Hello!

I'm a first year in AISS, so I can definitely answer any of your AISS related questions. AISS is a two semester class and it is a double class each term (so technically four classes, but it counts as six [2bio, 2chem, 2phys]). It meets every morning Monday-Friday for 2/3 hours a day (though I heard next year it might be 2 hours each morning from 9-11 and a separate lab period in addition one afternoon).

For starters, because I remember I was nervous about this at the beginning of the semester- I definitely did not have a super solid background coming into AISS because my high school was not very big on sciences. I would say I had a pretty strong background in Bio, but my high school Physics/Chem classes were pretty much jokes. I have never felt that I've been at a disadvantage due to that. We don't use typical high school physics at all, and the teachers never just assume that you'll be able to do something based on what you know from high school.

I would DEFINITELY recommend AISS to anyone considering taking it. There is so much to learn from the interdisciplinary nature of the course, and there are a lot of connections that you just couldn't make if you weren't taking all three subjects together. Taking physics and Chem together makes understanding the basis for what is actually happening behind formulas, etc. that we use A LOT easier. They make understanding what is happening fundamentally in biological context much more simple.

AISS is DEFINITELY more about learning how things work than memorizing. We get formula sheets on quizzes, and honestly even most of the things we are supposed to remember are pretty easy to reason through. We learn why things work and we learn how thing work, which I love because it drives me crazy when I can't rationalize the way that something behaves. Problem solving skills will definitely get you further than memorization, though I would imagine there are people who get by mainly on memorization.

As for study groups and such, science at Keck is very cooperative. From my experience, professors are always willing to spend an absurd amount of time making sure kids understand what is going on in office hours. Most people I know do the majority of their homework with their friends (i might be a little biased because of the AISS- virtually everyone in AISS works on the assignments with other AISSers). I actually often found that I worked better alone in high school because I am very easily distracted, but I can't think of one homework
assignment I've done this year that I haven't interacted with the people in my class at all on. AISS particularly is a very coherent group, we spend far too much time with each other both inside and outside of class. Most of my best friends are from AISS.

As for negatives- I guess the workload is pretty tough (we complain about it a lot), but I've never found it overwhelming and I am NOT even remotely good at managing my time. I'm probably worse at time management than virtually anyone every. There was one week that it was bad, but that was the only time I've stressed over it at all. You might want to get other opinions, but I definitely find it manageable. I've never not been able to go out with my friends because of it. The grading is a little tough, but I wouldn't say unfair. You just have to be able to accept that just because you didn't do as well as you would have liked on a quiz here or there, it's not the end of the world. Last semester, virtually everyone I talked to ended up getting a better grade than they expected for the semester.

In conclusion- AISS is wonderful and amazing and I think that every school should have a similar program. I honestly couldn't imagine learning what I've learned in any other way.

And most of what I said applies to Keck in a broader sense as well. There are a lot of opportunities and most of the professors (every one I have encountered at least) go out of their way to help students. I'm staying in Claremont most of the Summer to do research at Keck, which is really exciting. It was pretty easy to get a grant to do so and find someone to work with (honestly, I had one of my professors help me find professors who had space available in their labs because I feel super awkward emailing people I don't know. As I said, they are VERY supportive and very helpful).

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