

General Course Information

CHEM434 Kinetics and Spectroscopy

0.125 EFTS 15 Points
First Semester 2026

Description

If you want to really understand chemistry, this is the course for you: it applies the fundamental physical and chemical principles developed in CHEM333 and CHEM343 for prediction, explanation and understanding of properties, structure and reactivity at a microscopic level.

The topics covered by this course are:

- Advanced reaction kinetics
- Spectroscopy and polymer analysis

This course is presented in the first semester only. It counts 15 points towards a Bachelor of Science with Honours / Masters of Science / Postgraduate Diploma of Science degree and should be taken in conjunction with other 400-level courses as advised by the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

Timetable

Refer to the University's online Course Information System or its timetable platform for students.

Lectures: Two hours of lectures per week. (For details see under 'Timetable' above.)

Tutorials: One hour every second week. (For details see under 'Timetable' above.)

Students should note that in the Science Faculty that the average student is responsible for approximately 4.5 hours of additional study for each hour of lectures at 400-level.

Course Co-ordinator

A/Prof Greg Russell, School of Physical and Chemical Sciences
Room JvH 635, ext 95129, email: greg.russell@canterbury.ac.nz

Assessment

Assignments: 20% (comprising 10% from each of the 2 lecturers)
End-of-course Exam: 80%

Examination and Formal Tests

End of Semester Exam: Three hours, with questions from both lecturers.

The following shall apply to all assessments in this course, except where a lecturer has specifically stated otherwise in written instructions for an assessment.

Generative AI Tools cannot be used for these assessments

In these assessments, you are strictly prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) to generate any materials or content related to the assessment. This is because students are expected to solve problems and demonstrate knowledge and understanding without the assistance of AI. The use of AI-generated content is not permitted and may be considered a breach of academic integrity. Please ensure that all work submitted is the result of your own human knowledge, skills, and efforts.

Textbook

P W Atkins & J de Paula, *Atkins' Physical Chemistry* (recent edition). This text covers some of the material of this course; it should be used to supplement the lecture material prepared by each lecturer. This textbook also contains many helpful worked examples and tutorial problems.

Copies are available on short-term loan from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Library.

Each lecturer will in addition provide library references and information handouts as appropriate.

Prerequisites

CHEM333 or CHEM343

Web-based resources

Various learning resources (lecture material, reference links, quizzes, discussion forums etc.) for this course are available via the University of Canterbury's *Learn* web site – <http://learn.canterbury.ac.nz/>. This site will also be used regularly as a means of communication and information distribution for all your Canterbury courses. **You should familiarise yourself with *Learn* as soon as possible.**

Goals of the Course

Students will become intimately familiar with all basic concepts of chemical kinetics, as employed throughout chemistry. They will learn that while there are millions of different chemical reactions, almost all of them reduce to one of four basic kinetic paradigms, and of these the so-called intermediate-complex model – involving the steady-state approximation – is the most profound. They will understand the most important theories for rates of chemical reactions, in particular transition-state theory, and be able to describe the variation of bimolecular and unimolecular rate coefficients with experimentally varied parameters.

Students will develop a sound understanding of the fundamental principles of polymer science and the spectroscopic and complementary analytical techniques employed in the characterisation of macromolecular materials. The course further introduces advanced spectroscopic methods, including surface-specific analytical techniques, and examines the application of these techniques to the solution of real-world scientific and technological problems.

Learning Outcomes (see also detailed Learning Objectives after Course Content, below)

- Develop the ability to apply scientific principles and concepts.
- Develop problem-solving and numeracy skills.
- Understand, evaluate, access and critically review new chemical information.
- Demonstrate the ability to think independently about chemical concepts.
- Develop a more in-depth knowledge of kinetics, spectroscopy and polymers.
- Know the concepts and phenomena of kinetics, spectroscopy and polymers.
- Communicate effectively in written English and chemical diagrams.

