

Welcoming the first year chemistry students

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"Alkukeitos", an introductory course for first year chemistry students, is planned and executed as a collaboration between a number of teachers, researchers and students in the department of chemistry. The primary intent of the course is to soften the student transition into the university world and to enhance student engagement and participation in the chemistry community.

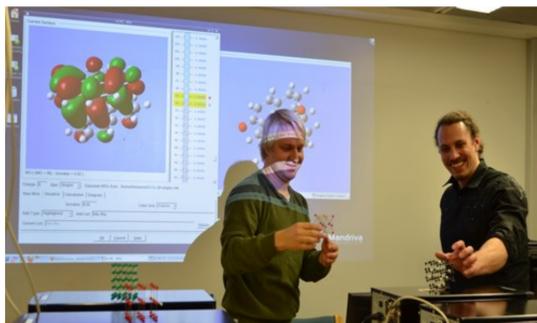
This poster shares the best practices found during the development of the course, and discusses how to create continuity in the first study year after the course has ended.

WHAT?

- ◆ Intensive course at the beginning of 1st year
- ◆ Compulsory for all chemistry majors, 2 ects credits
- ◆ About 80-110 students attending yearly
- ◆ Planned and executed as a collaboration between teachers, researchers and senior students

WHY?

- ◆ A softer transition to student life
- ◆ Enhancing student engagement and creating sense of community
- ◆ Staff gets to know the students and students get to know the staff
- ◆ Reducing the number of drop-outs and increasing the amount of degrees completed



Actual research presented by enthusiastic teachers and researchers is an essential part of the course. Here, an introduction to molecular modelling takes place.



First year chemistry students love doing laboratory work already in the first days of their studies, and it is also a great way to get to know your fellow students. These two students are preparing a dye-sensitized solar cell out of blueberries.

HOW?

"Having fun while learning about university life":

- ◆ **Student-to-student tutoring**; getting to know other students, planning studies together, peer support (tutors trained also by the department of chemistry)
- ◆ **The first week's schedule made ready** for students; makes it easier to concentrate on more important subjects
- ◆ **"Campus Race"**; getting to know the campus and finding the most important lecture halls etc. via a game
- ◆ **General info** about practical things; student allowance, health care, the structure of studies, general practises in lecture courses and exams, study counseling; IT services etc.
- ◆ **"Theme days"**; learning about chemistry research by lab works that are connected with the strength areas of the department, getting to know the staff, getting prepared for laboratory courses
- ◆ **Working life connections**; alumni telling about their studies and current jobs, presentation of the trade union, familiarizing students with academic career options by research staff presentations
- ◆ **Social dinner**; having fun together, informal meeting place for students and teachers

AND THEN WHAT?

- ◆ Study counseling in same student groups as in Alkukeitos course until the BSc degree, done by teachers that the students are familiar with from the start
- ◆ Studying in small groups in lecture and lab courses

ANY EFFECT?

- ◆ Course evaluations by students and staff are very positive
- ◆ Closer relations between students and teachers; "teachers are only human"
- ◆ Stronger sense of communality
- ◆ Students participating more actively in courses and course development
- ◆ Number of BSc and MSc degrees growing slowly
- ◆ The reputation of the Department of Chemistry as a student friendly place is spreading wider



It is also essential to learn to find your way around the campus. The first year chemistry students get to practise this together in the "Campus Race" on their very first day of studies. The best group wins a prize, which is announced at the social dinner.

CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ An intensive introductory course organized by the department is a good way to start the studies; every student is made sure to get the same information and experience
- ◆ The course helps in creating a sense of communality and creating closer student - teacher connections
- ◆ Continuity after the course (study guidance, group activities etc.) is important
- ◆ The feedback on the course has been very positive from the start, and the course has become an important part of department activities

