



CHEMISTRY AT VASSAR

Guide for Pre-major Advisors and First Year Students

The Chemistry Department wants to ensure that all students, including those considering a major in chemistry or biochemistry, or who are on a pre-health track, are placed appropriately in our introductory-level courses.

CHEM 121 – This course is designed to provide some fundamentals of chemistry in the context of an instructor-specific theme; it is only appropriate for students with limited previous exposure to chemistry. This course does not have an associated laboratory and does not count toward the chemistry major. Any student who took AP Chemistry and received a grade of 4 or 5, or IB Chemistry and received a grade of 6 or 7, may not take Chem 121.

CHEM 125 – This course is designed to cover the important aspects of general chemistry lecture and laboratory in one semester and is appropriate for students who have previously studied chemistry or have a strong science/math background in general. Students should generally take Chemistry 125 if they studied two years of high school chemistry or if they studied one year of high school Chemistry about which they feel reasonably confident.

CHEM 244 – This is the first semester of organic chemistry, and we do not recommend it for first year students. The pace and expectations of the course may overwhelm even a very well-prepared first year student; generally, we recommend students who truly do not need to take 125 to wait until sophomore year to take CHEM 244. If a student still feels they wish to take CHEM 244 in the first year, they should speak with the department chair (Alison Keimowitz, alkeimowitz@vassar.edu).

Any first year student who cannot register for CHEM 121 should speak with the department chair. Any first year student who cannot register for CHEM 125 in the fall semester should consider taking it in the spring semester. If they wish to do so, they should contact the department chair to be placed on a waitlist of those unable to take CHEM 125 in the fall.

It is essential that those students considering a major in chemistry take their 100-level course in the first year, so all efforts will be made to find them a seat. Those students who are taking chemistry for other reasons (such as a pre-health track or biology major) may take 100-level chemistry in the sophomore year or later.

Questions about placement in a laboratory section should be directed to Jen Appawu (jappawu@vassar.edu or ext. 7794). Students are strongly encouraged to be flexible about which laboratory section they request to increase the ability to offer seats to all interested students.

For students considering a career path in the medical field: Pre-health students need to complete CHEM 125 and CHEM 244-245 starting in their first or second year. Medical schools require four semesters of chemistry with laboratory. CHEM 125 fulfills the general chemistry content requirement for medical schools but not the unit requirements; a fourth unit of chemistry, usually Biochemistry 272, should be taken by pre-medical students.