

# Spotlight

## on R & D in chemical engineering at Wits

by R.E. Robinson\*

On 18th November, 1991, the Department of Chemical Engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, held a display of posters to review their R & D activities. Although not a new concept, this series of presentations was the first time that the Department of Chemical Engineering at Wits had undertaken as comprehensive a review in this particular format. It turned out to be a most worth-while exercise, and the many visitors must have been impressed with the quality of the presentations.

There were 17 presentations from pairs of 4th-year students, covering projects ranging from biochemical engineering, hydrometallurgical flotation, catalysis, devolatilization of coal, to heat transfer. Most of them related to extraction metallurgy, which illustrates the importance of our mineral industry in projecting worth-while R & D topics in chemical engineering.

These presentations were for me the highlight of the afternoon. It impressed me, not only that students are being introduced to the importance of good technical communication in their professional careers, but that the

choice of the topics for their project work was excellent and the posters were both informative and creatively interesting. These 4th-year projects offer excellent opportunities to the students to try out their first conceptual ideas before embarking on full-scale R & D projects, and I am sure that the staff at Wits would welcome suggestions from industry.

The post-graduate research presentations were also interesting, and represented a wide range of topics. There were 25 post-graduate posters on display (including 3 from the Metallurgy Department, which dealt with coal and the reduction of manganese ores), representing a healthy research activity in the Department. An underlying theme to most of the topics was the mathematical modelling of the fundamental parameters involved, and some interesting new techniques were utilized. It is most valuable to have post-graduate engineers moving into industry with first-hand experience and knowledge of these new modelling approaches.

Prizes were given for the best posters. The 4th-year prize was awarded to Goeff Birch, and the post-graduate prize to Spiro Comitis.

Well done Wits. I look forward to next year's presentations.

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