

Teacher's Feedback: CHEM-E0105 Academic Learning Community

Course facts: 3-5 cr; periods I-V (2022-23); number of students in Sisu: 161 (108 students in total passed the course, ca. 67%); grades: pass–fail

MyCourses: <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/course/view.php?id=36451#section-0>

Teaching and learning methods: Lectures, workshops, quizzes, independent studying and exercises, attending events, as well as academic advising and major-specific feedback sessions. The teaching sessions mostly in contact mode; some sessions were carried out online (Zoom). For the bachelors coming from outside Aalto University, the orientation week events formed a part of the course, enabling these students to receive 4 cr. Two elective 1 cr modules were also offered: Career Planning Exercises and the basics of MatLAB. By attending these modules, the students could increase the extent of the course to 5 cr. In addition to the themes already mentioned, the topics covered during the course included: Aalto Ethical Guidelines, Study Skills, Scientific Article Exercise (SAE), Communication Skills, Master's Thesis Review, and Entrepreneurial Mindset.

Assessment methods: The possible grades for the students were “pass” or “fail”. To pass the course, the exercises and quizzes had to be carried out in an acceptable manner. In addition, the students were required to attend certain activities and events (major-specific orientation, Aalto Talent Expo, academic advising, and feedback sessions). Details on this can be found in MC (click the link above).

Feedback summary: Feedback was collected actively during the course (discussion in class, as well as open questions in the quizzes). In addition, the standard electronic survey (Webropol) provided valuable feedback – see Table 1 for a summary of the results.

*Table 1. Summary of the student feedback from the electronic (Webropol) survey. The figures are averages from the students' responses. The number of the responses given in the option “E=not applicable” is displayed in parentheses after the calculated average. The deviation of the answers is described presenting the range of the given responses (the column titled Min.-Max.; only for 2023). For comparison, the corresponding average values are also shown for last study year (2022). The number of respondents (n) was 54 in 2022 and 55 in 2023. **Note that the numbering of the questions has changed from last year because a new open question has been added to the survey (number 5).***

	Average 2023 (E)	Min.-Max.	Average 2022 (E)
1. Overall assessment	2.15 (0)	1-5	2.53 (0)
2. Teaching methods	2.69 (0)	1-5	3.07 (0)
3. I am pleased with my study effort	3.26 (1)	1-5	3.67 (1)
4. Workload compared to other courses	3.59 (0)	1-5	3.33 (4)
6. Correspondence to the description	3.62 (2)	1-5	3.80 (1)
7. Effect on the study motivation	2.28 (0)	1-4	2.51 (0)
8. Difficulty compared to other courses	2.52 (6)	1-5	2.51 (6)
9. The course enhanced my general skills	2.81 (0)	1-5	3.04 (0)

The numerical averages of the students' feedback are clearly lower than last year, which means that unfortunately the decreasing trend of the students' numerical feedback is continuing. Comparing this year's results to the previous feedback surveys¹, the overall assessment (Question 1) has only been lower in 2019 (2019: 1.96; 2020: 2.63; 2021: 3.02; 2022: 2.53); the evaluation of the teaching methods (Question 2) also follows this trend: 2.43, 3.04, 3.23, and 3.07 (from 2019 to 2022, respectively). Normally the number of the students giving the answer “E=not applicable” in this survey follows the trend

¹ Available in the course's MyCourses workspace: <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/course/view.php?id=36451#section-0> (scroll down to the title “Feedback summary”)

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June 27, 2023

of the overall numerical feedback but this year, actually, the number of the choice “E” is slightly lower than last year; the highest number of these choices can be seen in question 8, indicating that comparing the difficulty level of this course with other courses is challenging.

The answers to the open questions showed somewhat polarized opinions. Many students have found the whole course, or some parts of it, frustrating (the structure was seen unclear, the course was seen to last too long, parts of the contents were seen unnecessary or overlapping with earlier studies), while other students liked at least some parts of the course. This is very well reflected in the questions, where it was asked, which parts should be removed, and which retained: many modules get votes in both directions. Therefore, it seems that each module is useful for someone. Even though many of the teaching events were organised on campus, the lecture time (Mondays 8:30-10:00 am) was not actively criticized, which was a positive surprise to me. Probably this is a reflection from the restrictions of the pandemic times: students have learned to appreciate the opportunity to attend the teaching together on campus.

Even though several students expressed an utter dislike towards the course in the survey, it is noteworthy that the feedback, which I collected during the course, was very different. There, many students expressed positive views towards many of the course topics. In my mind, this means that in the electronic (Webropol) survey results the negative feedback is over-represented.

Development actions for next year: It is evident that this course needs to be further improved. For next year, I will still try to improve the communication about the modules’ contents as well as about the schedule. Some changes will be implemented in the schedule, mostly based on the teachers’ requests, but the overall schedule will stay essentially the same (teaching in all periods, I-V). I will take a close look into the contents of the different modules, assuring that the workload will not be too much.

I feel privileged to collaborate in the context of the ALC course with extremely competent and motivated professionals: Jukka Kortela – MatLAB; Seija Leppänen – Career Planning; Henna Niiva – study skills; Kirsi Heino and Prof. Riikka Puurunen – SAE; Henni Kervinen – Communication Skills; and Sonja Hilavuo – Entrepreneurial Mindset. Also, numerous teachers from all CHEM School’s master’s majors have been helping me with evaluating the students’ essays, and the Learning Service personnel’s support has been very valuable. Without all this, implementing the course would be simply impossible. I thank you all, and I am looking forward to continuing the collaboration!

General feedback from the teacher: I repeat myself by stating again that the students’ justified and analytical feedback is very important – I am extremely proud of our smart and skilful students! Even though the survey’s results and students’ comments are not as positive as I had hoped for, I am confident that the course is useful for most of the students. At the same time, it is of course evident that there are many aspects, which need to be improved.

Some students claimed that they had not learned anything during the course and that the contents were just a repetition of bachelor-level courses. I find this criticism difficult to accept because I know for a fact that the contents of the modules have been created especially for the ALC course. There may be similar themes with previous courses, but the detailed contents of the modules are original.

Next year will be probably the last time this course is arranged. I aim to improve the course content so that the numerical averages will be the highest ever because that would leave a positive feeling about the course to me, and hopefully to the students, too!