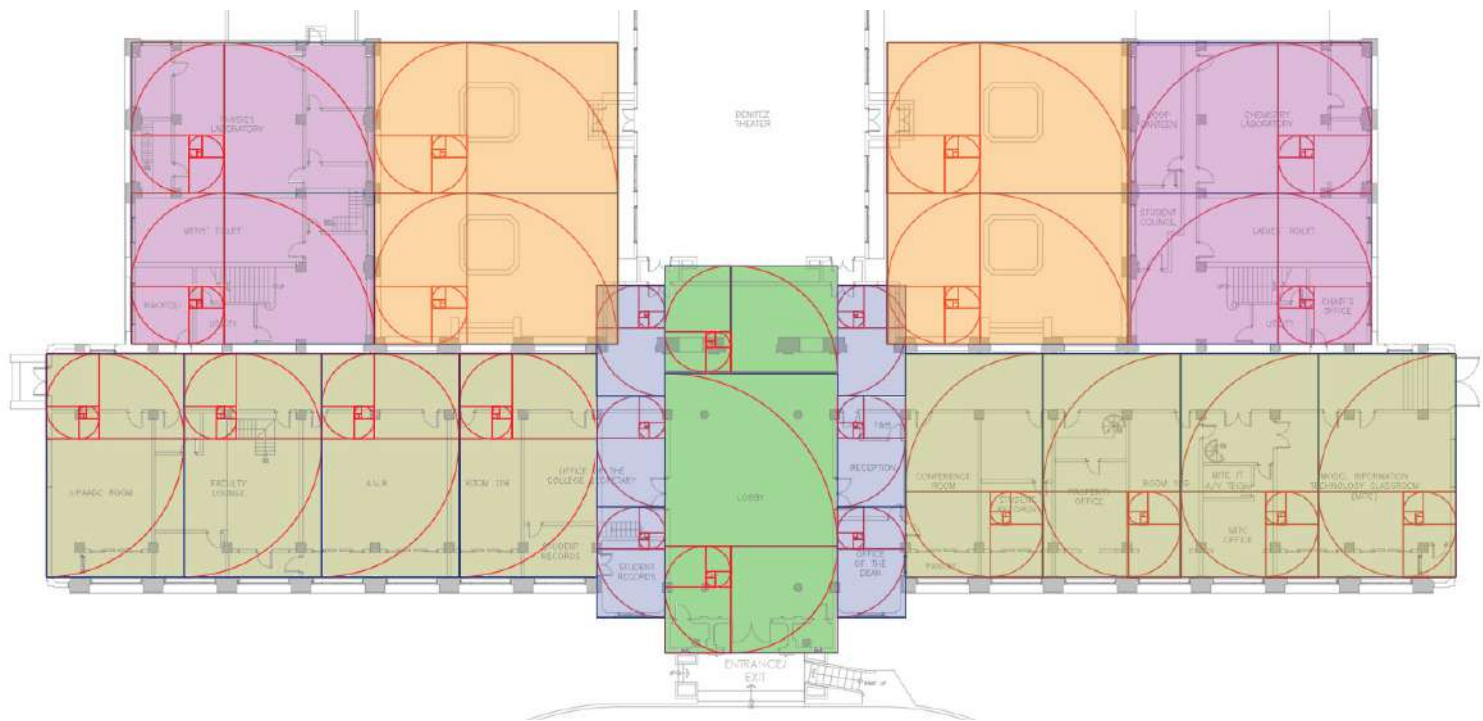
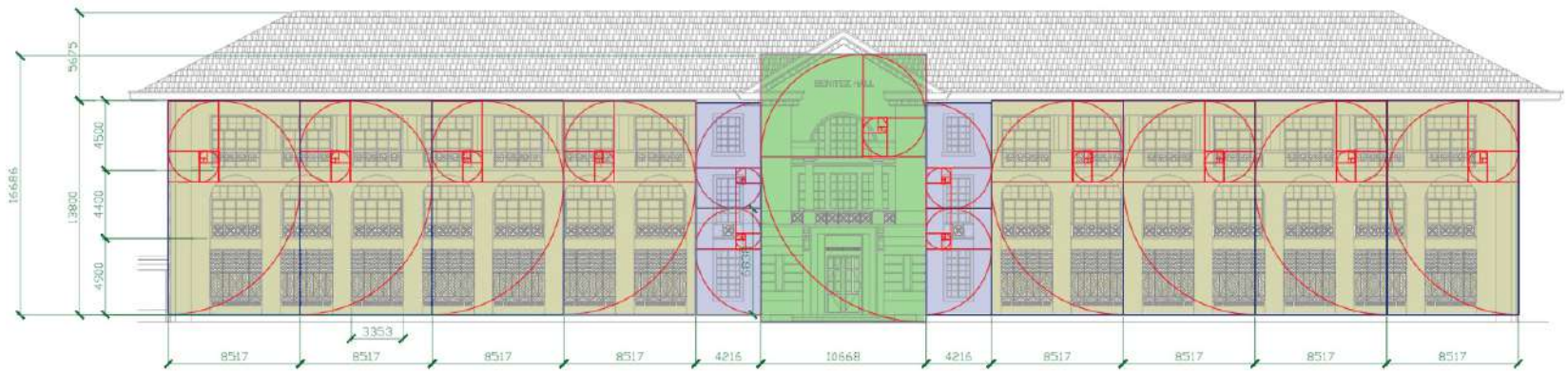


