

Announcement – CHEMATHON on Hiatus in 2020 (Posted Feb. 17, 2020)

With great reluctance, we inform our community that the CHEMATHON competition will be on hiatus in 2020.

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Maryland, College Park has hosted CHEMATHON for over thirty years, and the competition is one of UMCP's premier outreach events. The CHEMATHON Executive Team, comprised of UMCP faculty and Maryland high school teachers, made the difficult decision to pause this event in 2020 based upon infrastructure considerations, detailed below.

Many past CHEMATHON participants will have noticed that the UMCP Chemistry Building, in many respects, does not meet modern standards. The State of Maryland and the University also recognize this, and have embarked upon a multi-year chemistry facility renewal plan. This plan includes the demolition and replacement of a major wing of the chemistry building, which will begin one year from now. Before demolition proceeds, many staged renovation projects have and will soon be launched. These will involve the loss of two of our organic chemistry laboratories (where lab events have been held), and the relocation of all of our small classrooms (location of the pencil and paper events) to another building. These projects would already be a major impediment to hosting the CHEMATHON. An additional complication is that a block of instructional laboratories are being utilized by another academic unit, and unavailable for CHEMATHON.

Logistically, holding a large-scale event like CHEMATHON is simply not workable until the intermediate projects are completed. Various alternative plans to hold CHEMATHON in reduced chemistry infrastructure or distributed in multiple campus buildings were considered. However, such plans required significant changes in the CHEMATHON program that would, in our view, reduce the quality of the event, which we find unacceptable.

The hope of the Committee is that CHEMATHON can be renewed in 2021, after the dust settles. Updates to the CHEMATHON organization will be needed for the CHEMATHON to proceed optimally in the redesigned facilities. The 2020 hiatus allows us to complete these projects and plan for the future.

Call To Action: We urge all chemistry teachers who are passionate about the program to consider volunteering their time to help make it a reality. CHEMATHON can't be a quality experience without a critical mass of high school teachers to serve on the Executive Team. Interested teachers are asked to contact Cathy Rosenfelder (crosen@umd.edu).

In the short term, groups of teachers may wish to put together a local level event for your immediate group of schools, or your district. The Committee will contribute whatever help, materials, and advice we can to facilitate the continuation of the enthusiasm for CHEMATHON.

Looking to the future,

The CHEMATHON Executive Committee