

Home of the Happy Student UPEI Chemistry

by Steve Ellis

If you stroll into the lounge on the second floor of the KC Irving Chemistry Centre at 12:45 p.m. on a Thursday afternoon, don't expect to be able to hear yourself think. Don't expect to be able to find a seat either. At this time, and at many other times during the week, the lounge is bustling with activity as people eat their lunches, swap stories and bicker over the answers of assignments that are due for next class. In a way, it is reminiscent of a family meal.

The scene in the student lounge reflects the general attitude of chemistry students. They are happy and at home. Who wouldn't be at home in the comforting environment of a new, well designed and spacious building?

There are so many things to be happy about in the new chemistry centre. The lounge is surely the envy of most other departments, with its lockers and beautiful view of the city. It seems to encourage a new spirit of camaraderie among chemistry students.

"I think, to a certain degree, that chemistry majors seem to be doing more things together than previous years.

[We] do our assignments together and help each other out a lot," relates Rochelle Baldwin, a third year chemistry major.

The students appreciate even more the new undergraduate laboratories and the improved research spaces for professors.

"I like the labs because they are big and there is lots of equipment," says Baldwin. "They are more open too. You don't feel like you are stuck in the lab because of the big windows."

Stephen DeGrace, 21, a fourth year honours chemistry student, really appreciates his research space. "It makes my life so much easier," he says with a smile.

The only thing that could make life even better for chemistry students is better instruments, especially a new, nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) instrument. "A reliable NMR is critical for research in organometallic [and other disciplines of] chemistry," says DeGrace.

The new chemistry facilities seem to be drawing students into chemistry as well. This year twenty-nine students are taking Chemistry 221, a

course generally taken only by chemistry majors. This is the highest enrollment ever.

Kristian Macdonald, a second year chemistry major, explains his reason for taking chemistry: "When I found out they had a new building, I knew the facilities would be good. I heard that they were among the best in the Atlantic provinces."

It is not just those who are enrolled in chemistry who are enjoying the new building. Spots that are quite popular among other students of UPEI include the student computer laboratory and the lounging area just outside of the large lecture hall on the first floor. Both locations are often filled by students from a variety of different faculties.

If you have not had a chance to view the new building, the department will give you a chance to explore the facility this week on Friday, October 25 and Saturday, October 26. In celebration of National Chemistry Week, an exhibition will take place from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. both days. Members of the faculty, staff and student body will be on hand to give guided tours and to do demonstrations of some colourful chemistry. All are welcome.

Cancer Causing Agents Used in Labs

By Anne Marie Vatcher
The Muse, Memorial
University

Science students at Memorial university are worried about the potential dangers of using carcinogenic substances in science labs.

Recently, a student complained to the student council about the safety of lab environments and student exposure to potentially harmful chemicals while conducting experiments.

The student, who wanted to remain anonymous, specifically mentioned a Cell Biology lab that required students to handle xylene, a known carcinogen. Students were informed of the dangerous nature of the chemical, and were instructed as to proper safety procedures which were to be exercised.

But the student's letter stated concern for personal safety because "due to the crowded conditions, and often rushed deadlines for completion of the experiments, not all students adhere to the rules."

Geraldine Kennedy of the university's hazardous materials control department, does not feel the labs at Memorial are overly dangerous.

"Most labs, when they're setting up experiments, are set up considering the factor that most students wouldn't have the expertise and the technical background as say, a science technician would," Kennedy said. "[Labs are] set up considering, 'What

possibly could go wrong with this experiment?' and are set up with safeguards in place."

Kennedy said Memorial meets safety standards, and when possible the least hazardous alternatives to dangerous chemicals are used.

"Any chemical carries some hazard with it," Kennedy said. But the student who wrote the letter doesn't agree with risking personal safety for an experiment.

"If a substance is a carcinogen and is so dangerous that it can be absorbed by the skin and upon inhalation, there are no excuses for its use," the student's letter said.

The letter also states that "the crowded, hectic atmosphere of these laboratories is simply not conducive to work with hazardous chemicals," and suggests instructors provide alternatives to students who don't want to work with toxic substances, plus greater enforcement of safety precautions.

Kennedy says that all proper precautions are already being taken, and to her knowledge there has been no case of a student encountering serious ill effects due to working in a lab.

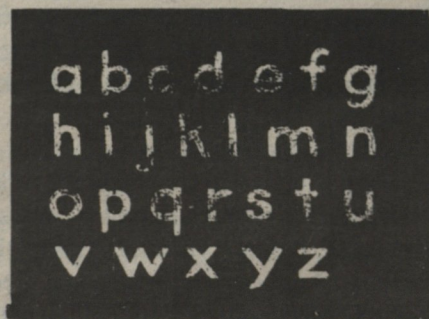
But Kennedy did acknowledge one of the student's concerns.

"You're going to have accidents and sometimes it can't be avoided, mostly because of the number of students you have going through," Kennedy said.

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