

Challenging research

Oier Lakuntza is a predoctoral student under the supervision of Prof. Jesús Ugalde at Universidad del País Vasco. When he decided to study Chemistry, many people advised against it, and even some members of the National Organization of Spanish blind people (ONCE). At the beginning of its bachelor's degree, when his blindness was not complete, he took his own notes using a pen and magnifying glasses, but later on he had to make use of computers and software such as Braille 'n Speak and screen lectors, or ask his classmates for their notes (specially if there were a lot of formulae).



He decided to do research in computational chemistry because he liked the field and because for a blind person it is easier to focus on the theoretical aspects of chemistry (while it is impossible to carry experimental work in the lab). An intriguing question for many people might be how he can imagine the chemical systems which he is studying, and the answer is through the "z-matrix" coordinate systems, which allows him to mentally represent molecular structures. Still, the chemical systems he deals with are generally small, even though he has sometimes worked with bigger systems (of about 36 atoms). The main topic of his research project is the study of methane activation through the Nickel hydroxy-hydride cation (HNiOH^+). This reaction is known to take place experimentally, and Oier is studying the singlet and doublet surfaces, as well as their crossings.

He considers that his stay at ICIQ has been a very profitable experience, since he learnt new and useful things for the study of his system. Moreover, from a personal point of view he says this stay has

been excellent, and has been pleased with the good vibrations in the group. But apart from being a very positive experience for him, Oier's visit has been highly enriching for the rest of the people working in the theoretical and computational lab. When asked about Oier's daily work, Maria stays that he is in fact very independent (he writes his own papers and makes his presentations using pdfLaTeX), and in fact the only thing in which he needs some help is in drawing. Moreover, Maria says that before Oier's stay, she thought there were many things that would be very difficult or even impossible for a blind person, and she realized it is not true. Thanks to his optimistic attitude, Oier faces challenges in a positive way and with a good sense of humor, which is something that undoubtedly makes him go on with his projects. As the Monty Python would sing, always look on the bright side of life!

Briefs

Calix 11: The 11th International Conference on Calixarenes, organized by Prof. Javier de Mendoza and Prof. Pau Ballester (ICIQ group leaders), will be held at ICIQ from June 26th to June 29th, 2011.



The program will consist on 30 keynote lectures, 10 short presentations selected among the abstracts submitted as contributors for the poster sessions, and 2 poster sessions.

i More info: www.calix2011.org

Young ICIQ researchers awarded: Dr. Héctor Fernández (laboratory coordinator of Prof. Vidal's research group) and Dr. Vanesa Lillo (laboratory technician of Dr. Galán-Mascarós' research group) both received the PhD Extraordinary Award for their doctoral thesis.

On the other hand, the research works of Verónica López and Nicolas Delpont (predoctoral students at Prof. Echavarren's group) were also recognized by Lilly awards.