

Summer Activity: Letters from Last Year's Students

Purpose: Most people find that the skills they need to succeed in college are different from the ones they've been using in high school. This assignment gives you a window into the skills you'll need so you can think about what to do when you get to campus.

- **LO3:** Articulate what you want from your university education and steps you can take to achieve your goals.

Task: At the end of their first term, students who take The Secrets to Success in STEM get the following writing prompt:

Write a letter to a new CH 221 student. What advice can you give them that you would have liked to get when you started the class 10 weeks ago? Consider study habits and time management, general "figuring out college" tips, etc. What do you wish you had known?

The letters from Fall 2019 – not the ones from 2020 because their experience was very different from what yours will be – are shown below. Some students preferred not to share their names; the letters are otherwise unedited.

1. Please read the letters.
2. Write a page-long response in which you talk about what you think college is going to be like academically, socially, and overall. Do these letters surprise you at all? Do the students' descriptions of what they needed to do to succeed in their chemistry class match what you needed to do to succeed in high school? What is your plan for success at UO? How is your current situation different from the one the Fall 2019 students encountered, and what will you need to do differently to succeed?
3. Be ready to discuss your reactions to the letters in our first First Year Experience Seminar class.
4. We will also ask you to submit an electronic copy of your response via Canvas, UO's learning management system, once you get to campus.

Criteria for success: You will have succeeded with this assignment if you have:

1. Made a genuine attempt at self-assessment and effort to engage with the questions.
2. Tried to write a coherent response to the prompt in #2. Please don't worry about trying to make yourself look good for me- that's not the point here. I'm looking more for content than perfect writing, so don't worry too much about grammar, spelling, etc. Please do read over what you have written, though, because incomprehensible stream-of-consciousness writing won't help either of us!
3. Submitted the written reflection via Canvas once we've talked in class about how to do that.
4. Engaged in the small-group discussion and made at least one contribution to the whole-class discussion we have about this assignment.

Also, before classes start, review the ALEKS topics you struggled with on the CH 221 placement assignment (the one you did before you could register). You will be expected to know this content well.

Dear New Chem 221 Student,

Welcome to it, for most likely the first time you're going to be leaving home and you be out on your own; and to make matters a little more challenging, you are probably going to have a harder course schedule than most of your friends. Now, don't let this scare you, all it takes is a little adjusting. Chances are, in high school you never had to study for multiple hours in a day, prep for big exams, or have to twist and turn your brain in order to figure out problems. But here you are, going into uncharted waters, not knowing what lies ahead. I'm not going to lie, this quarter will take a lot of work, but if you simply apply yourself and give it everything you have, you can take down this course like a champ. So, in order to do this, there are a few tips that I think would be helpful.

1. Figure out how to manage time right off the bat. When you arrive, there will be lots of free time, but there will also be lots of people trying to rope you into a certain club or activity. Whether this be club sports, Greek life, hall government etc. Don't be afraid to say yes to all these things, but you must know when to say no. One of the biggest challenges to college is trying to figure out how to manage time, so set your priorities. Yes, I love hanging out with friends and watching Netflix as much as the next guy, but sometimes you have to say no. Figure out a daily schedule that works best for you. Try to find things that are important and plan out as much time as you need for each one. This will range from, schoolwork, clubs, personal time, eating, laundry, etc. But when you get here you need to set your priorities.

2. When you need help, GO AND GET IT. This is one thing that I feel that new students don't take advantage of. There are tons of resources on campus that can help you. Free tutors and study sessions are always helpful, but the thing that helps me the best is going to office hours. In a big lecture hall, it can be tough to learn in that format. But, going to office hours and getting help is the best thing for you. Your professor can meet with you one-on-one, and you get to address things that you are struggling with. Remember, it's hard to catch up if you fall behind, so do your best to stay ahead of the curve.

3. Apply yourself. You are going to this University for a reason; you are a smart kid. This course is going to take a lot of work, about 8 hours outside of class a week. This at times can be consuming, but if you work hard and go into it with the right attitude, you can solve any problem that is thrown at you. Trust me, nothing is more satisfying than figuring out a tough concept or getting a good grade on an exam. With hard work, the sky is the limit.

