

[Skip Navigation](#)



COLLEGE to CAREER

- [Areas of Chemistry](#)
- [Chemistry Careers](#)
- [Next Steps](#)

Chemists in the Real World



Willis Weigand, Associate Professor & Director of General Chemistry Labs

Willis Weigand is an associate professor and the director of general chemistry labs at Southwestern University, an undergraduate college in Georgetown, TX. He received his Ph.D. in chemistry, specializing in synthetic inorganic chemistry and crystallography, in 1982 from the University of Arkansas. He spent the early part of his career as an industrial chemist for W.R. Grace and Halliburton Services, working in product development and technical service. He also worked for Radian Corporation, an environmental consulting firm in Austin, TX.

Weigand began teaching at Southwestern in 1994, and then accepted a tenure-track position at Penn State Altoona. He later worked as a technical advisor in an intellectual property firm, assisting the

attorneys and their clients in writing patents. Weigand and his family missed their friends and extended family in Texas and Oklahoma, and so he returned to Southwestern to teach full-time.

In addition to teaching general chemistry labs and first-year chemistry, Weigand does research on the chemistry of copper, cobalt, and some of the main group elements, and he mentors a small undergraduate research group. This is how he works.

How did you find your first chemistry-related job after you graduated from college?

I had been looking around at oil companies and other businesses in the area after I got my bachelor's degree. A friend of one of my parents' friends worked at an environmental consulting firm in Austin, and he gave me the name of the company's vice president for research. I didn't have a sense of how far up in the hierarchy this guy was, so I just gave him a call directly and expressed my interest in working for his company. He set me up with an interview, and I wound up working there for about a year before I went to graduate school.

What is your major responsibility in your current position?

I teach general chemistry labs and first-year general chemistry. I also

What's a typical day on the job like?

50% teaching, 10% meetings, 40% preparation for class and labs. My research and mentoring my research students is integrated in with all of this.

Typically, how many days each month do you spend away from your workplace on travel?:

I don't travel much, but I do accompany students to some of the regional and national ACS meetings. I'm gone about 1–5 days when I'm at conferences.

Are there any apps/software/instrumentation/tools that you can't live without?

My students and I use tablet computers and laptops in the lab and in the classroom. We recently got a large grant to make our lab courses more inquiry-based and collaborative. Students use tablet computers interfaced with instrumentation to collect and analyze their data, and we are planning to install display screens in the lab so that students can share their data with the rest of the class as they are working. I use a computer for my slides in the classroom, and the students use them for taking notes.

Our labs are outfitted with the typical analytical chemistry instrumentation.

Describe your work environment.

It's a relaxed academic environment, less stressful for me than my industry work was, because I'm focusing on how best to help my students rather than trying to make the most profit for a company. My job can be stressful, but it's a different kind of stress, probably because I really enjoy this type of work. Most of my work is done in my office and laboratory, although I also work at home, grading papers and planning my lessons and labs. I work 50 or 60 hours a week, but it's work I really enjoy.

What do you like most about your job and why?

I love working with students and seeing the "light bulbs" light up! It's immediate gratification to see a student sit down and think something through, and say, "yeah, I see that". Some of my incoming students are nervous about taking chemistry. Maybe they had a bad experience in high school, but I tell them "throw that away". I share with my students what I've done over my industrial and academic career, and what it was like for me. I remember what it was like for me as an undergraduate, and think of how I would have liked someone to explain things for me. I put myself in my students' place and teach them the way I would have wanted to be taught.

What is your best productivity trick?

Get to work early, make a list if needed, and have a plan.

What's the best career advice you've received?

When I was in school, one of my professors told me, "You should really explore academics." I didn't follow that advice for 15 years! When I was working at the environmental company in Austin, I got an opportunity to teach part time at a local community college in the evenings and on weekends. After I got the OK from my employer, I decided to give it a try and see if I liked it — and I did!

Do you have any special talents or traits that make you a great fit for your job?

I enjoy working with students and I think I am fairly patient. I absolutely love this job — it's what I was wired to do.

Is there anything else you would like to mention about your career?

If you are wired for teaching it is a great profession. When I graduated from college, the chemical industry was going through a lot of changes. I learned that you have to be flexible and be willing to try several things to see what you like the most. My various jobs let me do that, and gave me an opportunity to explore different parts of the country. I don't believe that you should go into a field because it's supposed to be "hot" or just for the money. If you try different things and find something you love, you will find the opportunities you need.

What is your favorite ACS resource? Please explain.

Chemical and Engineering News. It has information that I can share with students.

How have you benefited from being an ACS member?

The journals, regional and national meetings, and C&E News help me stay up-to-date with the chemistry enterprise.

I don't believe that you should go into a field because it's supposed to be "hot" or just for the money. If you try different things and find something you love, you will find the opportunities you need."

- [Al Ribes](#)
- [Allison Dick](#)
- [Amber Evans](#)
- [Amy Paris](#)
- [Andrew Klein](#)
- [Andrew Stack](#)
- [Anneliese Schmidt](#)
- [Beatrice Ngatcha](#)
- [Ben Chambers](#)
- [Bryan Balazs](#)
- [Cesar Garza](#)
- [Chris Bradley](#)
- [Chris Ciolli](#)
- [Cynthia Bunders](#)
- [David Lopez](#)
- [Dawn Redington](#)
- [Elaine Nam](#)
- [Fatima Rivas](#)
- [Gwen Gross](#)
- [Harry Elston](#)
- [Herman Cho](#)
- [Ian Henry](#)
- [James Gibson](#)
- [Jared Roop](#)
- [Jennice Ozment](#)
- [Jeremy Lewis](#)
- [Jessica Brozek](#)
- [John Cort](#)
- [Judie Dziezak](#)
- [Julie Dzielawa](#)
- [Karen Tkaczyk](#)
- [Kathryn Leach](#)
- [Kevin Tibbs](#)
- [Kimberly Jackson](#)
- [Kristine Smetana](#)
- [LaTonya Mitchell](#)
- [Leah Nemetz](#)
- [Linda Roettger](#)
- [Lisa Balbes](#)
- [Lori Ensor](#)
- [Martial Taillefort](#)
- [Matt Mio](#)
- [Max Kushner-Lenhoff](#)
- [Miriam Quintal](#)
- [Nader Heidari](#)
- [Oluwatoyin Asojo](#)
- [Owen Compton](#)
- [Philip Rodenbough](#)

- [Ranjit Koodali](#)
- [Richard Nafshun](#)
- [Rolande Hodel](#)
- [Ruth Hathaway](#)
- [Sarah McIntyre](#)
- [Stacy Glidden](#)
- [Stephanie Wettstein](#)
- [Susan Cardinal](#)
- [Tashica Amirgholizadeh](#)
- [Theresa Huston](#)
- [Tim Garrett](#)
- [Timothy Paschkewitz](#)
- [Victoria Finkenstadt](#)
- [Victoria Nguyen](#)
- [William Doub](#)
- [Willis Weigand](#)