

DEPARTMENT OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

The Mechanical Engineering Department is completing its 41st year as a departmental organization. Since its inception 600 students have received the degree of B.S. in M.E., and approximately 40 will be added to the list this coming June. About 75 percent of the graduates have reached administrative and executive responsibility by the age of 45. Most of these are engaged in engineering but several are detached from technical work either wholly or in part. This record speaks for itself.

Prior to the year 1903 laboratory and shop equipment was conspicuous by its absence and the curriculum was decidedly non-descript. There was no foundry—six small forges and anvils comprised the forge shop—about a dozen single machine tools covered the work in the machine shop—and a dozen home made speed lathes furnished the equipment for wood working and pattern making. Testing apparatus for the experimental engineering laboratories consisted of two small universal testing machines, a torsion machine and a single cylinder gas engine. Students desiring information in steam-machinery operation were permitted to watch the firemen shovel coal and on rare occasions assisted the chief engineer in taking indicator cards from the old Corliss engine which furnished power for the school. The most popular courses were those taught in the drawing room on the fifth floor of the main building. Here the young ladies from the Department of Domestic Science attended classes in free-hand drawing.

After the Scientific Academy was closed and the coeds gradually eased out of the picture, the shops, laboratories, and power plant were developed to their present status. Curricula, however, were continually changed



George F. Gebhardt

because of the rapid development in the art of mechanical engineering. At first stress was laid on shop work and specialized engineering subjects, with little attention to the so-called humanities. This was followed by a period of adjustment between engineering and cultural subjects until a balance was reached which appeared to meet the popular demand. At any rate Armour graduates experienced no difficulty in competing with those from other engineering schools.

At present the pendulum is swinging in the opposite direction, more stress is placed on the humanities and less on specialized engineering subjects, with a trend toward a single under-graduate course in engineering and science to be followed by graduate work in elective specialities. How far it will swing and what effect the changes will have on the qualifications of the graduates no one can predict. The Mechanical Engineering Department has always kept pace with the leading engineering schools and will continue to do so.