

Among 400 Men

What? A Coed Engineer?

DURHAM — Engineering is traditionally a man's world, but at Duke University there's at least one coed who has added a definite aura of femininity to the old engine house.

Marsha Lynn Nelson, 20-year-old senior from Charleston, S. C., came to the Woman's College of Duke University with the idea of majoring in math. Then in the mid-

dle of her sophomore year, after several sessions of testing at the guidance office, she decided her interests and abilities lay elsewhere.

She promptly switched to the School of Engineering. She is now the only girl studying mechanical engineering, and one of seven girls among about 400 men in the entire school.

Asked how it felt to be in a real "minority group," Marsha said, "It doesn't bother me, but sometimes I think it bothers the boys. Engineering is traditionally a man's field and I think it's only natural that some of the boys would look on me as an intruder."

But the attractive, red-haired coed is considered more an asset than a misfit by her fellow engineers. Last spring, running against a North Carolina male, she was elected vice president of the School of Engineering student body. "Admittedly, it was a very close race," she said. "But it proved to me that women can be accepted by their peers, regardless of sex."

SMALL ADVANTAGE
In fact the women engineers may have a slight advantage over their male counterparts, according to Marsha. "The seven girls in engineering at Duke attract special attention from their professors, and sometimes special criticism. But at least everyone knows who you are. And I don't think a professor ever asks a boy to babysit for him, or eat Sunday dinner with his family."

Marsha is now actively recruiting other women engineers. "It's a shame that more girls don't go into engineering," she declares. "Many do not realize that mechanical and electrical engineering are desk jobs. Anyone with an aptitude for math and a little creativity would be good at it."

"Also the recent emphasis on 'equal job opportunities for women' enhances a woman engineer's chances for a better job than she might have expected a few years ago. It's very hard for large companies to find women who are qualified for top positions, and many engineering firms are vigorously searching for them."



MARSHA NELSON

Marsha is not just a theoretical engineer. For the past two summers she has worked as an engineering draftsman designing submarine piping, first for the Charleston Naval Shipyards, and last summer for Allstate Design and Development Co., in Charleston.

Does a woman engineer find any disadvantages in the working world? "No, I was surrounded by about 40 men who were eager to help me with the work — as well as lining me up with dates," she said.

About the only problem Marsha has had as an engineer has been in convincing people that she really is one and, "making my dates stop laughing at the courses I take."

HEAVY LOAD
Like most engineers, she has to carry a heavy work load of 18-20 classroom hours and 4 or 5 laboratories a week. The courses that sound so strange to the non-engineers are her forte: "deformable bodies, heat transfer, thermodynamics, refrigeration, air conditioning, vibrations, and networks."

In addition to the required courses, Marsha is doing an independent senior project on analog computers which she said, "will hopefully enable me to evaluate design proposals that involve approximations and estimates."

Marsha, who is not all the stereotype image of engineers, either male or female, doesn't restrict her activities to her chosen profession. A dean's list student, she is also a Freshman Advisory Counselor, a member of the Pep Board, and an avid sports fan and athlete. Her more typically feminine interests include china painting and designing and making all her own clothes.

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