

Teacher's Feedback: CHEM-E0105 Academic Learning Community

Course facts: 3-5 cr; periods I-V (2020-21); number of students: 147 (111 students in total passed the course, ca. 76%); grades: pass–fail

MyCourses: <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/course/view.php?id=27978>

Teaching and learning methods: Lectures, workshops, quizzes, independent studying and exercises, attending events, as well as academic advising and major-specific feedback sessions. Due to the pandemic situation, all the activities 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. The latter was a completely new module, while the former was essentially the same as previous years. 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 Virtual Week, 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 during Zoom sessions, 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 2021). For comparison, the corresponding average values are also shown for last study year (2020). The number of respondents (n) was 61-63 in 2021 and 48 or 49 in 2020.

	Average 2021 (E)	Min.-Max.	Average 2020 (E)
1. Overall assessment	3.02 (0)	1-5	2.63 (1)
2. Teaching methods	3.23 (0)	1-5	3.04 (2)
3. I am pleased with my study effort	3.74 (0)	1-5	3.56 (1)
4. Workload compared to other courses	3.40 (1)	1; 3-5	2.94 (2)
5. Correspondence to the description	3.72 (0)	1-5	3.54 (1)
6. Effect on the study motivation	2.63 (0)	1-5	2.65 (0)
7. Difficulty compared to other courses	2.38 (3)	1-5	2.23 (5)
8. The course enhanced my general skills	3.33 (3)	1-5	2.98 (3)

The numerical averages of the students' feedback are good. Looking at the results of the previous feedback surveys¹, it can be seen that since 2019 the overall assessment (Question 1) has been constantly rising (2019: 1.96; 2020: 2.63; 2021: 3.02); similar trend is observed with evaluation of the teaching methods (Question 2): 2.43, 3.04, and 3.23 (from 2019 to 2021, respectively). It is also note-

¹ Available in the course's MyCourses workspace: <https://mycourses.aalto.fi/course/view.php?id=27978> (scroll down to the bottom of the page)

Kyösti Ruuttunen
June 22, 2021

worthy that the number of the students giving the answer “E=not applicable” has decreased. Additionally, in the open questions, change in the students’ attitude is notable compared to previous years. The students are not only complaining but some are even stating that they liked the course, which gives a very good feeling! Moreover, in the questions, where it is asked, which parts should be removed and which retained, basically all the modules get votes in both directions. My analysis from this is that each module is useful for someone, meaning that developing the course has been quite successful. It is also remarkable that this year the lecture time (Mondays 8:30-10:00 am) is not criticized at all. This is most probably because the lectures were organised online, so the students did not need to use time for travelling to the campus.

Even though many students had a positive view of the course (or at least some parts of it), there were still several students who expressed an utter dislike towards the course. Some students claimed that they had not learned anything and that the contents were just a repetition of bachelor-level courses. I find this criticism, in fact, not at all justified because I know as a fact that the contents covered *e.g.* in the SAE and the Communication Skills modules were completely new and created specially for the ALC course; yet, some students saw also these modules as useless repetition.

Development actions for next year: I am very happy to see the positive development of the student feedback. At the same time, however, it is evident that this course can be further improved. As considerable changes were implemented in the study year 2020-21, nothing much will be changed for next year. Instead, I will try to develop the course by making small changes in the contents and probably also by changing the schedule slightly (there were requests for moving the SAE module to periods I or II, which I see justified). I will also pay attention in somehow trying to change the complete lack of motivation that some students tend to feel towards this course. As I am rather puzzled about how to do this, I will be in contact with pedagogical experts and study psychologists about this issue.

I feel privileged to collaborate in the context of the ALC course with extremely competent professionals: Henna Niiva – study skills; Kirsi Heino and Prof. Riikka Puurunen – SAE; Rinna Toikka & Henni Kervinen – Communication Skills; Matthew Billington – Thesis Review; and Lidia Borisova – Entrepreneurial Mindset. Also, numerous teachers from all CHEM School’s master’s majors have been helping me with evaluating the students’ essays. Without this valuable support, 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: Again, I am very grateful for the students’ justified and analytical feedback – I am extremely proud of our smart and skilful students! It is delightful to see that the improvements implemented have proven successful, and that the positive development in the students’ feedback is continuing. Nevertheless, the student feedback also points out clearly some critical aspects, and it is evident that there is still a lot of room for improvements in the ALC course.

In the end, I again quote myself: I am fascinated by the different themes covered in this course, and I am convinced that all of the topics are of extreme importance for CHEM School students during the studies, as well as in their future working life. Therefore, my motto for this course continues to be: “Let’s make this the best course ever!”