Figure 15. The “Golden Ratio”, as applied to the spaces (2022). Source: Ar. Giancarlo Aycardo. (opposite page)

Despite being one of the first two structures of the UP Diliman campus, the Benitez Hall still stands today, outlasting many other buildings built during its time. It has proven to be formidable, making it an **icon of strength**.

Figure 16. College of Education students (1950). Source: College of Education Yearbook Archives.

The Benitez Hall was built using what was considered state-of-the-art technology during the time of its construction. It outlasted many other structures, having been able to battle various elements that could have easily leveled it to the ground. But to this day, it proudly stands, showing little or no signs of major damage. Many have described the building as imposing and monumental, due to its thick walls and rigid neoclassical columns. People are awed when they find out that it has been around for an exceptionally long time. The alumni of the College of Education can attest that little has changed from the time they were students.



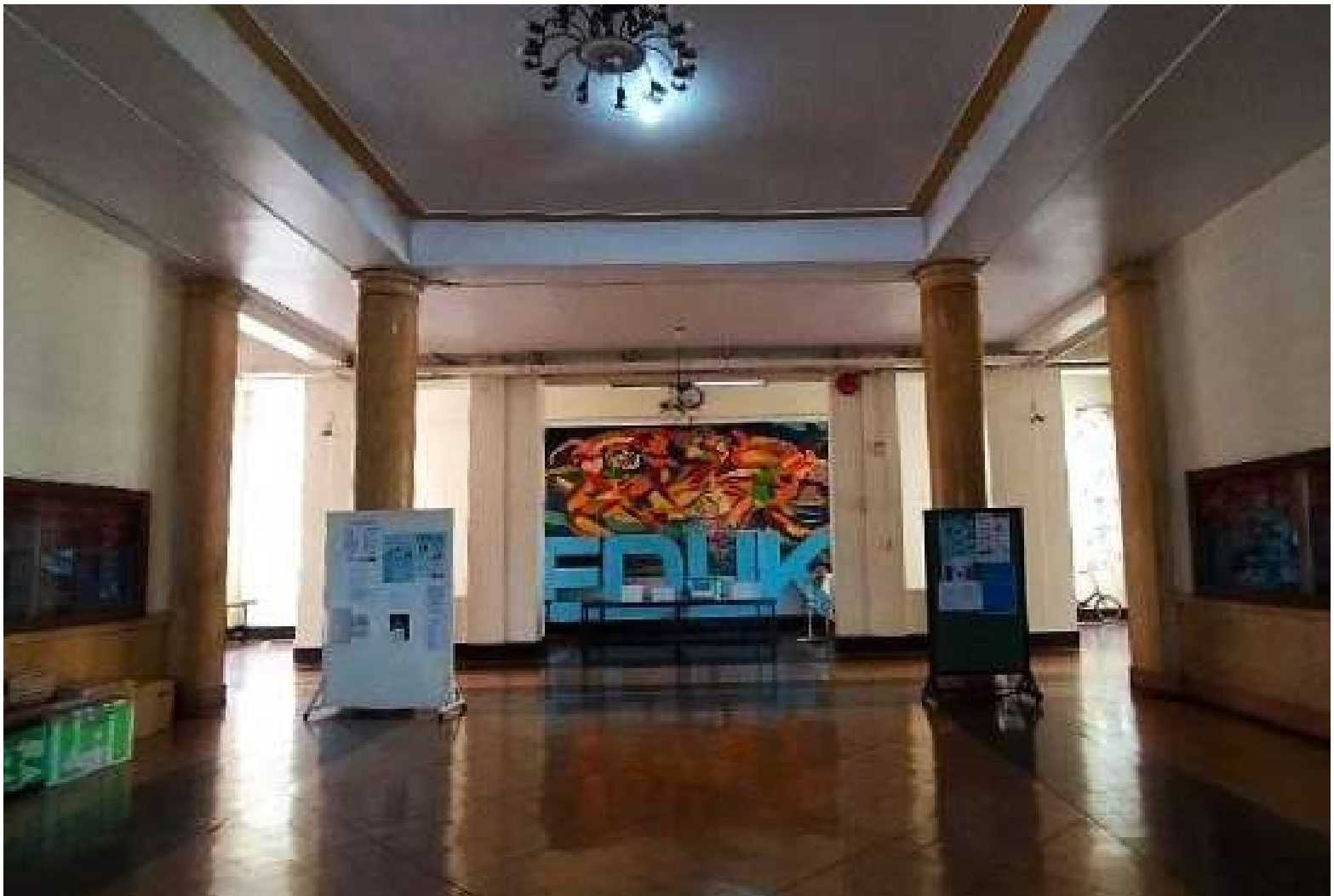


Figure 17. Third floor corridor (2022).  
Source: Author's own. (opposite page)

Looking through decades-old UP yearbooks, featured photos of the Benitez Hall can pass as pictures taken a few months back, proving that this great building stood the test of time. For many, this is an assurance that Benitez Hall will still be around for a longer time. (Luna et al, 2022, p. 99, par. 1-2)

Figure 18. The Benitez Hall lobby (2022).  
