

Course Evaluation

CHEM 421 01 – Professor Alanna Schepartz

Question 1

Looking back on Chemistry 421 01, what is your overall assessment of the course? What are its strengths and weaknesses, and in what ways might it be improved?

Response 1

Overall this course was an interesting and helpful introduction to the new field of chemical biology. Its strengths were small class size and a knowledgeable professor.

Response 2

This course is an interesting look at current (or at least recent) research topics. I thought that the material was interesting and well taught. Both a strength and a weakness of the course is that it covers many topics, and has few prerequisites. It's a good way to get students interested in the field, because it surveys many applications, but it also feels a bit scattered, and there is no opportunity to gain in-depth familiarity with the material. In our class, it seemed a bit odd to cover elementary biochem as much as we did, but I appreciated that Alanna adapted the coverage for our background, since we (or at least I) needed it. Overall I was very glad to have taken this course, and I definitely enjoyed it.

Response 3

Overall, I really enjoyed this class. It was a very useful introduction to the study of chemical biology, as we reviewed some of the hallmark papers and techniques in the field. Furthermore, and more importantly, it taught me the strategies and ways of thinking required when approaching a multidisciplinary subject such as chemical biology. I enjoyed the fact that we focused mainly on primary literature with Professor Schepartz guiding us on the scientific story behind the papers. This was a unique thing to experience, especially as a sophomore.

One of the weaknesses of the class, in my opinion, was the extremely small class size. I think it was dealt with in the best manner possible, but a class of 8-10 students would have been more enjoyable, allowing for more significant group discussions on topics and a wider range of final reports.

In terms of improvements for the class, I think better advertising to prospective sophomore students would be a good idea, as well as cross listing in the MB&B major. This class, although not strictly aligned with the prerequisites for either the chemistry or biochemistry majors, is a great and worthwhile class for a student in either major to take.

Question 2

Please evaluate each instructor of Chemistry 421 01. What are the instructor's strengths and weaknesses, and in what ways might his/her teaching be improved?

Response 1

Professor Schepartz is extremely effective at teaching complicated concepts and detailed processes. Her explanations are clear, her writing is legible, and her topics are challenging yet manageable. Sometimes she writes very fast, making it hard to keep up, but she always is happy to slow down if you let her know that you're falling behind.

Response 2

Alanna teaches very well and is inspiring because she so clearly loves her subject. She moved through lectures at what felt like a breakneck speed, which was stressful and made it hard to take notes (please, please don't stand in front of what you've already written!), but worked really well, because my mind never had a chance to wander, and I learned a lot. I know you said we could slow you down, but I never quite worked up the nerve for it. Instead, I think it would help students keep pace if you encouraged some preparation for class, perhaps handing out a sheet with structures of the important chemicals in the next lecture, and suggesting topics from organic chemistry to review. If I'd been a bit more familiar with the structures we were dealing with, I would have had a much easier time taking notes.

Response 3

Alanna Schepartz was a great teacher. She was enthusiastic about the topics, knows a great deal about chemistry and biology, and she did her best to engage us in scientific discussion.

Question 4

How would you summarize Chemistry 421 01 for a fellow student? Would you recommend Chemistry 421 01 to another student? Why or why not?

Response 1

I would summarize Chem421 as a course that examines biological research from a chemical point of view. I would absolutely recommend this course to another student; this course is unique in that it deals with cutting edge research that applies the processes discussed in more traditional chemistry/biology/biochemistry courses. The course is fast-paced, and you're taught an enormous amount of information. It's an excellent way to familiarize with reading and understanding literature published in science journals.

Response 2

I would recommend this class to students with an interest in the intersection of biology and chemistry, and some background in both. It covers interesting topics, is well taught, and shouldn't be very stressful. You may feel out of your depth if you aren't pretty comfortable with organic chemistry and MCDB--but even if it feels overwhelming, there's no need to be stressed.

Response 3

Chemical Biology I is a fairly intensive introduction to the study of chemical biology, which includes such topics as the chemical synthesis of DNA and proteins, chemical arrays, phage display, and the application of fluorescence to biology. It contains a fair amount of both chemical and biological detail, so it would be best for someone with a significant interest in both fields.

I surprised myself when I ended up liking this class-- as a biology major, I had just finished organic chemistry the semester before and was looking forward to never taking another chemistry class again. However, Chemical Biology showed me how the reactions I learned in organic chemistry could be used in fascinating ways to explore biology. I would recommend this course if you really enjoy biology and wish to see how extremely relevant chemistry can be to the field.

Question 5

Overall, how would you rate the workload of this course in comparison to other Yale courses you have taken?

Response 1

The workload of this course overall was about average. The problem sets took a lot of time and thinking but were not assigned weekly. The exam

required a few days of studying, and the final project and paper should not be left to the last minute. Also, I found that I needed to review and re-copy my notes after each lecture in order to keep up.

Response 2

Much less

Response 3

Somewhat harder

Question 6

What is your overall assessment of this course?

Response 1

I learned a tremendous amount of information and also an essential skill—reading scientific journals. I think it's a worthwhile course to take, though more so for chemistry majors than for biology majors.

Response 2

Excellent