4. Finally, make sure to have fun. College can be some of the best days of your life, but at the end of the day, it is what you make it. If you let your schooling consume you at all times of the day, you will lose your mind. Nobody can be at their best unless they cut out some time each and every day and dedicate themselves. You will be meeting so many great people and you will make some great memories that will last you a lifetime. So, when you get here, don't be shy. Go up and talk to as many people as you can so you can truly get the most of your college experience.

-Kirby Antonen

Dear new math 112 student,

Welcome to college! UO has such a comfortable and welcoming environment. I hope you enjoy your first quarter in Eugene. That being said, my first two weeks of college was the hardest two weeks of

my life. I was constantly calling my family for support, I couldn't force myself to eat any food, and I had a hard time going to sleep. I am telling you these things not to scare you, but to let you know that it's okay to feel like that, especially in the beginning. Believe it or not, it does get easier. After my first quarter at UO, I can confidently say that it has been one of the best experiences of my life. I have met so many new friends, built connections with my professors, and learn about the beautiful geography of Oregon.

Adjusting to school life is hard. Ranging from rigorous class material, being far from home, adapting to the weather, balancing your schedule, & etc. makes adjusting to school life in general difficult. One major key that helped me not only survive my first quarter, but having success, includes heavy planning. To me, planning is the name of the game. College course work is much different than High school course work. The material is harder to comprehend, it takes more time, the due dates are scattered, and you have much less time to complete it. At times it feels impossible to complete all the assignments, but with strategic planning, it is possible. I found success by using three planners. A monthly planner (on google calendar), a weekly planner (on a whiteboard in my room), and a daily planner (A notebook I carry with me in my backpack). All these planners help me see what I must get done that day, what I have coming up during the week, and what assignments are due later that month. They keep me organized and allow me to have better success at completing my assignments on time. You might be thinking, "what the heck is wrong with this guy?" It might sound crazy at first, but I promise it will keep your assignments better organized and you will have more success at completing your assignments overall.

I have already learned many things about how to find success during college, such as the importance of planning and retaining a healthy lifestyle, seeking help, and creating bonds with professors and classmates. All those things are important, but the most important thing that I have learned, is that college is what you make it. This is YOUR education, it's not your parents, not your friends, and not your siblings. Everybody has different amount of work they can handle at one time. It is important that you take the amount of credits you can to be successful, especially for your first quarter. I feel that learning how to take care of yourself and learning how to get comfortable at first is a class within itself. Do not feel pressured to take more credits than you feel comfortable with, even if your friends or family push you to do more than you can handle.

Like many of you reading this, I started in the math 112 and chemistry 221 sequence. After a week, chemistry 221 was kicking my butt. I was falling behind, and I was not understanding any of the material during lecture. I knew that my high school chemistry course did not prepare me for this sequence. Instead of continuing down a dark road, I decided to drop the course and work my way back. I am telling you this because it is okay to work your way back. At first, I was nervous that I would be made fun of, or that I would be looked down upon because I could not find success yet in that sequence. I then remembered that this is MY education. Not anyone else's. After talking with an advisor, I was able to create an academic and career plan moving forward, and I am beyond excited to pursue my career.

I hope that you enjoy your experience here at the UO and remember to have fun and stay on top of your course work.

Cheers,

Josh Cervantes

Dear New CH 221 Student,

Don't be discouraged from my letter but taking Chemistry 221 your first term of college is going to be one of the most difficult things you will have ever experienced. For the class, I recommend never falling behind. One example of this is the summer assignment. That is something that you have to power through and may make you cry and wish chemistry was never a thing but honestly, it prepares you for what chemistry is going to be like. For the class, one thing that you will have to get used to fast is the learning structure of the class. While you do learn in class, most of what you learn you are going to learn from online. The structure of the class is to learn on Aleks before class, in class skim over whether or not people understand the topic, and then after class review the material learned that week on Sapling. This will repeat every single week and if this is not how you learn best, there are a lot of resources I would recommend such as additional office hours, SuperChem, Chem Encore, and of course your friends in the FIG. Another thing I would recommend, would be to keep up on all of your assignments not just Chemistry. This would benefit you greatly because even classwork from class you don't have a hard deadline on such as FIG work will definitely pile up over the term. FIG homework also greatly helps you assess how you are doing in your classes and how you are feeling about them but this only works if you do it when you are assigned it. Adjusting to college itself is a big deal. College will (hopefully) feel extremely different from highschool. When you first arrive on campus and explore, there are a lot of things to do and it may feel overwhelming but overtime the school will start to feel like a second home to you. If you ever need help, there are a lot of people you can reach out to those who are always ready to help such as your FA, FIG instructor, and your RA.

