A Brief History of UMR

The University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy, which in 1964 became the University of Missouri-Rolla, was founded in 1870 as the “mechanic arts” component of Missouri’s response to the Morrill Act of 1862 and the land-grant movement of the late nineteenth century.

MSM, as it became known, was the first technological institution west of the Mississippi River and one of the first in the nation. MSM was Missouri’s response to the acute need for scientific and technical education in the burgeoning United States.

In inaugurating the School, President of the University of Missouri, Daniel Read stated its purpose:

“This school is to be a school both of science and of its applications: its purpose is to teach knowledge and art - first to know and then to do, and to do in the best manner.”

Early curricula were focused on the mining industry and its immediate technological needs, but by the 1920's courses of study included mining, civil, mechanical, electrical, and chemical engineering and chemistry, metallurgy, mathematics, physics, and geology.

The School expanded slowly in its first 50 years. The building of the campus reflected the steady growth of enrollment -- 107 students enrolled in 1874, when the first graduating class of three received their diplomas; total enrollment in 1920 was 393, with 59 diplomas awarded (57 B.S. degrees, 2 M.S.). Over the years, MSM graduates earned a wide reputation as competent practitioners, well-trained professionals who do their homework, and the School became a major source of technological talent.

In the time of World War II, enrollment was consistently above 500, and an increased focus on research was reflected in the rising number of graduate degrees: in 1940, 153 B.S. degrees and 6 M.S.

Graduate education and research began to assume an even greater role on the campus in the 1950's, as the nation emerged from World War II as the economic and scientific leader of the free world. Missouri saw the need to strengthen its infrastructure, and the School of Mines and Metallurgy became increasingly a technological university whose impact reached beyond the state and nation.

In 1964, recognizing its expanded nature and role, the name of the institution was changed to the University of Missouri at Rolla, soon to be altered to University of Missouri-Rolla. UMR, as it quickly came to be called, was one of four campuses of the newly reorganized and expanded University of Missouri.

The change from “school” to “university” involved three major changes in the programs of the campus. First, UMR's curricula expanded to encompass the full range of engineering and scientific subjects. Degree programs in nuclear engineering, life sciences, and computer science were added. Second, offerings also included degrees in the liberal arts with an appropriate growth in the number and quality of faculty and courses. Third, graduate programs strengthened the science and engineering disciplines, and the commitment to research in all areas better enabled the campus to respond to Missouri's needs. Originally a mining school and later an engineering school, the University of Missouri-Rolla has become a major technological university.

In the course of these metamorphoses the campus has been transformed from that of a rustic academy to a modern institution of science and engineering. To the older campus, built slowly over the first 95 years, have been added, beginning in the 1960's, a large number of new classroom and laboratory buildings and a new library and new performing arts center.

UMR’s students today, though predominantly from Missouri, come from all states of the nation and many foreign countries. MSM/UMR's nearly 50,000 alumni can be found in every state of the union and more than 75 countries of the world. The impact of the campus now reaches around the globe.