

Chemistry students mix fun, work while burning midnight oil

By Merry Hayes
Staff Reporter

Four years ago a handful of chemistry students drove a Volkswagen into a Hamilton Hall elevator to take a picture of it. It wouldn't fit.

Last year some chemistry students threw a watermelon out an eighth-floor window.



Another time some students took the furniture out of a professor's office and replaced it with couches. The students were lounging on them when the professor came to work the next morning.

These are just a few examples of what goes on in Hamilton Hall at night. When those lights are burning late in UNL's white skyscraper the chemistry students aren't necessarily burning the midnight oil.

"What we do mostly is work," said Jeff Urbauer, a doctoral candidate in biochemistry.

He said chemistry undergraduates, graduate students and lab technicians spend many nights at Hamilton Hall because it is easier to get their work done at night.

Page Mehlhaff, a doctoral candidate in biochemistry, said, "There are so many interruptions during the day. At night I don't have to wait for equipment and I don't have to talk to anybody."

Mehlhaff said sometimes she will work on five experiments at once.

"If anybody's in your way, everything completely falls apart," she said.

Urbauer said he spends about 60 hours a week in the lab working on his dissertation.

Mehlhaff said the time she spends in the lab depends on her mood.

"When I'm in a bad mood, I come here a lot," she said.

Bruce Kahn, doctoral candidate in inorganic chemistry, said he spends so much time in his lab that he gives his home phone number to people he doesn't want to talk to.

To fight boredom when waiting during experiments, the students said, they mostly play computer games, read and sleep.

A group of chemistry students who would only be identified as Merle, Burl, Earl and Dave said they take breaks at Chesterfield's and sometimes even return to the labs afterwards.

Earl said, "When students enter this college, they are required to memorize the periodic table and the bar schedule at Chesterfield's."

Merle said sometimes they throw, roll and slide things down the halls, and perform "stupid laser tricks with hundreds of thousands of dollars of equipment" and play with toy guns.

"When I'm bored with the guns, I do research," Merle said.

He said a lot of chemistry students sit around and "think of ways to make millions because they'll never do it as chemists."

Dave said, "We get together for wine-and-cheese parties and discuss modern problems like what chemicals are doing to the environment."

Burl added, "And we try to deal with the hatred and rejection we experience as chemists."

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