Good luck and have a great year in CH221!

Chantelle Chang

Dear New Chemistry 221 Student,

Welcome to the University of Oregon! You worked hard to get here and should be proud that you finally made it! Also, you are registered to take Gen Chem your first term so I have some advice for you. College is crazy, actually and totally crazy. All of a sudden you are completely on your own, usually far from home, and almost always lacking in impulse control. And for the most part, that's ok. But there are a few things you need to know before you start your first year.

The main thing you need to remember is that it is very easy to get behind in your classes. I would recommend a planner or electronic calendar of some kind to keep track of all the due dates you will receive, because there are so many different professors asking different things of you. Then, actually do the work. This is the hard part, but you have to actually do the work. Don't leave your homework until the night before it is due! Work on math and chem problems all throughout the week and start your essays at least a handful of days before they're due. If you don't stay on top of your homework, it will be very easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer amount of work you have to do, even if it's not that difficult.

Next, don't be afraid to ask for help. This chemistry course is pretty hard, and they move fast in the lectures. Take time outside of class to make sure you understand whatever the lecture was on, and if you don't get it then go get help. There is no shame in not knowing, and there are so many great resources on campus to help you out. Take advantage of them! Professors and their student assistants love to help, and there are study groups that meet all over campus that you can visit.

Finally, make some friends! College is the time when you meet people that you really enjoy. You can choose to hang out with people that are interested in all of the same things as you, or someone totally opposite. Just get out there and meet new people! Friends are really important right now because you are no longer living with your parents. You can all love and support each other, study together, and get into trouble together. And best of all, when you first come to college everyone is in exactly the same friendless place you are. If you talk to someone for more than 12 seconds, you made a friend. It's that easy!

Enjoy this first term, don't get overwhelmed, and make some new memories!

Best of luck,

Vivienne Cornutt
A chem 221 survivor

Dear Math 112 Student,

I hope you are excited for college. You may be only worrying about Chemistry 221 but do not forget about math. You may think math will not be as stressful as chemistry, but that does not mean you should not give it attention. I put math aside and worried only about chemistry and now I am struggling in math. There are no good resources for math like there are for chemistry. There is no practice test or studying resources other than practice problems in the textbook. In Math 112 the HW will be overwhelming, do not put it off. Do WebWork HW early or else you will be freaking about doing it the night of Friday. To study for Math 112 midterms, I suggest reviewing your quizzes and homework. Also, I suggest doing practice problems in the textbook. Along with that with WebWork HW make sure to try and do the problems yourself and not look them up, it will help you with quizzes and exams. My most important piece of advice for you for not only Math 112 but all your classes are to go to class. If you go to class you will do so much better with HW and with midterms, so even if it's hard to get up just try to and go to class. In the do not let classes worry you too much. Make sure to take care of your mental health and enjoy your time in college. Don't be shy in your classes and reach out to people they are wanting to meet new people just as much as you do. Check out all the resources at UO like the Duck Nest and join organizations. There are so many at UO you can check them out at OrgSync, it will help you to make new friends and feel part of campus. Good luck to you and enjoy college life at UO.

Kaitlyn Dawn Kavanagh

Dear New Chem 221 student,

You do not know what you have gotten yourself into. This class will start out very easy, but will quickly turn into one of the hardest classes you have ever taken as of yet. But I have some tips to help you survive:

1. Get a good amount of sleep. It really is the most important thing you can do, because tired you is not going to pay attention as good as well rested you.
2. Pay attention during lectures, take notes, and ask the TA's for help on problems you don't understand. This will make a huge difference in the way you learn.

