

PHARMACOLOGY & TOXICOLOGY STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION

PTSA COURSE COMMENTARY: A GUIDE TO SURVIVING PHARMACOLOGY AND TOXICOLOGY

This Course Commentary is a compilation of comments from the 2012-2013 course evaluations, as well as a compilation of course-specific tips from previous students. For the numerical breakdown of the 2012-2013 course evaluations, please check out the "Faculty of Arts & Science Course Evaluations Feedback" link on <https://portal.utoronto.ca>.

PCL102

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the diversity of topics covered in the course to be very interesting. Science students found a large portion of the material to be a review of basic concepts they learned/are learning in BIO230 and high school biology, as well as a very basic and interesting overview of the drug industry and the process of drug discovery. Non-science majors found that the lectures geared more towards students with a science background; As well, they also noted that they appreciate the use of many analogies to explain the more scientific concepts. Many students have mentioned that they would have liked a more dynamic and interactive teaching method (e.g. more tutorials), but that they appreciated the level of enthusiasm in the delivery of the lectures. Students appreciated the external resources and readings for this course. They found it to be very stimulating and relevant. They enjoyed how the course gave real world applications to the course material.

PCL201

Course evaluation comments:

This course focuses on basic pharmacokinetic principles, as well as certain other sub-disciplines in pharmacology such as pharmacoeconomics. Students appreciated the variety of material and the level of depth in presented in this course. However, some have mentioned that more focus on the background material relating directly to the course would have been beneficial. As well, students found the material to be very dense and too memory intensive, which made the course more geared towards memorizing arbitrary facts instead of understanding core concepts in pharmacokinetics. Additionally, students find that the material tends to be repeated too often between each section of the course. They also found that the pacing for certain sections—particularly in the section for pharmacoeconomics—to be too fast. Students found it difficult to ask questions during class. They found that the environment and atmosphere was not conducive for questions. However, they appreciated the tutorials and the extra exam review sessions. As well, they appreciated the use of the online discussion board as a medium for asking questions. With regards to evaluations, students found the wording of the test questions to be rather vague at times.

Tips from upper years:

Many students found the definition of some terminology is to be very specific. They suggested making sure you are able to define these terms with the specific language required. As well, respondents encourage future students to practice the math (pharmacokinetic) problems---especially conversion between units of measurement. Students have found that converting between each unit can eat up a lot of you're time if you're unfamiliar with them. Additionally, respondents encourage future students to not just memorize the variables of each formula, but instead, make sure you actually understand what they mean.

Respondents stress the importance of taking down detailed notes because many minute and specific details are asked for in the tests. As well, they suggest knowing the details about the drugs that are constantly mentioned (e.g. therapeutic effect, physical properties). Students have also found past tests to be similar in format and phrasing and thus, found them to be great for practice and good indicators of how prepared you are for the test. As well, past students found that while the evaluations focus on material covered by the lecture, the textbook gives great clarification/details that will help you thoroughly understand what is going on.

Respondents also found tutorials to be very helpful, and suggest that if you can't make all of them, at least attend the ones where practice quiz questions will be taken up. Finally, past students stressed the importance of making sure that you understand the concepts thoroughly, because the material in upper year PCL courses build upon the basics taken up in PCL201.

PCL285

Course evaluation comments:

This course teaches one to critically evaluate scientific literature and media relating to the drug industry. As well, the course gives students the opportunity to practice their essay writing skills and presentation skills. While students found the lectures and class discussions to be stimulating and relevant to pharmacology, they found that the lectures tended to be too biased against pharmaceutical companies. Students found this practice in critical thinking to be excellent but wished that the course was less biased and one-sided with regards to the politics being discussed.

Some students find the course very similar to ENG100 and that the concepts covered to be too simple and repetitive of high-school level English courses. As well, some students wished that essay writing had been geared more towards writing a scientific manner.

Tips from upper years:

Past students stress the importance of not procrastinating your work and that doing the readings and handing in assignments on time is critical to get an excellent grade.

Past students found help to be readily available from the professor and TAs so it is highly encouraged that students utilize the instructors to the best of your abilities. Respondents also found that feedback from the TA is very helpful and suggest that future students should write their rough drafts seriously in order to get as much helpful feedback as possible. As well, past students stress the importance of editing your work multiple times and have mentioned that it may be best to get your peers to edit. Past students have also found that following the outline process has made writing their essay very easy. Respondents suggest that when writing an essay, students should focus on having a clear, concise argument with one point per paragraph that is well supported.

Past students have also found the textbook for this course to be valuable and especially helpful with regards to grammar rules and writing citations. As well, respondents encourage future students to actively listen and participate in class. Many found that the discussion helps guide you to possible points that you can argue for your essays and short assignments. Past students also highlighted the importance of picking topics you are interested in for your paper because you will be researching extensively on them and working on the paper for a prolonged period of time.

