

Expert Insight

Young, enthusiastic and successful...

Heidi shows how determination can pay off

INDUSTRY VIEW

Women in physics are rare. However, relatively large numbers of young women start the nanoscience study programme at the Swiss Nanoscience Institute (SNI) at the University of Basel.

One of these is Heidi Potts (far right). In 2008, the 25-year old German citizen started her studies in nanoscience. She successfully completed the numerous lectures and practical projects in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics that allow an excellent insight into the diverse topics of nanoscale sciences and their applications.

When the time approached to select a topic for the master's thesis, Heidi did not take the easy route. Instead of applying to one of the numerous research groups at

the SNI in Basel, she pursued her goal to combine a thesis about solar cells with her wish to stay in Canada for a while. Dedicatedly, she scanned publications and the internet and was finally successful at the University of Toronto with Professor Nazir Kherani. He was looking for a candidate who studied ultra-thin silicon solar cells that are more cost-efficient than standard products.

Heidi successfully examined problems related to the subsequent minimisation of the solar cells and suggested ways to prevent them. Not only was her supervising professor impressed by her work but also the SNI, as she was awarded the prize for the best master's thesis in nanoscale science at the University of Basel in 2013.

In the meantime, Heidi has started her PhD at the EPFL in Lausanne under the supervision of Professor Anna Fontcuberta i Morral. For her thesis, she produces and examines nanowires with novel physical properties. "I feel well prepared for this topic, which is

classically investigated by physicists through my nanoscience studies in Basel and the expertise that I have received during my education," Heidi said when asked about her work.

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