Transferable Skill Register

As a student in this course I will develop the following skills:

- Problem solving. This is a key skill that is transferable to most careers.
- Pattern spotting and logical analysis. A key feature of physical chemistry is the ability to understand similarities between processes and use this pattern recognition to address complex issues in a logical fashion.
- Critical analysis of data. This is a key skill that is transferable to most careers.
- Three-dimensional spatial awareness. The ability to think about molecules and chemical reactions in three dimensions is highly useful transferable skill.
- Graphical awareness. Graphs are the pictures of physical chemistry, as in “a picture paints a thousand words”. It is important to understand how equations translate into graphical pictures, and what these pictures convey in terms of physical behaviour.
- Science communication. A particularly important skill is being able to communicate scientific principles.

Summary of the Course Content

The topics covered by this course are:

ADVANCED REACTION KINETICS

(12 lectures)

Tables of thermodynamic data are comprehensive and are relatively easily used to say with certainty what will happen in chemical systems. But thermodynamics says nothing about how fast something will happen in chemistry. This is the domain of chemical kinetics, and really it is what chemistry is all about: the *timescale* on which chemical events happen. This course will equip students with an understanding of advanced chemical kinetics, with the following topics being covered:

- The language of kinetics: rate law, reaction order, rate coefficient, integrated rate law, pseudo-first-order kinetics, half-life, Arrhenius parameters.
- Experimental techniques for measuring rates, in particular spectroscopic methods.
- The steady-state approximation and the four most common paradigms for reaction mechanism: consecutive reactions, pre-equilibrium, parallel reactions and opposing reactions. In particular the potency and ubiquity of the pre-equilibrium (or intermediate-complex) model will be emphasized.
- Theories for bimolecular rate coefficients: collision theory, transition-state theory, Smoluchowski theory for diffusion-controlled reactions.
- Detailed case studies: kinetics of enzyme-catalysed reactions, and (time permitting) radical polymerization and/or emulsion polymerization.
- The effect on bimolecular rate coefficients of viscosity, pressure, solvent polarity, dielectric permittivity, ionic strength, reactant substituents and isotopic substitution (the so-called kinetic isotope effect).
- The kinetics of gas-phase unimolecular reactions.

Lecturer: A/Prof Greg Russell, ext 95129, Room JvH 635, greg.russell@canterbury.ac.nz

SPECTROSCOPY AND POLYMER ANALYSIS

(12 lectures)

Topics from the following will be covered (time permitting):

- What makes polymers different to low molar mass organic materials.
 - Distributive properties of polymers.
 - Analytical approaches
 - Sample preparation and handling.
 - Preparative fractionation
 - "Depth profiling"
 - Time-dependent studies
 - Comparative analysis
- Characterisation and analysis of surfaces and microscopy
 - When and why surface characterisation is important.
 - Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM)
 - Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM)
 - Attenuated Total Reflectance Spectroscopy (ATR)
 - Photoacoustic Spectroscopy (PAS)
 - Electron Spectroscopy for Chemical Analysis (ESCA) and Auger Electron Spectroscopy (AES)
 - Secondary-Ion Mass Spectroscopy (SIMS) and Ion Scattering Spectroscopy (ISS)
 - Scanning Probe Microscopy
 - Measurement of contact angle and surface energy
- Spectroscopic analysis of polymers
 - ^1H -NMR examples of application in polymer studies
 - ^{13}C -NMR for structural analysis, tacticity, comonomer content etc.
 - Infra-red spectroscopy
- Positron Annihilation Lifetime Spectroscopy
- Thermal analysis
 - DSC, TGA, DMA, DEA
 - Modulated DSC (MDSC)

Lecturer: Prof Peter Mallon, JvH 7th floor Desk Number 728-011, pemallon@sun.ac.za

Specific Learning Outcomes

Reaction Kinetics:

At the end of this lecture block you should be able to:

- Demonstrate a high degree of familiarity with the following basic concepts of kinetics, including the important results associated with each: rate law, reaction order, rate coefficient, integrated rate law, pseudo-first-order kinetics, half-life, determination of reaction order, variation of rate coefficient with temperature.

