IN MEMORIAM

SAHOTA, Gian Singh (1924-2010)

“A colleague who guided the program [GPED] in its formative years... a mainstay at all times.” James S. Worley (1988)

Gian Sahota was born on July 22, 1924, and died in Princeton, New Jersey on November 20, 2010 at the age of 86. He received M.A. in Economics from Leeds University in the United Kingdom in 1957 and then returned to India as a Junior Fellow at the prestigious Institute of Economic Growth in Delhi and promptly published his first book entitled *Indian Tax Structure and Economic Development* which gave rise to several studies on the same topic in other countries. From 1961 to 1964, he was at the University of Chicago pursuing Ph.D. in Economics. His Ph.D. dissertation: *Fertilizer in Economic Development* was published by Praeger in 1968.

Professor Sahota came to Vanderbilt University as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Economics in the Graduate Program in Economic Development (GPED) in the summer of 1964. He spent the next 24 years at Vanderbilt, becoming associate professor in 1967 and full professor in 1970. In the mid-1960s, after joining the Vanderbilt Economics Department, he traveled to Sao Paulo, Brazil with other Economics faculty including Andrea Maneschi, Bill Thweatt, Werner Baer and Doug Graham to set up a Master’s program in economics at the University of Sao Paulo. This program became one of Vanderbilt’s best known foreign programs and continues to thrive today as a domestic program which now offers the Ph.D. degree as well.

Professor Sahota was a prolific writer. His contributions encompassed many areas of economics, but development was his passion. He authored six books whose topics ranged from the role of fertilizer in economic development to economic policies in India, Brazil and Panama. He published over 100 articles in professional journals on issues related to poverty, income distribution, public finance and transition economies. He published papers in the *Quarterly Journal of*

Professor Sahota was an accomplished econometrician. Typically, he used large data bases and careful analysis to derive important policy implications. Nicholas Georgescu-Roegan, another noted economics professor at Vanderbilt, was honored in 1977 on his 75th birthday with a Festschrift. In presenting a copy of this festschrift to Gian, Professor Georgescu wrote “To my fearless econometrician friend”. That indeed capsulated the role econometrics played in Professor Sahota’s career!

After retiring from Vanderbilt, Professor Sahota continued to be active in international consulting. He headed a team, including Kathryn Anderson, to study economic development and policy in Bangladesh; he went there in 1988 and lived for two years. In 1992, he was one of two distinguished economists invited to fill the P.K. Seidman Distinguished Professorship in Political Economy at the Rhodes College in Memphis. Professor James Tobin of Yale University was the other. Professor Sahota was also engaged in evaluating policy and development in Kazakhstan and made several trips there in the 1990s.

Gian was a close friend of India’s current Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh who asked him to remain involved in research on economic development in his native state of Punjab. His research helped identify economic and fiscal gains from the liberalization of agriculture in the state.

Professor Sahota was a star athlete in his college days, captaining five sports teams – soccer, volleyball, wrestling, kabaddi (a sport native to India), and athletics -- in one year. While he was always an avid tennis player, his athleticism blossomed in his senior years. In the biennial 1999 Senior Olympics, when he was pushing 75, he won the gold medal in 10 kilometer race as well as silver and bronze medals in 800 meter and 1500 meter track meets. He also won several half marathons in Tennessee, Alabama, and Kentucky, all
after retirement. His interest in athletics extended from participation to research. In January 1984, he co-authored an article with his wife, Kanta Sahota, entitled “A Theory of Human Investment in Physical Skills and its Application to Achievement in Tennis” that was published in the *Southern Economic Journal*.

Professor Sahota was closely associated with the GPED throughout his Vanderbilt career. He supervised over 300 master’s theses. He also supervised nearly 30 Ph.D. dissertations, serving as chair of 16. Still, he found time to act as an external examiner on a dozen Ph. D. dissertations from universities in Brazil and India. By mentoring so many graduate students from over 50 countries around the world, Professor Sahota has left a lasting legacy. He is survived by his wife Kanta, son Vivek, daughter-in-law Sumeet, and three beautiful grandchildren.

Suhas Ketkar
Professor of Economics (visiting)