SMU campus is ‘open to public’

Design gives them maximum access after outcry over SMU getting site

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COME rain or shine, a new tunnel in the Bras Basah civic district offers a cooler alternative to the hot street.

The 800m, air-conditioned passageway was opened yesterday, allowing people to walk in cool underground comfort.

The tunnel cuts across the new 4.5ha campus of the Singapore Management University (SMU), which was officially handed its six buildings yesterday.

It links five of the six buildings, much like the City Link Mall which links City Hall MRT Station to Suntec City, a complex of commercial and office buildings.

In future, people will also be able to use the SMU tunnel to reach Museum MRT Station on the new Circle Line.

The station will be built at SMU, opposite the Singapore Art Museum.

Public access will be a byword above ground at SMU too: the ground floor of the buildings have been designed to be “porous”, allowing people to cut across the buildings and giving them easy access to the cafes, book shops and exhibition spaces.

Beyond the buildings, the campus green, about the size of two football fields and facing the Singapore Art Museum, will be open to the public too.

Maximum access to the public was prompted largely by an outcry when it was announced that the site, dotted with small parks and open spaces, would go to SMU.

Its chairman Ho Kwon Ping admitted as much yesterday. He said: “We held several roundtable discussions and public forums. People felt the place should belong to Singaporeans and we have made sure that it does.

“The whole campus is totally porous… you are not locked out,” he said.

The Bras Basah civic district is Singapore’s historical birthplace, where the early settlers here lived and worked.

It is home to many landmark buildings, including the Singapore History Museum, Singapore Art Museum, the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, the Armenian Church and Raffles Hotel.

With the tunnel, pedestrians can walk from SMU’s School of Economics and Social Sciences, facing the Hotel Rendezvous, to the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, facing the old MPH bookstore.

Come August, when the academic year begins, pedestrians can expect more buzz as the foodcourt and shops open to coincide with start of the academic year.

SMU president Howard Hunter said the new campus would add “colour and texture” to the city area, with such activities as lunchtime lectures and performances open to the public.

For the students, the proximity to the business and financial centre will help immerse them in the “university of life, where they will be able to experience real situations and witness first-hand the workings of the commercial world”.

SMU will move from its present Bukit Timah campus to its new address in the next two months.

When the academic year begins in August, it will have 3,600 students and 200 teaching staff.