- Outline common experimental methods – in particular spectroscopy – for measuring rates and explain their strengths and weaknesses.
- Justify the steady-state approximation and derive and use results for the four common reaction mechanisms of consecutive reactions, pre-equilibrium, parallel reactions and opposing reactions.
- Discuss, as detailed case studies, the kinetics of enzyme-catalysed reactions, radical polymerization and (time permitting) emulsion polymerization.
- Explain the following theories for bimolecular rate coefficients: collision theory, transition state theory, Smoluchowski theory for diffusion-controlled reactions.
- Explain how bimolecular rate coefficients are affected by viscosity, pressure, solvent polarity, dielectric permittivity, ionic strength, reactant substituents and isotopic substitution.
- Describe the variation of unimolecular rate coefficients with pressure.

Spectroscopy and Polymer Analysis:

At the end of this lecture block you should be able to:

- Explain what makes polymers different to low molar mass materials and highlight the challenges in doing polymer analysis.
- Describe the spectroscopic and other common analytical techniques used to analyse polymers including the principles behind these techniques.
- Compare the various analytical techniques
- Interpret the results and data from the various techniques and relate this to the structure and properties of the materials.
- Select and describe methods and procedures that could be used to solve “real” problems including what information would be needed to solve the problem.

GENERAL INFORMATION | TE KIMI MŌHIOHIO 2026

Policy on ‘Dishonest Practice’ | Ngā Takahitanga me ngā Tinihanga

The University has strict guidelines regarding ‘dishonest practice’ and ‘breach of instructions’ in relation to the completion and submission of examinable material. In cases where dishonest practice is involved in tests or other work submitted for credit, a department may choose to not mark such work – see the online guidelines in relation to [‘Academic Integrity’](#).

The School of Physical and Chemical Sciences upholds this policy. It considers plagiarism, collusion, copying and ghost writing – all detailed below – to be unacceptable and dishonest practices:

- **Plagiarism | Tārua Whānako** is the presentation of any material (text, data or figures, on any medium including computer files) from any other source without clear and adequate acknowledgement of the source.
- **Collusion** is the presentation of work performed in whole, or in part, in conjunction with another person or persons, but submitted as if it has been completed by the named author alone. This interpretation is not intended to discourage students from having discussions about how to approach an assigned task and incorporating general ideas that come from those discussions into their own individual submissions, but acknowledgement is necessary.
- **Copying** is the use of material (in any medium, including computer files) produced by another person or persons with or without their knowledge and approval. **This includes copying of the lab reports (raw data may be shared within the group if permitted or required by the experiment) – data analysis and interpretation of obtained results MUST be performed individually.**
- **Ghost writing** is the use of other person(s) (whether with or without payment) to prepare all or part of an item of work submitted for assessment.
- **Generative AI Tools: The following shall apply to all assessments in this course, except where a lecturer has specifically stated otherwise in written instructions for an assessment.**
In all assessments, you are strictly prohibited from using generative artificial intelligence (AI) to generate any materials or content related to the assessment. This is because students are expected to solve problems and demonstrate knowledge and understanding without the assistance of AI. The use of AI-generated content is not permitted and may be considered a breach of academic integrity. Please ensure that all work submitted is the result of your own human knowledge, skills, and efforts.

Special consideration of assessment | Ngā Pairuri Motuhake

[‘Special Consideration’](#) (previously termed ‘Aegrotat Application’) for an item of assessment is for students who have covered the work involved but have been prevented from demonstrating their knowledge or skills

at the time of the assessment due to unforeseen circumstances, whether illness, injury, bereavement, car crash or any other extenuating circumstance *beyond one's control*. Special Consideration for a test/exam may be because a student has not sat it or has done so with impaired performance. Applications can be submitted via the above link and must be made **no later than five working days after the assessment due date**. Note that special consideration is **not available for items worth less than 10% of the overall course mark**. In the case of illness or injury, medical consultation should normally have taken place either shortly before or within 24 hours after the due date for the required work or test/examination.