3. Before your lectures, review the slides and materials and take notes on them, so that the lecture itself is more like a helpful review.
4. If you don't do well on your first midterm, don't worry too much, it's not the end of the world, and you will do better on the next one.
5. Make friends with people in your course. Having people to study with will be your saving grace for this course, especially for Sapling, Aleks, and studying for midterms.
6. Everyone moves at their own pace. There will be people in this class who get 100s on tests, and there will be people who get 50s. Don't feel discouraged because of one bad grade, or because someone else did better than you, if anything, ask that person to tutor you.
7. Superchem is a savior, but only with the right tutors, so attend it early in the year and figure out which tutors work the best for you.

Good luck and I wish you the best on your journey through chem 221.

Rosa Taylor

Dear New CH 221 Student,

Welcome to the University of Oregon; more importantly welcome to the wonderful world of chemistry. If I am being completely honest with you, it is not as hard as you think it is. As I sit back and reflect on my first term of chemistry, I realize that I was not doing enough to help myself be successful. The most crucial part of getting through chemistry is dependent on how willing you are to help yourself succeed. This is college, you have the reins now and you are responsible for the outcome of the year. Now, the first term of college is a lot to figure out at once. There are so many new things happening and new experiences that you will want to partake in. However, chemistry will need to become your best friend. In order to be successful, I have formulated a couple of study tips and tricks that I believe will be helpful in surviving chemistry. First, go to office hours. While office hours may seem scary at first, your teachers are genuinely interested in helping you succeed. However, going to office hours does not mean simply waiting until you are confused. Go to office hours the first week of class so that your teacher knows who you are and to get a head start on learning the information you will cover during lecture. Second, write notes before the lecture. The lecture is not going to teach you what you need to know, it will simply review what you should have already covered in your notes. Therefore, it is important to take notes or at least read over the topics that you are going to cover in lecture the next day. Also, sample problems in the textbook are helpful in reviewing equations for tests and benefit in helping you rework the problems in a way that you can understand. Lastly, go to class. Seriously. There are going to be days where you really do not feel like going but you are going to go to class the next day and be so lost. So go to class, get your clicker points and pay attention. I recommend sitting in the middle section in at least the first five rows. You are going to focus better and not have the temptation of going on your phone or talking to friends.

Finally, make sure that you cut yourself some slack. You're not perfect. While you may have excelled in high school, college is a completely different scenario. There are going to be some ups and downs but it's okay to make mistakes. Take a deep breath, eat some food and then try again. I promise you that you can do it.

Jaleh Wooten

Dear Chem 221 student,

This class will be hard, I'm not going to pretend that it's easy. However, it will be worth it, and it will be rewarding, because you will make it through. Time management will be very important, a planner is definitely a must to make sure that you do not forget anything. Working with other students, especially students you meet in the fig that you connect with will be very helpful. Aleks and sapling can be hard and frustrating however if you do it together with other students it can be much easier and beneficial to your learning. Overall, adjusting to college life is a challenge, but just make sure you manage your time, go to office hours for help, don't skip class and put yourself out there to make new friends and have new experiences.

Student 1

Dear new chem 221 student,

First off, if the other letters are like the ones I read when I was you, disregard their content. Granted the first week or two is a harsh adjustment. You will be flooded with info and programs you have to sign up for. Take a deep breath, it gets easier. Overall the classes I took this term were no more difficult than those in high school. The only real difference was the volume of work we had to do. Once you figure out what your schedule will be like, the term will go by in no time. Granted, you must be willing to put some effort towards studying. Stay on top of your assignments and do as much as possible in advance (especially aleks and sapling (you'll know what these are soon enough)), and yes, if you're in chem you should be reading the textbook and taking notes on what you read. Even if you think you understand the concepts and calculations, reading the textbook will prepare you for the exams. If you show up for class, pay attention and do your work you will do fine.

Lastly, you need to take care of yourself. This should go without saying, but it is much harder to do well in school if you are not sleeping, exercising, and spending time with friends. Focus on eating well and getting as much sleep as possible. If this means you have to take some naps in-between classes then so be it, you will not regret it.

