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The sweet science

Studying chocolate isn't as simple as it might seem

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THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

What'd you do in class today?

We ate chocolate.

Hmmm. I guess a snack is OK. What was your lecture about?

Chocolate.

Hmmm. I guess professors get off track sometimes. What's your textbook about?

Chocolate.

Excuse me??

It's no joke, mom. Your Ohio State University student is indeed experiencing all things chocolate in -- no surprise here -- Chocolate Science 101.

Professor Sheryl Barringer cooked up the class last year as a way to introduce students to food science, a major in the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. And students have lapped it up.

"It's chocolate. What's not to like?" asked senior Kelly Lake, 21, as she chipped pieces off a large, yellowish lump of cocoa butter during class last week. Lake, a biology major from Cincinnati, kept at it until she had chipped 200 grams into a container.

Across from her in the lab in OSU's Parker Food Science and Technology Building, senior Josh Hyster was dropping cocoa-bean nibs -- the insides of the beans -- into the top of a contraption called a juicer and holding a bowl underneath to catch the liquid spurting out.

"It's not very tasty," said Hyster, 21, a food-business-management major from Wakeman, near Elyria. "It smells like chocolate, but it's really bitter."

Lake's cocoa butter, some finely ground sugar, emulsion powder and dried milk will fix that when they're added to the liquefied nibs and then ground and mixed for 48 hours in a machine that's a cross between a stone mill and a food processor.

The 50 students are midway through the nine-week class, which meets once a week, and they're still working on their first batch of chocolate. In past weeks, they roasted the cocoa beans and removed the shells; in the coming weeks, they'll temper the chocolate (cool, heat, then cool again) and pour it into molds.



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Still at work on their first batch of chocolate midway into their nine-week chocolate science class, Ohio State students Lesli Baum, left, and Waverly Byun mix ingredients in a wet grinder. The class of 50 is divided into two "companies," each designing and marketing a chocolate product.



What's Chocolate Science 101 without taste-testing? OSU student Beth Payne samples some chocolate during a recent class.



DORAL CHENOWETH IIIDISPATCH

Wiping the milk chocolate out of a wet grinder requires three sets of hands: from left, Waverly Byun's, instructor Stephanie Smith's and Jennah Davidson's.

During each class, they also taste three kinds of chocolate to compare flavors and textures and take a quiz, based on chapters they've been assigned in their textbook, *The Emperors of Chocolate*, about candy companies Mars and the Hershey Co.

The chocolate they make isn't just for practice. The class is split into two "companies," and each designs a chocolate product and marketing campaign. The results are presented during the final class, along with tastes of the two batches of chocolate each company has made.

Disaster has struck only once so far. A drop of water from a steamy spoon fell into a bowl of nearly complete chocolate last quarter, ruining the batch.

"You can't get any water into chocolate -- not even one drop," Barringer said. "It makes it thick and gloppy."

The class always has a waiting list, said instructor Stephanie Smith, who teaches with Barringer.

"Right away, they're interested in the topic because most people like chocolate."

With Valentine's Day on Thursday, some students said they'd make chocolate for their significant others if they had the equipment.

But Barringer said she'd never attempt it.

"You can buy chocolate that's so much better than what you can make at home."

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"It's chocolate. What's not to like?"

Kelly Lake, OSU senior

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