SUCCEEDING IN ORGANIC CHEMISTRY

Organic chemistry is a subject in which there is a large amount of knowledge which is expanding at an ever increasing rate. At first sight learning organic chemistry might seem an impossible task. But you can learn organic chemistry and do very well in the course. The most important factors in learning organic chemistry is a willingness to work hard, a good knowledge of general chemistry (particularly chemical bonding), the ability to think logically and to reason by analogy. It is not necessary to have a good memory to do well; in fact, the less you try to memorize material, the better. What is most important is to be able to draw logical conclusions from data and to discern logical connections relating new material to information you have already seen.

Study Hints

Different people learn at different rates, but the average person should expect to spend 10 hours or more per week outside of class on this course. People learn in different ways, but below are some suggestions that students have found helpful in the past.

1. Read each chapter at least twice, once before it is covered in class. Some people find it helpful to takes notes as they read or to highlight the text.

2. Rather than spend all day on organic chemistry, try to spend smaller amounts of time every day. You will remember more of what you have learned this way.

3. Do all of the assigned problems and more if you have time. It does little good to read the problem and then look up the answer in the solutions manual. You can easily convince yourself that you understand the material when you really don't. However, if you've spent some time on a problem and can't find a solution, go ahead and look at the answer and then try some similar problems.

4. Meet regularly with a study group. You may want to work on problems, quiz each other, discuss difficult points in the lecture or text, etc.

5. Some people find it useful to tape the lectures and listen to them again or to recopy their notes as soon as possible after the lecture. This reinforces the material in their minds.

6. Come to me during my office hours or at other times if you are having difficulty or wish to discuss something. I am happy to help and will try to make specific suggestions for you. Some people find tutors to work with. Note that there are few student tutors at MCC for a course like organic chemistry since almost everyone who has completed the course has moved on.

7. Particularly as we start studying organic reactions in the middle of the semester, I urge students to keep a list of reactions. I suggest doing this on index cards where you might write the name of the reaction, an example of it and some information on reaction conditions, competing reactions, etc.

8. Try to keep a good overview of the material and avoid getting bogged down in minor details ("the trees and forest” syndrome). It might be helpful to make diagrams for yourself.
9. Try to keep a positive attitude and continue working when you encounter difficulties. One bad performance on an exam is not a disaster and you will have chances to recover.

**Exam Strategies**

The following are suggestions for taking exams in organic chemistry that should help improve your performance. You should realize that a well-constructed exam will have some questions that are very simple and straightforward, and some that are more complex and challenging. Don't get upset or frustrated when you see a problem that you don't know how to answer.

1. You are allowed to bring in a sheet of paper with relevant information. Prepare this carefully by writing important reaction, formulas, concepts, etc. This can be a good way of organizing your studying for the exam.

2. Arrive early for the exam. Don't waste the first few minutes taking off your coat, getting pens and pencils, etc.

3. Read over the exam quickly and begin by answering questions you know the answer to or can figure out very quickly. Answer the question completely but don't waste time giving information that is not asked for.

4. Attempt the difficult questions only after you have finished the simpler ones.

5. The point value of each question is given on the exam. Don't waste a lot of time on a question that is worth only a few points.

6. On essay questions or questions calling for an explanation, express yourself in complete, logical thoughts and be specific.

7. If you don't understand a question or what is being asked for, ask the instructor about it during the exam.

8. If you get very nervous during exams, you might want to contact the Counseling Center and take one of their short workshops on relieving test anxiety.