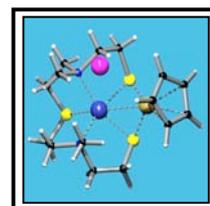


The Zürich School of Crystallography

Bring Your Own Crystals



University of Zürich
August 30 - September 12, 2009



The third Zürich School of Crystallography followed the style of the two previous schools and catered predominantly for students in the chemical, molecular and solid-state sciences. The school was once again an overwhelming success, judging from the participant and tutor feedback. The twenty participants this year comprised 2 MSc and 14 PhD students, 2 postdocs, one young academic and one researcher. They came from Croatia, Finland, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland, the Ukraine, the UK and the USA; 9 women and 11 men, all of them under 36. The 10 tutors were from the Universities of Basel, Bern, Geneva, Zürich, the EPF Lausanne and the ETH Zürich.

Tony Linden, Hans-Beat Bürgi, School Directors



The Zürich School of Crystallography 2009 – a Student's Perspective

I arrived in Zürich on the evening before the first day not really knowing what to expect. Of course, a two week school on a demanding subject like crystallography will be intense and likely to be physically and intellectually tiring, but as for what the tutors, the other participants and the overall atmosphere of the school would be like I had no idea. Fortunately, I came back to England having had possibly the best two weeks of my post-graduate career and, perhaps more importantly, feeling confident that the experience and knowledge I had gained would be extremely useful for my PhD research and in the future.

I had two main reasons for attending the school. The first was to further my knowledge of crystallography from basic undergraduate lectures. The second was to increase my understanding and experience of crystal structure determination from a handful of refinements that I had done in the past, which to me had seemed like button-pushing without any reasoning behind it. My own research is on hybrid inorganic-organic framework structures, and the single most useful tool I need is single crystal X-ray diffraction, primarily for structure determination but also for investigation of structure-property relationships.



The first few days of the school were mainly devoted to lectures, both on theory and various practical aspects, and I was immediately proven right about the high intensity of the teaching. However, the small group sizes (20 of us in lectures were split into pairs for computing practicals and the diffractometer session) and dedication and expertise of the tutors, of which there was one per pair of students, meant that I finished each day with far more understanding than anticipated, which definitely made the effort spent worthwhile. It was extremely useful to have so many experts on hand during the practical classes, who were prepared to answer all questions, however trivial they may have seemed!

All the students were extremely sociable, and many of the tutors found time to share their experiences (crystallographic and otherwise) with us. Breakfasts and dinners at the hotel, lunches at the university's cafeteria and much needed tea-breaks between classes were not just a relief from the intense schedule; they were a great chance to get to know the other participants and find out about their research and the countries and cultures they came from. The excursion to Fribourg, ending with a Swiss fondue, was a great day out, as was the free day, which I spent sight-seeing around Zürich. The Sunday barbecue and end-of-school Chinese banquet will also give me many fond memories.



It's hard to think of any bad points about the school. Perhaps one or two of the lectures and practicals could have been better explained initially, but with the help of the tutors and revision sessions these became very minor hindrances to my learning experience. Maybe the hardest thing for some participants was that the course was taught completely in English, but having one central language is unavoidable in such a multilingual environment.

All in all, I really enjoyed my time in Zürich. I feel the course was extremely good value for money, and the knowledge and experience gained will stand me in good stead for my future research. In the past, when I had problems with my crystals I often didn't know why. Now, I feel confident that I cannot just recognise any problems, but work out how to solve them and produce meaningful, well thought through crystal structure determinations. In addition, it's great that an online forum has been set up to help all the previous years' students with their crystallography and to enable us to keep in touch, students and tutors alike.

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