

General Chemistry Teaching Workshop: A Student's View

by Kimberly Glenn

How often do students have the chance to step on the other side of the lectern and see the classroom through the eyes of their professors? From July 20 to 25, a group of seven students had the opportunity to do just that. Ronald Ambe, Clark-Atlanta University; Chris Boeschel, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL; Jewel Daniel, The City College of CUNY; Kimberly Glenn, University of Kentucky; Fred Spolitino, University of Montana; Michelle Thornhill, American University, and Renyu Zhang, University of Rochester, participated in the 1997 Stony Brook General Chemistry Teaching Workshop.

These students were not just spectators, but active participants, who had experienced chemistry instruction in a workshop format both as learners and as teachers. Recent research on the workshop approach shows that this method of active learning improves not only students' performance in chemistry courses but also enhances their overall critical-thinking skills.

During one of the conference sessions, the veteran workshop chemistry students shared their experiences and told others: "Don't feel like you have to have all the answers. The peer leader is supposed to guide the students so they can discover the answers for themselves. Of course, a peer leader should have a good working knowledge of chemistry, but leadership and interpersonal skills are just as important because the leader has to be able to get the group to open up and work with one another. A workshop ap-

proach is just as beneficial for the peer leaders as for the students in the workshop."

Having students and professors collaborate and brainstorm together on ideas on how to enrich the learning experience for first-time chemistry students proved valuable to all involved. Joe March, the General Chemistry Lab Director at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the involvement of the students in the conference "brought reality to the discussion" and allowed professors to get immediate feedback on their ideas for the classroom. Fred Spolitino, a classical literature major from the University of Montana, said, "It was nice to bounce ideas off of the experts." Some particularly liked the session about Online Web-Based Learning. They felt that bringing computers into the classroom would bring "a new life to chemistry".

With the conclusion of the conference, everyone had ideas of how to continue and better chemistry education at their schools. Joe Wilson, the Chemistry Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Kentucky, said that attending the conference was extremely helpful. "Being able to interact with the different faculty and students gave me a lot of ideas for workshop chemistry. I'm excited about starting the program at UK this Fall."

Kimberly Glenn is a mechanical engineering junior at the University of Kentucky, where she is a staff writer for the student newspaper. She plans to be a chemistry workshop peer leader in the Fall.