PCL302

Course evaluation comments:

This course focuses on basic pharmacodynamic principles and covers a diverse set of topics that students enjoyed learning about. Particularly, many students seemed to enjoy the section on drug transporters. However, while students found the lectures to be generally interesting and well-delivered, students found a great discrepancy between the level of difficulty between different sections during tests/exam. As well, the students found the course to be highly based on memorization and that students were expected to know very minute details for the tests/exams. They also found the wording of test questions to be rather vague.

Tips from upper years:

Study notes and re-listen to lectures and make sure you know the pathways off by heart. Preview material before class.

Leave lots of time to study and memorize the material before tests – there are lots of mechanisms to know.

During the test: budget your time well as there is a lot of writing and a tough time limit!

Practice on past tests and think about where the marks are coming from in an answer.

PCL362

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the material taught in class to be interesting. Many appreciate the "in the news" component, which helped connect the lectures with the real world events. Many respondents raised the concern that the evaluations were not truly reflective of students' understanding on the subject. They believed that more specific and detailed instruction on the tests would help students to know the intention of the testers.

Tips from upper years:

Memorization is key for this course so manage your time well. Past students found every little detail could have been testable and the marking scheme of the midterms was strict. Past students suggested to understand diagrams and graphs but also you must be able to reproduce them on a test. Students also found that the past tests were predictable but stated not to study from them as they change every year. Attending class and listening to the professor was also advised since the professor is a good lecturer and he would indicate which material would or would not be on the midterms.

PCL365

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the work load to be quite high and that the requirement for lab report to be vague. This made students use "trial and error" to figure out what is required. Students found the course to be a remarkable learning experience, even if the course itself is pretty labour-intensive.

Students wished that the midterm was not worth as much as the final, because they find that they have a better overall grasp of the material at the end of the school year as opposed to during the December midterm.

As well, students appreciated how quickly they got a response when they emailed in questions.

Tips from upper years:

Do not procrastinate on lab reports – get started on the background and methods sections ASAP

Read feedback from the TA and don't be afraid to ask them (or the Prof) questions about the lab report

Be concise! Don't go over the page limit but also make sure figures and graphs are labeled properly and explained.

Know the background of topics well and how the lab techniques work – they will come in handy!

PCL376

Course evaluation comments:

Students understand the importance of the material for their future career. However, many found the pace of lecture is slow at the beginning and becomes faster near the end where more complex concepts such as regression are taught. Many students found that assignments aid their understanding of the material and would appreciate more problem solving based tutorials. Also more sample questions from the instructors would be helpful to prepare students from the evaluations.

Tips from upper years:

Make sure to attend lecture. Demonstrations on how to use the software required for assignments are done in-class.

This is essentially a math course and the key to success is practicing a lot of the questions. As well, do any and all practice questions provided by the instructor in order to familiarize yourself with the language used.

You might do better if you have some previous experience with a stats course. There's a lot of material condensed into this course so the last sections of the course can get a bit overwhelming if you don't stay on top of your work or are very unfamiliar with statistics.

Go to the professor's office hours. It's very helpful with regards to getting clarification and obtaining a thorough understanding of concepts.

Some students found re-listening to the lecture helped although some of my peers preferred reading the text book. The reason I found listening to the lectures helped because after the midterms I often realized some concepts that were briefly mentioned and emphasized in the lecture were on the midterm. If I have missed that I would not know how to do the questions.

This class is statistical theory. You really only have to apply the major stats on assignments; the exams focus on the basic understanding of the theory behind them.

Make sure you word everything properly/make sure you know what the question is asking. Even if the term is defined in a rather loose manner during lecture, the marking scheme used has very specific terminology. The assignments and quizzes help in understanding concepts. However, note that they do not reflect what the exams are like/the typical format of the exams.

PCL389

Course evaluation comments:

Students enjoyed the interactive nature of the lectures as well as the heavy emphasis for critical thinking in this course. They found that the small class size lent to an intimate atmosphere that was conducive for learning. Many found the class debates to be very fun and educational. As well, students appreciated the ability to practice their presentation skills in this course.

Some students found that due to the variety of topics covered, the material became too disjointed. As well, due to the interactive nature of the class, some students had difficulty taking down notes for certain lectures because they were focused on actively participating in the discussion. Additionally, students found the small writing assignments (reflection papers) to be challenging.

Students found the service learning portion of the course to be a great meaningful learning experience.

Tips from upper years:

Go to class and participate in the discussion - this is a common tip shared by almost all respondents to our survey. Participation constitutes a portion of the overall evaluation, therefore it is highly encouraged.

PSL372

Tips from upper years:

Past students found writing a mini lab report after each lab extremely helpful. Writing summaries of the labs were easy when multiple students teamed up and divided the work. It was also suggested to start researching and writing your report assignment early.

When did you take PSL300/PSL301? Did you find that it makes a difference when you take PSL300/PSL301 (i.e. whether you take it the fall/winter in the school year before, the summer or simultaneous with PSL372?)

Past students found PSL300H1 and PSL301H1 to be very heavy courses in terms of quantity of material. Most students took PSL300H1 and PSL301H1 during the school year of their second year. Some students recommended taking PSL300H1 before PSL301H1. Even though they were difficult courses, most students found that the physiology provided a solid basis and easier understanding of PSL372H1 and other PCL courses.

