

IN MEMORIAM

LYLE G. CLARK

Our colleague and friend Lyle Gerald Clark, professor of aerospace engineering and engineering mechanics, passed away at the age of 77 on February 12, 2002. He was born on July 12, 1924.

Lyle completed his professional education at the University of Michigan, obtaining dual bachelor of science degrees in engineering mechanics and mathematics in 1948, a master of science degree in engineering mechanics in 1949, and a doctor of philosophy in 1955. During his tenure as a graduate student, he began developing his very effective teaching style as an instructor, and later as an assistant professor, at the University of Michigan.

After serving for a year as director of research at the ARO Equipment Corporation in Bryan, Ohio, Lyle resumed his academic career as professor and chairman of mechanical engineering at the University of Delaware, and served as acting dean during the 1958-59 academic year. In the fall of 1960, Lyle moved his family to Austin and accepted a position as professor of mechanical engineering at The University of Texas. In 1965 he transferred to the Department of Engineering Mechanics and served as chairman of the department from 1966 until it merged with aerospace engineering in 1968. Although Lyle retired to emeritus status in 1997, he continued to come to work almost every day until illness sidelined him just a few months before his death.

Perhaps Lyle's most notable professional legacy is a group of gifted former graduate students who have gone on to distinguished careers in industry and academia. Lyle challenged his students with problems which appeared deceptively simple but forced them to think deeply

about assumptions, principles, and models in engineering. He was dedicated and demanding, with a style that intimidated less dedicated students, but upon which excellent students thrived. He worked his graduate students hard, but no harder than he worked himself. This is illustrated by an excerpt from a letter written to Lyle by Dr. Charles McQueary, a Distinguished Engineering Graduate of the University, on the occasion of Lyle's retirement. "Those of us who worked for you in graduate school owe you much for the many hours you spent, particularly at night, discussing everything from mechanics to philosophy. Little did I realize at the time that this was an equally important part of the education I was receiving. I thank you for this, not only because of its value to me but because I now realize the sacrifice that you personally made to spend so much time with us." The satisfaction that Lyle's career brought him was also communicated to his students as evidenced by the career choice of almost half his PhD students. In another letter, Dr. Steve Gibson, now a professor at UCLA, wrote, "I often reflect on two facts: I cannot imagine being happy as anything but a university professor, and I cannot imagine having become one had I not met you."

The remarks of John A. Walker, a student of Lyle's at the University of Delaware and now a professor of mechanical engineering at Northwestern University, also given at Lyle's retirement, bring out well Lyle's character and how his intimidating presence masked a heart of gold. "You were a large pipe-smoking individual, somewhat intimidating, and the first professor I had ever encountered. Nevertheless, you seemed friendly and gave me a job as assistant to Jerry, the major-domo and chief factotum of the M. E. shop. I had no idea that you would become one of my oldest and closest friends. For the next few years you were my undergraduate advisor. I remember carrying overloads, taking graduate courses in physics and mathematics, and

piling up credits I did not need. This was not all your fault, since I thought I should get as much as I could for my time and money. Nevertheless, you were a very unorthodox advisor with heretical ideas about education. You even thought it was your job to push me! After you had left the University of Delaware for The University of Texas and I was a senior, I went to the dean of the graduate school to obtain the graduate credit (for my graduate courses) that you had promised. The dean replied, 'Clark thinks that rules are made to be broken.' He was right, and so were you—I got the credit." Professor Walker concluded his remarks by noting, "I learned that most supervisors assigned 'doable' thesis topics to their students (even then), but you were different. That made your students different, and we took pride in our difference. In fact, I was happier than I ever would be again. By the time I finished in the spring of 1964, I had learned what graduate education ought to be. During the past thirty-three years at Northwestern, I have generally failed to re-create that experience for my own students. You cannot be duplicated."

At the University, Lyle supervised the work of 15 PhD and 17 master's candidates. Lyle authored or coauthored 40 research papers published in refereed journals and conference proceedings in the fields of dynamical systems and control, vibrations, and non-linear analysis. His expertise led to more than 50 consulting positions during his career. He was a member of Sigma XI, the American Society of Engineering Education, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers. Lyle was instrumental in initiating and developing two regional programs that greatly enhanced the engineering mechanics graduate program. The Southwest Mechanics Lecture Series pooled the resources and reputations of mechanics programs in Texas and adjoining states to bring to this often overlooked geographic area distinguished lecturers to speak to and meet with graduate students

and faculty. The Southwestern Graduate Research Conference in Applied Mechanics gave graduate students from a sizeable geographic region a chance to meet and present their research in a professional setting.

Professor Lyle Clark was also an avid sports person. He played football in college, and, during the time he was at UT, he regularly played handball, squash, and racquetball. For a while (1965-1980) he was one of the top handball players in the UT men's program. In spite of that, he was always willing to play with colleagues who were trying to improve their games. He was a demanding man who worked hard and expected those in his classes and under his supervision to work hard, and to be successful. His demands on others were only equaled, if not exceeded, by his contributions to others. He was a man who gave willingly and generously of his time to ensure the success of others. He will be sorely missed.

Larry R. Faulkner, President
The University of Texas at Austin

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Morris Stern (chair), David G. Hull, and Eric B. Becker.