The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Royston M. Roberts, professor emeritus, chemistry and biochemistry, has filed with the Secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

John R. Durbin, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
ROYSTON M. ROBERTS

Our longtime colleague and friend Royston M. Roberts passed away on October 26, 1996, at the age of 78, at his home in Austin, Texas. He is survived by his beloved wife, Phyllis, three sons (Richard, David, and Stanley), and a daughter (Jean Ellen).

Royston, or Roy as he was usually called by his colleagues, was born and educated in Sherman, Texas, and continued his higher education as a chemistry major at Austin College in Sherman. After graduating in 1936, Roy pursued graduate studies in organic chemistry at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he earned both his MS (1941) and PhD (1944) degrees in chemistry, working with the well-known organic chemist Professor C. C. Price as his supervising professor for both degrees. With Price, Roy devised and patented a new synthesis for chloroquine, an anti-malarial drug, which was implemented commercially for use by our armed forces in World War II, and which, amazingly, is still in use for the synthesis of this drug today. Armed with his PhD, Roy began his professional career as a research chemist with the Merck Company, where he briefly worked on chemistry related to penicillin. However, his real love was the academic environment and, after just one year at Merck, he accepted a Research Corporation Postdoctoral Fellowship with the renowned Professor Saul Winstein at the University of California at Los Angeles. As revealed by one of his letters to the chemistry department at The University of Texas, his goal, even prior to joining Professor Winstein’s group, was to return to Texas and embark there on a teaching and research career. Roy’s application to the Department of Chemistry here was well received and he was offered an assistant professorship at the princely salary of $3,000 (for the academic year). Although Roy very much wanted this position, he boldly rejected the initial offer, which was less than his postdoctoral salary at UCLA. After several stages of further negotiation, Roy finally accepted a sweetened offer of $3,400 and promptly began a distinguished research and teaching career that ultimately spanned nearly 50 years (1947-1996).

Roy quickly established a research program that was well recognized nationally and internationally. Its emphasis was in the area of physical-organic chemistry, which was then burgeoning and in which he had received excellent training in the Winstein laboratories. He was perhaps best known for his work in the area of the mechanisms of Friedel-Crafts alkylation reactions and of the carboxylation rearrangements that sometimes accompany these Lewis acid catalyzed processes. In fact, one of the authors of this article (coincidentally at the University of Illinois at the time) was first attracted to The University of Texas by an elegant Roberts article on the rearrangement of a carbon-14 label in ethylbenzene. He also remains well known for his research on the novel “enolene” rearrangement, on cyclialkylation, and on the structure of coal and lignite.

During the course of his long career, Roy supervised the research of 25 doctoral candidates and 22 master’s candidates and published more than 125 articles in scientific journals. He also wrote three books and several book chapters. The classic and highly popular sophomore organic laboratory textbook *Introduction to Experimental Organic Chemistry*, cowritten with Professors Gilbert, Rodewald and Wingrove, has continued to be popular through four editions. In his later years, Roy also wrote the internationally popular lay work *Serendipity: Accidental Discoveries in Science*. Revealing even more versatility, he teamed up...
with his daughter, Jean Ellen, to write the children’s book _Lucky Science_, which brings the magic of science to a younger audience.

A hallmark of Roy as an academician was his promotion of the careers of his younger colleagues. He was a perennial source of wisdom for his junior faculty and provided invaluable insights regarding teaching and research alike. His philosophy was one of egalitarianism, and Roy always made decisions to the benefit of his colleagues rather than to himself.

In addition to his love of chemistry, Roy maintained a strong interest in travel and most especially in connection with developing collaborations with chemists from other countries. Sponsored by a Petroleum Research Fund International Fellowship, Roy spent the 1959-1960 year at the University of Zurich, where he enjoyed a fruitful collaboration with Professor Hans Schmid. In 1967, he was invited to be a visiting professor at the Philipps University in Marburg, Germany. A Fulbright-Hays Fellowship enabled him to travel to the Bucharest Polytechnic Institute in Romania in 1978, and in 1982 he traveled and lectured extensively in Egypt.

Early in his career at The University of Texas at Austin, Roy often taught the advanced physical-organic chemistry course in the graduate program, and throughout his career he contributed outstandingly to the teaching of “sophomore organic chemistry” both in the classroom and in the laboratory. Even after his retirement, Roy continued to teach this course virtually every semester for several years. Although Roy was always well liked by the students (considering the nature of the course), some of his very effective teaching tools—the scheduled quiz and especially the pop-quiz—were not so universally admired by them.

Roy was a member of many organizations, including Sigma Xi, Alpha Chi Sigma, Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Lambda Upsilon, the Chemical Society (London), and the American Chemical Society. He served as book editor for the Journal of the American Chemical Society for several years and was a long-term consultant to Conoco. Roy was a member of the Board of Trustees of his _alma mater_, Austin College, for many years. He was honored with a doctor of science degree from there in 1965.

Roy’s contributions to chemistry have gained national and international recognition for their originality and excellence. Their effect upon the progress of the science of chemistry was, and will continue to be, important. Nevertheless, the most distinctive feature of Royston Robert’s life was that he was a devoted and dedicated Christian, who served numerous terms as an elder in the University Presbyterian Church and who was active in this church’s campus outreach. His faith and his family were the central priorities in his life, and the honesty, integrity, gentleness, and fairness that flowed from that faith and from those priorities will not be forgotten.

This memorial resolution was prepared by Professors Nathan L. Bauld (chair) and John C. Gilbert.

Distributed to the Dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the Executive Vice President and Provost, and the President on June 12, 2000. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, FAC 22, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/)