Source: Author's own.

These narratives summarize what Benitez Hall means to people who are familiar with it or to those who experienced it. The collective meaning would then be the "spirit of place." Moreover, through investigation and research, the significance of the Benitez Hall was determined, establishing that this heritage structure possesses historical, aesthetic (architectural), social, and technological (scientific) values.







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Figure 19. The Benitez Hall's main entrance (2022). Source: Author's own. (opposite page)

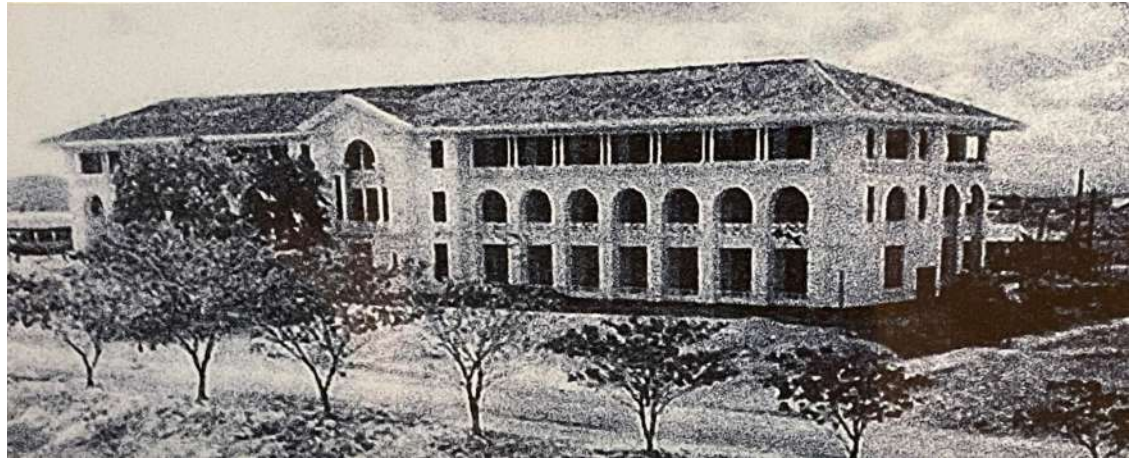


Figure 20-21. Archival photo (1950). Source: College of Education Yearbook Archives.





Figure 22. The old and the new (2022).  
Source: Author's own. (opposite page)

Figure 23. Courtyard view (2022). Source:  
Author's own.



The main goal of conservation is to protect a heritage structure's significance and to maintain its "spirit of place." This can be done through policies and action plans, which are included in the CMP.

In the case of the Benitez Hall, the policies and action plans led to an approach that involves the redesigning of its site, incorporating additional structures that would accommodate the College of Education's spatial needs, while preserving the main structure through complete restoration.

Hopefully, the intervention that has arrived at shall be instrumental in linking the past to the present, and in rousing the spirit of Benitez Hall.

#### **Bibliography**

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