Meet Dr. Isaiah Speight, Thieme Chemistry Journals Awardee 2026!

Dr. Isaiah Speight *received his PhD from Vanderbilt University (USA). After a brief postdoctoral stay at University of California Irvine (USA), he moved to industry and joined AbbVie (USA). Currently, he is an assistant professor at William & Mary (USA).*

Thieme: Which field of organic chemistry are you interested in the most and why?

Dr. Speight: I am interested in all forms of synthesis but additionally green chemistry and synthesis. Using new and emerging technologies, specifically mechanochemistry, to solve synthetic problems. Mechanochemistry interests me due to the versatility of the technique, the new challenges it presents, and the solutions it provides for greener and safer synthesis.

Thieme: Following that, what is the focus of your current research activity?

Dr. Speight: My research group focuses on chemical adaptability. We are seeking to solve synthesis problems from an organic, organo-metallic, and inorganic lens by searching for new techniques and mechanochemical applications to advance the field towards a safer and more environmentally friendly approach for synthesis.

Thieme: What do you think about the modern role and prospects of organic chemistry?

Dr. Speight: I believe that the true challenges are development of new tools for industry and scale-up applications. Organic chemistry has proven itself time and time again to be a powerhouse for building complex molecules. Now we should be focusing on building reaction methods for scalability in a safe and manageable way.

Thieme: Which difficulties are there for young upcoming chemists in your field? Do you have any tips?

Dr. Speight: Currently, the challenges are the safe and ethical adoption of AI in chemistry. The use of AI is becoming increasingly common, especially amongst junior trainees and students. We as chemists need to work with AI developers to help create ethical and safe methods for AI use rather than push against the adoption of the tool. By working in concert with developers, we can build the tools we both trust and can feel confident in operating.

Thieme: What is your most important scientific achievement to date and why?

Dr. Speight: My work with AbbVie on developing a reactive extrusion method for scale-up of Sonogashira reactions. This marked one of the earliest adoptions of extrusion for a pharmaceutically active molecule.

Thieme: Could you tell us something about yourself outside the lab, such as your hobbies or extra-work interests?

Dr. Speight: I'm an avid video gamer and a basketball fan.