Note that you may be required to sit a special exam or your grade may not be changed if there is insufficient evidence of your performance from other invigilated assessment items in the course. ***You have the right to appeal any decision.***

It is important to understand that Special Consideration is only available *where course work has been covered*, and the inability to demonstrate this fully is both *no longer possible* AND is due to *unexpected circumstances beyond one's control*. Thus Special Consideration is **NOT available for:**

- essays, assignments or quizzes where an extension of time is available to complete the assessment item (see below for the process to involved);
- missed lectures during the semester;
- experiencing examination anxiety;
- having several examinations or assessments close together;
- known impairment, such as chronic illness (medical or psychological), injury or disability unless medical evidence confirms that the circumstances were exacerbated, despite appropriate management, at the time of assessment;
- mistaking the date or time of an examination (this is a circumstance one can control!);
- failing to turn up to an examination or test because of sleeping in (a circumstance as above!);
- where applications are repeatedly made for the same or similar reason, then the application may be declined on the grounds that the reason is not unexpected;
- where the application is made at the time of the assessment but the supporting documentation is received significantly after this date or after the date results are released; or
- the application is made following the release of results (unless under exceptional circumstances).

Extensions of deadlines | Tononga Wā Āpiti

Where an extension may be granted for an assessment item, this will be decided by application to the course co-ordinator and/or the lecturer concerned.

Late withdrawal from a course

If you are prevented by extenuating circumstances from completing the course after the final date for withdrawing from the course, you may apply for special consideration for late discontinuation. For details on special consideration, or to make an application, refer to the Examinations Office website <http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/exams/>. Applications must be submitted **within five days** of the end of the main examination period for the semester.

Missing of tests | Te Matangaro i ngā Whakamātautau

In rare cases a student will not be able to sit a test. In such cases, the student should consult with the course co-ordinator to arrange alternative procedures. **This must be done well in advance of the set date for the test.**

Past exams

Past exams can be found on the [Library website](#).

Submission of reports and assignments

Reports (including lab reports) and assignments should be handed in on time. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances (such as illness or bereavement). If an extension is required, as early as possible you should request it from the lecturer concerned.

Note: If you do not submit an assignment for assessment, you will be allotted zero marks, which will affect your final result. You should ensure that you pick up marked assignments and keep them until the end of the course as evidence that the work was completed and marked in the case that either is disputed. To guard against accidental loss, it would be prudent to keep photocopies or electronic copies of anything submitted.

Late Work

Acceptance of late work for assessment will be at the discretion of the course coordinator and/or the lecturer concerned. If your assessment is likely to be late, please contact the relevant of these people **before the assessment is due**. Never assume that an extension will be automatically granted – some courses have the policy of no late work being accepted. A commonly exercised policy is to deduct 10% of the total marks for each day that the work is late, where weekends and public holidays also count as such days.

Marks and Grades | Taumata Ako

The following numbers should be considered as a guide to the expected grades under normal circumstances.

Grade:	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D	E
Minimum mark %:	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	55	50	40	0

The School reserves the right to adjust this mark/grade conversion, up or down, to achieve consistency of assessments standards.

Reconsideration of Grades: Students should, in the first instance, speak to the course co-ordinator about their marks. If they cannot reach an agreeable solution, or have questions about their grade in a course, students should then speak to the Coordinator of 400-level studies, [Professor Sarah Masters](#) (phone 369 4229). Students can appeal any decision made on their final grade. You can apply at the Registry for reconsideration of the final grade within four weeks of the date of publication of final results. Be aware that there are time limits for each step of the appeals process.

Student Accessibility Services | Te Whaikaha

Students can speak with someone at [Student Accessibility Service](#), phone: 369 3334 (or ext. 93334), email: sas@canterbury.ac.nz.

Academic Advice: [Professor Sarah Masters](#) is the coordinator of 400-level chemistry courses. Her interest is in the academic performance and well-being of all such students. Anyone experiencing problems with their chemistry courses or requiring guidance about their 400-level courses should get in contact with Sarah.

Sarah Masters
Coordinator of 400-level Chemistry Courses
School of Physical and Chemical Sciences
2026