DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
HAROLD W. “SKEET” SMITH

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Harold W. “Skeet” Smith, professor emeritus, electrical and computer engineering, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
HAROLD W. “SKEET” SMITH

Harold W. “Skeet” Smith, professor emeritus, was born February 8, 1923, in Brookfield, Missouri, and died in Austin, Texas, on December 22, 2008.

In the fall of 1940 after graduating from high school in Ft. Worth, where he lettered in both football and basketball, Dr. Smith entered college as a freshman at North Texas Agricultural College, a division of Texas A&M. The next year he transferred to The University of Texas and went on to receive his bachelor of science degree in electrical engineering in the spring of 1944. As a student he was elected to membership in both Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honorary society, and Eta Kappa Nu, the electrical engineering honor society. Immediately following graduation he was sworn in as an ensign in the U.S. Navy and served on active duty as an airborne electronics officer during the last year of World War II. Following his discharge from the Navy, in the spring of 1946, he returned to Austin to pursue a master of science degree in electrical engineering. Because of the large expected enrollment of ex-service men under the G.I. Bill, he was asked to begin teaching immediately as an instructor, and this began his long teaching career at UT. Except for the two years he was in the Navy, Dr. Smith was a member of the UT community as both a student and a member of the faculty for 58 years ending with his full retirement as professor emeritus in 2000.

At the same time that Dr. Smith began teaching, he also was employed by the Electrical Engineering Research Laboratory (EERL). That laboratory was formed at UT at the end of World War II to pursue the study and development of advanced microwave communication and radar systems. Dr. Smith had been involved with state-of-the-art radar systems during his time in the Navy, and working at EERL was in line with his interests for conducting graduate research. He received both his M.S. and Ph.D. degrees at UT while maintaining a busy schedule of employment in both teaching and research. He would eventually rise to assume both the positions of full professor and director of EERL.

Dr. Smith’s teaching contributions were many and varied. He was an outstanding teacher and always popular with the students. He received a Student Association Teaching Award in 1959, and he won the prestigious General Dynamics Teaching Excellence Award for the outstanding teacher in the College of Engineering in 1960. During his career he taught 80% of the required courses and a number of electives in the undergraduate electrical engineering curriculum. His graduate courses on automatic controls and digital signal processing were routinely filled to capacity. Dr. Smith was always a champion of curriculum maintenance and keeping it up-to-date in the fast changing technological world. He was an early proponent of involving students in computer systems well before personal computers became available. He not only supervised many graduate students but often served as their mentor in their professional careers.

Dr. Smith played an instrumental role in the development of the department of electrical engineering, which during the 1960s was beginning its rise from a small regional department to the large diverse department with the national prominence that it enjoys today. During that era, Dr. Smith was chairman of the faculty recruiting committee and was responsible for recruiting many of the outstanding faculty that have contributed to the success of the department. It may be said that Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering would not be what it is today but for Dr. Smith’s untiring efforts at recruiting bright young faculty members.
Also during the 1960s, Dr. Smith’s research interests shifted from microwave systems to electrical geophysics. He lead a group at the EERL that earned a national reputation for contributing to the development of methods of exploring the electrical properties of the earth’s subsurface. A number of those methods still find use today in the exploration for minerals, hydrocarbon, and geothermal energy resources. He served as a consultant to both government and industry, and he was author of more than 100 technical papers during his career.

Dr. Smith was no less active professionally. In 1970, he was elected fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers professional society. He was one of the founders of the Geoscience and Remote Sensing subgroup of that society and served as its chairman for two years. He was also chairman of the American Geophysical Union’s Academic Committee for a period of 10 years and served as a delegate to numerous international scientific assemblies.

Dr. Smith was an active member of the community and was a longtime member of the Rotary Club of Austin and University Christian Church. He was an avid golfer, skier, hunter, and fisherman. In addition, he was a member of the Great Hills Golf Club and the Rockport Country Club.

Dr. Smith was a friend to everyone he met. He loved life and people. He was a great colleague. He had a wonderful sense of humor that he often used to defuse what otherwise would be a tense situation. He was a loving husband, and at his death he was survived by Patricia Smith, his wife, of 66 years. They had one daughter, Teri, who is married to Drake Farmer, and two grandchildren, Shelby and Christopher.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors J. K. Aggarwal (chair), Francis X. Bostick, and John H. Davis.

Distributed to the dean of the Cockrell School of Engineering, the executive vice president and provost, and the president June 9, 2009. This resolution is posted under "Memorials" at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.