

Adjustments to Course Schedule

I have decided not to collect a lab report for Experiment 7 on Chemical Equilibrium. That being said, I disagree with the arguments that were presented for the assignment's elimination:

- The experiment is a highly appropriate subject for a formal laboratory report. (My colleague Truman Schwartz, who developed the present form of the experiment, had his second-semester general chemistry class write a formal report on this lab two years ago.) In the Procedure section, one could discuss the rationale for the experimental design and how the spectroscopy worked. In the Results and Discussion section, one could explain in detail the spreadsheet calculations. Indeed, a danger of using spreadsheets is that one can type in formulas blindly without understanding the underlying concepts.
- One cannot realistically claim to have mastered scientific writing after two reports. I have co-authored 14 scientific papers since graduating from college, and I still have more to learn about writing.
- The workload in Chemistry 112 has been appropriate and typical for a first-year course in the natural sciences. In fact, general chemistry instructors at Macalester usually administer four midterms and a comprehensive final. When designing this course, I decided not to administer a final precisely to provide you with more time for writing at the end.

All of this notwithstanding, I believe in the maxim, "Never let the perfect be the enemy of the good." If you sincerely feel overwhelmed and undermotivated at this point in the semester, all of my pedagogical rationales for a third formal lab report are moot. I am willing to let you focus your Chemistry 112 efforts at the end of the semester on the final problem set (covering material not on this Thursday's test) and on revising your final papers. Remember that both are due on (or before!) the very last day of finals, Tuesday, December 21. (You also need to turn in your notebooks for Experiment 7 to Rob.)