PCL402**Course evaluation comments:**

This course is new (launched in spring 2013) and focuses on basic concepts of drug development. Students found the material to be heavy on applied learning. As well, many students found the interactive nature of the class to be enjoyable.

Additionally, students found the due dates for evaluations to be too condensed in one time period, and that the expectations from these evaluations to be rather vague.

PCL469

Tips from upper years:

There are many opportunities for participation marks - pay attention in class and make sure you've looked over the reading materials. Take good notes on the readings because they will be on the final exam. Take time to do the writings. Read the regulations, write, read the regulations again, review.

PCL470

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the lessons to be fairly disjointed due to the number of different lecturers.

Many students enjoyed the variety of the course material, but found that the amount of information was rather overwhelming. As well, students found the course to be very memory intensive.

Tips from upper years:

Start studying early, this is definitely not a course you will do well in if you start last minute. Also, the written assignment is marked pretty hard, so finishing early and giving yourself lots of time to edit is a good idea.

PCL471

Course evaluation comments:

Students wished that expectations for lab reports to be given more clearly and have a more specific criteria.

Students taught it was an excellent opportunity to gain lab experience and to practice working in groups.

PCL472/474

Tips from upper years:

Communication is key. Communicate with your lab members and build a friendly rapport - you can offer to help out others as well. Communicate with your prof, and don't be afraid to ask questions if you're unclear about something. Enjoy gaining lab experience and be ready to learn things on your own. Finally, don't start the final thesis in the last few weeks! The introduction and methods sections can be written long before the end. Use the writing skills you learned from your lab courses to put out a good paper.

How to Choose a Prof:

Choose a lab based on a research topic you're interested in - you don't want to write a lengthy thesis on something you aren't enthusiastic about. Some profs will work directly with you, and others will take a hands-off approach. Agreeing on a time commitment with the prof is a must-do!

Research Comments Summer v. Fall:

Summer research allows more involvement and time to focus on the research course alone. You have many more commitments in other courses and activities during the Fall-Winter session, so you have less time for lab work and writing the final thesis. You can develop a longer relationship in the Fall-Winter with the members of the lab, but some found that it was easier to build relationships in the summer.

PCL473

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the atmosphere of the course lectures to be a good learning atmosphere and conducive for asking questions.

Some students found the level of depth to be too superficial for many of the topics covered in class. However, many also enjoyed having to learn various different aspects of toxicology.

Some students found the rubric used to mark midterms to be too unyielding and harsh. They believe that the expectations for each short answer question were not clear from the given questions. The questions were found to be very brief leaving students limited information regarding how to approach the question. Many also found the structure of the tests to be geared towards testing your ability to simply memorize facts instead of truly understanding and applying the lessons learned.

Some students found that the course topics overlapped greatly with many other 400-level Toxicology courses.

As well, students found expectations for the written assignments to be too vague.

Tips from upper years:

Take good notes and perhaps record the lectures. Put time into memorization. Take your time writing the reviews - choose a chemical you like and can write a lot about. The forensic toxicology section will require background research on your part outside of everything that was in lecture. A final exam strategy is to go over all the material, then write detailed answers to past exam questions with your notes as an aid.

PCL475

Course evaluation comments:

Students found the class enjoyable despite the heavy workload. They appreciated the opportunity to discuss several aspects of the topics at such an in depth level. They appreciated how mentally stimulating and challenging the course was.

Students found that the use of word documents instead of powerpoint slides as the provided notes to be rather disorienting. As well, for students who print out notes, it becomes time consuming having to fix each document.

Tips from upper years:

Be familiar with the lecture material and the readings particularly the terms given and the drug list. Give yourself ample time to study because there is a lot of material to cover.

PCL477

Course evaluation comments:

Some students found the pacing of the lectures to be a little slow.

Many students found the material to be explained in a very clear and understandable manner. They appreciated the focus on specific experiments in the field.

Students appreciated being told what to specifically focus on for the exam/midterm. They also found the level of difficulty of the course and its tests to be very fair.

Tips from upper years:

Start early on the written assignment. Make sure to give yourself time to edit. It's a decent amount of background reading depending on the topic you choose.

Know the lecture material. Be prepared to APPLY the material in the tests and not just regurgitate it.

Know the enzymes and pay attention to the topics that the professor says will be on the tests.

Attend class! Some concepts are explained with graphs and figures so listening to a recording might not be sufficient.

PCL481

Course evaluation comments:

Students found that the course lacked a cohesive overall theme and that the lecture subjects were too different for each section. Better organization would have improved the flow of the course.

Some students found certain sections to be too fast paced and would have preferred a 3 hour lecture with concepts properly explained than jamming everything into a 2 hour lecture.

Tips from upper years:

Know the concepts in the first four lectures very well. Know all the details of the receptor mechanism diagrams unless told otherwise and ensure that you have a strongly supported mechanism before you select your topic for the review.

Attend class! Recordings will not be sufficient. Review lectures before class, listen attentively and ask questions.

Give yourself ample time to study for the tests.