

Oxford Asymmetry originally anticipated that most business would derive from the biotechnology sector, but mainstream pharmaceutical companies now represent half of Oxford Asymmetry's partners. The company is working in collaboration with 'virtual' pharmaceutical companies, but Moses stresses that the company has no wish to become a

pharmaceutical company in its own right. Not only would this require different skill sets and funding, but the trust that it has established with its partners would be jeopardized.

What of the future? Moses believes that the real strength of Oxford Asymmetry lies in offering leading edge chemistry. Growth of the company continues

apace, the headcount of 50 at the start of 1996 will double in the course of the year. Nevertheless, through structuring the science teams in small units, he expects to maintain the flexible and enthusiastic approach that it has been able to offer to its partners.

David Hughes

Video reviews

Chemical Diversity: Synthetic Techniques of Combinatorial Chemistry

American Chemical Society, 1995, 2 hours

Chemical Diversity: Applications of Computational Approaches

American Chemical Society, 1995, 2 hours

Price per video: \$225.00 (includes 120-page study guide)

S*ynthetic Techniques of Combinatorial Chemistry* is a video of a live satellite television programme broadcast in October 1995. It includes two seminars in combinatorial chemistry plus introductory and closing remarks by Dr Mario Geysen (GlaxoWellcome, Research Triangle Park, NC, USA) and a phone-in session of questions from viewers. The format is novel and the seminars interesting, but it is unclear why the two talks, which in Geysen's words cover such extremes of combinatorial chemistry, are brought together.

The first talk by Dr Brian Kay (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA) is an informative demonstration of the preparation and use of phage display libraries. However, the seminar builds on, and thus demands, considerable prior knowledge; terms and expressions requiring explanation are given none. The second talk by Dr Robert Armstrong (UCLA, CA, USA) describes his work on multi-component organic reactions for library synthesis. Although possibly more understandable for the average synthetic organic chemist, this is by no means a typical approach to combinatorial synthesis. The talks presented were thus highly contrasting, and it seems that whilst these seminars map the extremes of library technology, they are not truly representative of combinatorial chemistry.

The video is not wholly successful. The slides are occasionally illegible, the presenters appear uncomfortable reading

their lectures and the power of television to enhance teaching by conveying visual messages is underused. The question time is embarrassingly devoid of questions after Kay's seminar, but more lively after Armstrong's talk, when the presenters all appear more at ease responding spontaneously to questions. However, it is intriguing to note that the questions that were phoned in were of a much more general nature than either talk, revealing a demand from the audience for more information on the basics of combinatorial chemistry. Indeed, it was only during the final discussion that the 'mix and split' method, surely a linchpin of combinatorial chemistry, was mentioned. Deconvolution, tagging, new polymers, compound analysis, diversity and the challenge of developing new solid-phase chemistry, all of which are fascinating and sometimes controversial aspects of libraries, are only mentioned in passing. Perhaps there is an opportunity for a more rewarding ACS video in these topics.

Applications of Computational Approaches is a recording of a live satellite presentation made around the same time. Like the first in this series, the video includes two seminars by leading scientists, with opening and closing remarks by Geysen. This video is the more satisfying of the two; it included two excellent presentations, from Dr David Spellmeyer (Chiron Corporation, Emeryville, CA, USA) and Dr Garland Marshall (Washington

University, St Louis, MO, USA), covering critical issues in drug discovery based on combinatorial libraries. Spellmeyer's talk covers the question of how to design libraries to gain maximum benefit, with due regard to structural diversity – that essential but highly elusive factor in combinatorial chemistry. Marshall describes how the screening data from testing combinatorial libraries can be used to gain a better understanding of the receptor structure.

The presentations do suffer from being recorded live. The format does not completely work; the presenters are not totally at ease with the teleprompter, and phoned-in questions are still embarrassingly thin on the ground. However, this second video provides a fairly complete picture of computational methods, and for those involved in library synthesis, it answers many questions as well as provoking new ones. As drug discoverers become more adept at the synthesis of combinatorial libraries, the demands of drug discovery will ensure that library design receives greater care and that screening results will be used to better understand biological targets. The seminars in this video offer thoughtful insight into both areas.

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