

# Why I love Organic Chemistry

by Karla Schallies

This is the story of how a Biology major learned to love organic chemistry. I transferred to the College of Arts and Sciences of Suffolk University as a junior to complete my biology degree. Suffolk University has many requirements in the hopes of preparing well-rounded scientists; one of the requirements as a biology major is to complete two semesters of general chemistry and two semesters of organic chemistry. As my second semester of general chemistry was coming to an end, my friends and I started talking about the next step, the organic chemistry course. Everyone talked about how complex and difficult the subject is, and, as it is understandable, I started feeling extremely nervous. I had really enjoyed my general chemistry class and performed well academically, but many people I know said that the two courses were not related at all, and that getting a good grade in general chemistry did not necessarily mean that you would do well in organic chemistry. I felt discouraged before the course even started; even though I had taken a basic organic chemistry class during high school back in my country of origin, Venezuela, I had not taken another class in over seven years. My nervousness increased and the nightmare of failing the course started to wander around my head. Moreover, I was also concerned that I, being a non-native English speaker because my first language is Spanish, could have problems understanding the terminology that was otherwise unrelated to what I had learned in my general chemistry class.

My first day of classes arrived sooner than I expected and, as I was sitting in the classroom waiting for the professor to come, I had an eye-opening moment. I had really enjoyed taking general chemistry and, I realized that there was no evidence to suggest that I would not like organic chemistry just as well. Not only that, but ever since I started college I realized how important chemistry is to the understanding of biological processes. With this in mind, I planned on having a chemistry minor that would require me to take organic chemistry and other extra courses besides the biology requirements and do well academically. The professor walked in the classroom thus interrupting my thoughts and my first impression was that she was young and engaging. Her name is Dr. Denyce Wicht and to her I devote this article.

The class started right away and Dr. Wicht talked about the subject matter, the syllabus, and some very important points that were going to help us be successful in the class. She emphasized the importance of thinking and practicing everyday to be able to understand all of the concepts and reactions that we were going to learn from that point on. I immediately felt better and I thought to myself, "there is hope; this class is not impossible if I study hard." However, students were still a little afraid of the subject. It was then that Dr. Wicht drew two lines together like shown here. She asked the group what they thought the lines meant and answers started coming, some funny and some very accurate. A very funny answer I remember was that a student suggested she had drawn the "greater than" symbol in the wrong direction... imagine that! This was the icebreaker that led to

laughter and explanations for the entire class. She explained that arrows and lines have very specific meaning to organic chemists. Specifically, from here on in organic chemistry, that symbol must mean propane to us. She also explained that we would never have to be afraid of molecules because we are both bigger and smarter than them. She continued to explain more and more about molecules and different analytical techniques. But most importantly, she taught us that organic chemistry is not a science requirement that should make students afraid of chemistry or discourage further chemistry studies, but is the study of how molecules interact in special and unique ways.

The semesters flew like the wind as Dr. Wicht helped all of us understand organic chemistry with jokes, by telling us about her own experiences, and writing everything down in the whiteboard so we could understand each word and its importance. One of Dr. Wicht's famous sayings is, "Molecules do not talk," so we have to use our knowledge of chemistry to understand them and be able to communicate with them. She was also great at finding relationships between the textbook's ideas and her own ideas and how all of this could be practical in our world. The class was challenging, but the first semester happened so fast that during the winter break I was eager to start the second semester. I was looking forward to hearing the jokes Dr. Wicht had prepared for the second semester and the new ideas that she will develop to help us enjoy the second part of the class like the many reactions and names of compounds. She even used animal sounds to help us remember group names, like the donkey sound that will always remind me of the enol group. Everybody in our class was touched by Dr. Wicht's approach to teaching organic chemistry; she made the lectures so enjoyable and involving that the group really bonded and learned many new ideas for their future as chemists. Now, when I go back to my notes, I realize that everything she taught was really simple because she took the time to explain it to us and make sure we understood everything at our own pace.

Dr. Wicht not only made lectures different and interesting, but she also made the laboratories unique and incredible. She introduced Green Chemistry into all of our laboratory procedures, which became of vital importance in my life as a member of the Suffolk University Student Affiliate Chapter of the American Chemical Society (SU SACS). The SU SACS chapter is very involved in Green Chemistry activities and I felt that having laboratories that support these ideas is extremely valuable. The laboratory gave me confidence in my knowledge that I use in my everyday life. It taught me about a wide variety of topics, from typical issues like, global warming to performing magic shows for kids using safer chemicals.

Finally, the most important thing Dr. Wicht taught me was to continue working and using all my potential no matter what class or how hard the class. This not only gave me the greatest confidence to pass the class with a great grade, but it also influenced my decision to take advanced organic chemistry in the following fall semester. I believe that what makes a professor unforgettable is that he or she helps the students understand the material by making it fun, useful for everyday life, and challenging enough to be enjoyable. There are not many professors like these around, which is why I know how lucky Suffolk University, my friends, and I are to have such a dedicated professor for organic chemistry.