

Dr. Patrick Sheridan

For Dr. Patrick Sheridan, a chemistry professor at Saint Leo University, teaching is a creative and collaborative process—one that transforms complex content into moments of discovery and connection. Every class becomes an opportunity for students to engage deeply, think critically, and even have a little fun along the way.

“One of my favorite review activities is called Whip Around Pass,” shared Dr. Sheridan. “All students stand, and we go around the room in order, with students providing a key term. I map these terms out on the board. Students stand until they cannot provide a term that has not already been listed. Once we cycle through and list all of the terms, we go back and start again. This time, students have to provide the structure for each of the terms that are mapped out on the board. This formative assessment encourages student engagement and lets students listen to and build on their peers’ ideas.”

Innovation and adaptability have also been central to Dr. Sheridan’s teaching journey. “During the pandemic, I had to get creative by modifying my pedagogy so I could still deliver content that is largely based on being able to draw structures,” he explained. “I modified my lab course time so that I could meet with small groups of students in an informal setting, guiding them through Padlet-based chemistry escape rooms. These activities distribute the cognitive load, allowing groups to simultaneously tackle multidisciplinary chemistry problems. This collaboration helps reduce anxiety by transforming complex problems into an engaging, shared intellectual challenge instead of a solitary high-stakes test.”

Dr Sheridan’s undergraduate students are “involved in hands-on research using fundamental concepts in organic chemistry to design and build novel target therapeutic compounds.” For example, “Rex Soderlund (SLU ’23) conducted honors research with me, involving the synthesis of novel anti-malarial compounds. As part of the honors aspect of his work, Rex organized and hosted an event for World Malaria Day. He worked with Mr. Andrew Wefwafwa, a clinician from Uganda, who helps to diagnose and treat patients who suffer from malaria. Rex collected donations during his event, and the proceeds were used to purchase a microscope and test kits for Mr. Wefwafwa’s lab. Rex made a real-world impact thanks to his research and enthusiasm for helping others.”

Curiosity and enthusiasm continue to drive Dr. Sheridan’s approach to both teaching and discovery. “I enjoy talking about cool molecules and nifty structures—compounds that have an impact on our daily lives,” he said. “One such compound is capsaicin. This molecule relates to food chemistry. It provides the heat found in peppers such as jalapeños and scotch bonnets! I’ve also enjoyed working with Dr. Miller and his Medicinal Botany students. We’ve conducted experiments that involve isolating medicinal compounds from common herbs.”

When asked what message he would leave with students, Dr. Sheridan’s advice was simple yet powerful: “Check the syllabus. Never give up!”