

Why Should I Seek an ACS-Certified Degree in Chemistry? What is it?

What is the significance of ACS certification? First, let's look at the meaning of the fact that your college or university offers an ACS-approved program in chemistry. The availability of an ACS-approved program in chemistry means that your institution is committed to providing you with a broadly based and intellectually challenging experience in chemistry. CPT's role is to carefully evaluate the chemistry department's program with respect to its breadth and depth, the qualifications of the chemistry faculty, the adequacy of the physical plant, condition of instrumentation, access to the current chemical literature, and opportunities for a meaningful research experience. An academic institution whose chemistry department meets the guidelines for ACS approval is placed on a nationally recognized list of approved chemistry programs. Clearly, the objective of the ACS approval/certification process is to encourage institutions to develop and maintain a high quality program of instruction in chemistry. Furthermore, identifying and participating in an approved program will afford you some measure of assurance that you are being given high quality instruction.

In many schools with approved programs, more than one chemistry major exists. For example, a noncertified degree might be available in addition to the certified degree. In such a case, why should you seek the certified degree? The best response to this question is largely philosophical, but internally very meaningful. Personal achievement rides the same waves as personal challenges. Without question, your own sense of self-satisfaction and worth will be stimulated by the challenges of trying to learn and understand as much as possible about a particular discipline. The certified chemistry degree program is typically more rigorous than the noncertified chemistry degree program, and it may often require a larger commitment of time to complete. Nevertheless, the more one knows about various facets of chemistry, the more one is able to understand and appreciate the broad significance and impact chemistry has in our daily lives.

But the benefits extend well beyond the personal challenge. The extra rigor and additional requirements of the certified degree are valued by potential employers and graduate schools alike. Employers realize that a certified graduate may have better preparation for technical employment. Some companies offer higher starting salaries to certified degree holders as compared to their noncertified classmates. It is not likely that a graduate school will overtly consider whether an applicant holds a certified degree or not, but it is clear that, all other things being equal, the additional course work and other requirements of your certified degree program will give you a boost as you enter the typical graduate program.

So, what's the bottom line? As outlined above, the ACS approval program and the student certification process encourage institutions to offer high-quality curricula. Such an effort directly benefits the chemistry graduates of those institutions. The certified degree is also valuable to the graduate because of the personal satisfaction of completing a rigorous program and the assurance of better preparation for a career in chemistry.

ACS Committee on Professional Training, Spring 1999.