

Discipline-specific writing skills in Chemistry and Biochemistry

Educational Objective:

The curriculum of the Department and Chemistry and Biochemistry serves the larger student community with classes such as General Chemistry and Organic Chemistry. The number of students in these classes (300+) prohibits a writing-intensive curriculum. Our lower division lab courses have 16-18 students per section but because of the substantial number of sections and limited TA resources, these classes also do not lend themselves to being writing-intensive. However, our upper-division lab classes with ~15-20 students frequently incorporate a significant writing component in the form of lab reports. The reports are turned in and the instructor and TAs provide written feedback to the students so that they may improve their future reports and/or turn in revised reports. Thus our undergraduates are currently receiving significant discipline-specific writing in our various upper division courses.

Changes under consideration:

Currently we offer one course, Chemistry 122, Principles of Instrumental Analysis, with the "W" designation. The curriculum committee this year is charged with exploring whether our three-quarter advanced laboratory series, 146ABC (2 units each) together can constitute a writing requirement. The committee will also discuss whether other courses, including our physical chemistry upper division lab course sequence, 164AB (2 units each), together with our 2-unit upper division inorganic lab, 151L, could constitute another writing requirement. We are also considering requesting a "W" designation for Biochemistry 110, which is currently a very intensive writing course. The Curriculum committee will explore whether to request making the senior thesis a writing requirement.