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Meet Mallory Hinks, 2016 ACS Chemistry Champion

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Mallory Hinks, a fifth-year chemistry Ph.D. student at the University of California, Irvine, was crowned the winner of the 2016 ACS Chemistry Champions contest on Aug. 22

during the ACS national meeting in Philadelphia.



Hinks is the newest ChemChamp.

Credit: Christine Schmidt

Now in its third year, the competition aims to give younger chemists an opportunity to develop and enhance their communication skills. Participants in the competition range from undergraduate students to professional scientists, from both the U.S. and abroad.

Hinks and three other finalists were narrowed down from contestants who submitted a two- to three-minute video of themselves describing chemistry concepts or their own research in a way that's accessible to the general public. Eight semifinalists received communications training this past summer in Washington, D.C.



Hinks won the title of best communicator over finalists John Gleeson, a graduate student at University College Dublin; Nathan Turner, an undergraduate at Louisiana Tech University; and Olga Zamudio, who recently earned a Ph.D. from the Center for Research & Advanced Studies of the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico and now lives in Vancouver, British Columbia.

“A lot of people are confused and scared by science,” Hinks says. “If you can make it more approachable, it would be better for society in general.”

Hinks will receive a trip to Washington, D.C., to network with professional science communications staff at ACS and possibly attend a briefing on Capitol Hill; host an ACS “Reactions” video; and join the National Academy of Sciences’ Science & Entertainment Exchange. She received a three-dimensionally printed Chemistry Champions trophy.

One piece of advice she’s learned during the course of the competition is to know who her audience is and choose words and figures that suit them. “Think to yourself, ‘If I say this, what will the audience get out of it?’ ”

Hinks says she has come a long way in improving her communication skills. “My first talk at an ACS national meeting, I was super nervous, and my heart was beating so fast,” she says. “My last ACS talk, I was much less nervous.”

After Hinks graduates, she plans on pursuing a career in science policy. “If you want to communicate to politicians why science is important, it’s really important to communicate that well,” she says.

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