

A Few Thoughts on Being A Successful Biology Major

A Word About Competition: All of you were excellent students in high school. Try to avoid an attitude of competing with your fellow students. It can be upsetting to you and it is bad for forming friendships and class morale. Just do your best and don't worry about how others perform. Remember that grades in this course are not based on a curve and are instead only based on your performance, as I evaluate it, as an experienced (25 years) College/University instructor.

On Study Groups: Do get together often with your fellow students and talk about the material. Find out what you can't explain and don't understand clearly. Then ask me about it in class, office hours, or review sessions. Study groups require that the members trust each other, that individuals are willing to be honest and ask others for explanations or criticize what someone else has said, if it is wrong. Study groups not only teach communication but they also provide an excellent check on how you are learning. Moreover, explaining something to someone else is a good way to learn.

Pre-Course preparation: Preparation varies among our students. Most of you are in your first semester but about 1/3rd of our class has completed at least a year of college and many of these have already taken half of intro biology during the second semester of their freshman year. Some biology students arrive at CHC with extensive science and math backgrounds, perhaps including two or more biology courses, while others arrive having only taken one course in biology and chemistry and mathematics through trigonometry. One would expect that the well-prepared students should consistently earn the highest grades in intro. This is often, but is certainly not always, the case. Excellent preparation can certainly help you but it can also lead to over confidence and poor work habits. And, it is important to remember that it is very common for those with lesser preparation, but with good work habits and a strong desire to learn, to be among the top students in the class.

Commitment: Being a successful science major takes a greater commitment than frankly, is required in many other academic disciplines. It is certainly true that the best students in any area usually work very hard and are passionate about ideas. But, the fact is that science students have large numbers of required courses that tend to require lots of study. Moreover, science students spend more time in formal class and lab settings. To succeed you must be willing to study effectively and diligently. To do your best you must realize that you must come to class ready to learn and not burned out from partying the previous night. This class meets MWF and each of these is a workday that should be preceded by study.

Science and Medicine: If you are interested in medicine I would urge you to think about the following. Regardless of whether or not you graduate as a science major, do take as many challenging courses that will help you understand the function of the body as you can. Why do I say this? Being a good physician requires not only warmth and a human touch but it requires real understanding of the operation of the body in health and disease. Deep understanding, the kind that allows you to see what others simply cannot, does not come from minimal exposure to the sciences that most impinge on how the body functions. Understanding takes time and repeated testing of your understanding. Design your curriculum accordingly; not with an eye to what will yield the highest grade to effort. *The general spirit of what I have written applies as well to those who plan to follow careers outside of the health sciences.*