

Five Tips for Surviving (and Thriving) Freshman Year in the College of Chemistry

1) Invest in your Chemistry 4B Project

This may seem like an oddly specific piece of advice to start with, but making the effort in designing and executing your project can make a big difference in your experience in chemistry at Berkeley. The Chemistry 4B special projects are a unique example when your undergraduate experience comes as close to actual research as it will (without actually joining a research lab). Take the time to research several ideas and choose an ambitious project.

2) Develop a manageable system for organizing class work

At the end of each semester of my freshman year, I found myself with an intimidating pile of class notes and returned work which I had to organize and review during dead week. To avoid this problem in future semesters, I made the effort to organize all my notes and other school papers for each class after a midterm rather than leaving it in a huge pile until dead week.

3) Keep up with class reading

One of my most painful studying sessions was the weekend before a Chem 4A midterm. Chronic procrastination left me with a several chapters of reading to complete in a one very long day at Barnes and Nobles. My more mature student self currently takes the time to do class reading each ~~day~~ week. Well, at least every other week. Just don't leave all the reading till the week before the exam.

4) Do fun things

Taking the time to recharge by going to a concert or hiking or <fill in your favorite activity> keeps you recharged for the weeks when your school load is especially heavy. A prime example is last semester when I had seven exams two weeks before dead week. Obviously this was a stressful week, but it was made slightly less stressful by having relaxed at a concert the weekend before.

5) Go to office hours

During one semester, I faced the dilemma of having virtually all of my professor's office hours scheduled during my class times. I solved this problem by not going to any office hours. In hindsight, this was not a good decision. In previous semesters, I had made the effort to go to office hours or to talk with professors after class if I couldn't make it to their office. Connecting with professors outside of class made me more invested in my classes and encouraged me keep up with the material so that I actually had something to ask questions about.