

# Love is in the air

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**F**OLLOWING the completion of their secondary school education, tertiary level students tend to explore romantic relationships during their years at institutions of higher learning.

Some call it puppy love while others may just end up marrying their girlfriends or boyfriends while still in college.

Do romantic relationships on campus affect academic performance? How does one juggle a romance and studies?

Dr Sabariah Mohd Salleh met her future husband when they were pursuing the matriculation programme at Kolej Mara Kulim, Kedah.

"We started going out together towards the end of our first year at university. Although we were Universiti Sains Malaysia students, I was a journalism undergraduate at the main campus in Penang while, as a medical student, he was in Kelantan.

"Both of us were committed to our studies. It is all right to have a relationship as long as one knows one's priorities," said Sabariah.

At the beginning of the relationship, Sabariah admitted that her academic results suffered,

maybe due to the long distance relationship or she was just a giddy, lovestruck young adult.

"I remember putting everything aside whenever he visited and the frequent late night phone calls. But I soon managed my time better and my grades improved. I spent more time at the newspaper lab and became more involved in class activities.

"I even won a scholarship and made the Dean's list throughout my final year of studies," she added.

It is so easy to let everything slide and lose focus but you may or may not marry the person you date while at university.

Your significant other may be love of your life but be aware of your responsibilities as a student and a daughter or son to your parents.

Make sure that you finish your assignments, attend classes and prepare for exams. Going out



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**SABARIAH MOHD SALLEH,**  
UKM senior lecturer

on dates doesn't mean just spending time at the movies, you can also study together at the library."

Marnied for 11 years, Sabariah is a senior lecturer at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and her husband Dr Amir Fariz is an orthopaedic surgeon at a public hospital. They have four children aged 11, 8, 6 and 3.

#### WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

UKM's School of Psychology and Human Development senior lecturer Dr Suzana Mohd Hoesni said love has elusive effects similar to drugs as one can be addicted to it and it can affect studies.

Research has proved that the brain activity of a person in love shows a preoccupation with trying to impress loved ones and achieving the apex of the relationship.

The early stage of love comprises passion and intimacy. This phase consists of more physi-

cal contact, and spending more time and doing things together.

"Therefore, the feeling of being in love redirects the focus of a student," added Suzana, who has expertise in areas such as Developmental Psychology and Close and Interpersonal Relationship.

INTI International College Subang's Student Services Department student counsellor Teow Ker Shin said some people may perceive college as the place where lifelong friendships are formed and romantic relationships develop.

There are also others who may feel that romantic relationships should not be taken seriously while pursuing an education.

However, Teow believes there is no right or wrong answer since everyone is different and it also depends on one's ability to make a commitment to a person in addition to one's priorities as a student.

"In general, it depends on the individuals and

dynamics of the relationship. One is inclined to strive for excellence when both parties have a common goal of helping one another to succeed.

"When you have someone who motivates you, has goals and inspires you to be a better person, you notice a significant difference in yourself to improve in all aspects of life," said Teow.

"The quality of a relationship is one of the factors that determine the emotional well-being of a person. It can affect the student's academic and personal development but individuals are unique in their way of managing relationships. It also depends on the amount of influence of the relationship on the couple's lives."

#### BALANCING ACT

Suzana said one should list down priorities — studies and/or marriage?

Investing time and energy into a relationship is a commitment that may compete with one's schoolwork, personal time and extra-curricular activities.

"Being a student while married can be helpful if the parties understand their roles as both an undergraduate and a spouse. Marriage comes with responsibilities and is also bound by law.

If both parties can play their roles well with social support and financial help, they can excel in studies.

"A secure marriage makes one psychologically happy."

Teow added: "Relationships take time to develop and it requires nurturing. Investing time and energy into a relationship is a commitment that may compete with one's schoolwork, personal time and extra-curricular activities.

This is where prioritising comes into play. In a strong, healthy relationship, dating can serve as an extra motivation to do well in school and get work done in a timely manner to be able to pay attention to your significant other.

"Without prioritising, the good intentions of developing a relationship may be futile and will result in the neglect of other responsibilities."

Juggling three key aspects of life — marriage, career and education — can be challenging and the pursuit of an education and desire to upskill never end.

The decision to go back to school while married is no longer an individual's decision. It's a joint one between spouses. It's admirable to see spouses support the academic growth of their partner.

"Every commitment has its challenges and it's up to the individual to come to a decision on how to cope while taking into consideration the concerns of their spouse."

#### FALL OUT OF LOVE

Sabariah believes that a break-up could motivate one to work harder to show the former partner that one is better than she or he thinks.

"Allow yourself to grieve, wallow in self-pity or feel angry, but do not think that it is the end of the world," she added.

Sabariah, who was married when she pursued her doctoral degree, said marriage spurred her to finish her studies on time.

"We were also married when my husband did his master's. Being married should not be the reason for failing or giving up on your studies. Ultimately, it is your will to persevere that matters," she said.

Suzana said painful break-ups can lead to depression and even aggression. "Yes, it can be traumatic. Talk to counsellors, trusted friends or close family members."

Over the years as a counsellor, Teow has seen students from both ends of the spectrum — those who can bounce back quickly from a failed relationship, and others who need more time and help in overcoming emotional anxieties after a break-up.

"Just like the beginning of a relationship, the end of one can have an impact on a person's life. Some deal with heartbreaks and losses rationally and can overcome them. But others are unable to cope due to the overwhelming emotional response.

"At INTI, counsellors are always ready to listen to students as we are dedicated to caring for their development throughout their learning experience at the institution.

"During the orientation, we introduce ourselves and the services made available to all. Through this exercise, we create a safe environment for students to express their concerns and even gain insight into making career and life decisions," she added.



Suzana Mohd Hoesni



Dr Sabariah Mohd Salleh and her husband Dr Amir Fariz