Student 2

Dear CH 221 student,

I know you have probably heard this a hundred times already but, chemistry can be hard. My biggest advice to you is to make sure to attend every lecture because so much is covered in each class period that missing even one lecture would put you behind. However, just attending class is not enough to completely understand the concepts that are covered. Make sure to complete all of the sapling and aleks assignments because they will really help you understand the content better. Also, don't be afraid to go and get help when you feel like you don't understand something. It's better to get your questions answered sooner rather than later because if you understand the basic concepts it becomes much easier to build the more complicated concepts onto an already sturdy base. As long as you put in the effort and do your best, everything will turn out well. Good luck in all your endeavours!

Student 3

Dear future Chem 221 student,

Straight up, chem 221 is probably one of the hardest classes you'll take at the U of O unless you're a genius, then you'll be fine. However, although chem is hard, there are a bunch of resources available for tutoring, extra help, and office hours!

If I could have known four things before the start of the term, these would be it:

1. Chem is hard! It is not at all like high school. You have to put in the extra hours and effort to succeed in this class. If you were a straight-A student in high school and never had to study to get those grades... well, you're in for a very rude awakening.
2. Read. The. Textbook. You will not succeed unless you read the textbook. Preview the lesson/chapter before going to the lecture so that you can actually understand what is going on in the class.
3. Do your homework! ALEKS and Sapling are tedious tasks but they will make a difference in your grade at the end of the term. Work on Sapling with other students because it will help you learn and get the right answers.
4. Last but not least, try and find a good group of people to do your work with! Find a group that will keep you motivated to go to class, to study, and to do homework with.

Again, chem is hard, but it's not impossible. If you put in the work and the effort, the results will show! I don't have much other advice because as I'm writing to you I am still just on my tenth week of freshman year. Best of luck freshie, and as always scooo ducks!

Best,

Student 4

Dear New Chem 221 Student,

Being nervous about college is perfectly normal. I was like that, my first two weeks here. I was homesick, and had trouble adjusting to the workload. However, things got better as I realized I am not the only one struggling and learned to manage things later on. You might be taking chemistry right now, whether you are interested in it or if you are doing it as a major requirement. This class, I am not even going to sugar coat is a difficult class. There are times when you will succeed, and there are times where you will struggle. The midterms and finals make up a huge portion of the grade, so it is important to do well on them. If you don't do so well on one of them, don't worry just pull through with the other exams. ALEKS can be VERY frustrating, but with a good study buddy you should be able to work through it. Sapling is better, because some of the problems mimic the test questions. Also, be sure to read the topics covered in class, before the lecture. College is hard work, but it is also very fun so learn to take time for yourself when you can.

Student 5

Dear New Math 112 Student,

To be honest Math 112 is definitely not the worst class to take your first term at the UO. I was a little bit worried coming in, but I quickly realized that a lot of the material was review from high school. It was a

little bit difficult to get myself to pay attention in class as I had already learned the material, but once I did, I really saw myself doing better and better.

Luckily Math 112 did not assign too much homework, but some of the assignments would take longer than I expected, so it is important not to leave them until the day it is due. It was new to me to have all of my homework assigned before I actually needed to worry about it, so it was a little bit of an adjustment not to get ahead of myself and get overwhelmed by all of the assignments. Make sure that you allow yourself to have social time, but remember that you are here to learn, it is easy to forget that. You are going to do great this year!

Student 6

Dear New Math 112 Student,

I am going to tell you this, Math 112 was hard for me because my teacher was terrible and I wasn't able to understand the material in the class since my teacher didn't explain the lesson pretty well. When you are looking for a time to take Math 112, Try to schedule for a class earlier in the day rather than later at night. Taking it later in the day would be tiring since taking it later would be two and a half hours long. I know this is all of you guys first time in a quarter system. I'll tell you this it is fast paced and you can easily fall behind in your classes if you don't manage your time wisely. If you are struggling in Math 112, make sure you go to your teacher office hours if their good or go to tutoring in the Knight Library they could be very helpful if you don't understand a problem. If you are struggling in the class, make sure you form study groups in your class so that you can all help each other out with the material if you guys don't understand it. So I wish you guys luck on your first year of college

Student 7