

Remembering ASU quantum chemist Vladimiro Mujica

Mujica was a scientist and mentor who believed science should serve society and inspire curiosity

By David Rozul, ASU News
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Vladimiro Mujica, professor and theoretical chemist in Arizona State University's School of Molecular Sciences, died on April 26 at the age of 71.

A beloved mentor, collaborator and internationally recognized scientist, Mujica spent nearly two decades at ASU advancing research in quantum chemistry, molecular electronics and nanoscience while mentoring generations of students.

"Vladimiro was an exceptional scientist, visionary collaborator and cherished member of our community," said [Tijana Rajh](#), professor and director of ASU's [School of Molecular Sciences](#). "He had a remarkable ability to inspire both students and colleagues through his creativity, curiosity and joy for discovery. Personally, I will miss him deeply, he was one of my closest collaborators and someone with whom I could share any outlandish idea and transform it into something meaningful."

Born in Venezuela, Mujica studied chemistry in both Chile and Venezuela before earning his doctorate in quantum chemistry from Uppsala University in Sweden in 1985. Before joining ASU in 2009, he held positions at Tel Aviv University, the Universidad Central de Venezuela and Northwestern University.

His research focused on understanding how materials behave at the quantum level, particularly in nanoscale systems where matter can take on entirely different properties. His work helped pioneer advances in molecular electronics, spintronics and quantum transport phenomena, contributing to ASU's growing efforts in quantum information science. In recent years, his research explored chirality and quantum chemistry, helping advance new understanding of how molecular structure influences electron spin and quantum behavior.

Over his career, Mujica published more than 100 peer-reviewed papers and spoke at conferences around the world, though colleagues say his greatest impact came through the relationships he built and the curiosity he inspired in others.

"I will remember Vladi as a dear colleague and close friend whose life was guided by a deep commitment to the common good," said [Marcia Levitus](#), professor in the School of Molecular Sciences. "In his research, he approached fundamental questions with rigor and creativity, and he gave his time generously to students and young scientists. He was regarded across Latin America as an intellectual who placed science in the service of democracy and human freedom."

"Vladi was a colleague, collaborator and close friend who had a major impact on both my teaching and research at ASU," said [Jeffery Yarger](#), professor in the School of Molecular Sciences. "We co-taught courses together and collaborated on many scientific projects over the years, and his passion for science and education touched countless students and colleagues."

[Mario Galante](#), postdoctoral scholar in Mujica's group, remembers him as someone who loved to look for new and sometimes unconventional connections, both between people and research topics.

"He had a strong focus on the big picture rather than day-to-day details. He loved to break down formal barriers to build personal connections with the people he worked with, regardless of their position in the academic hierarchy," Galante said. "'I work with people I like,' he often said, emphasizing how much he valued genuine, positive relationships in his collaborations."

Galante added that Mujica's attention was always spread across many projects, driven by his desire to put new ideas out into the world and he believed deeply in the role scientists play in society, often encouraging students to think critically and engage with the world around them.

"Our role as educators is to teach how to think, not what to think," Galante said, recalling one of Mujica's guiding philosophies.

Collaborator and former [Biodesign Institute](#) postdoctoral fellow Julio Palma said Mujica had a rare ability to combine rigorous science with humor, joy and compassion.

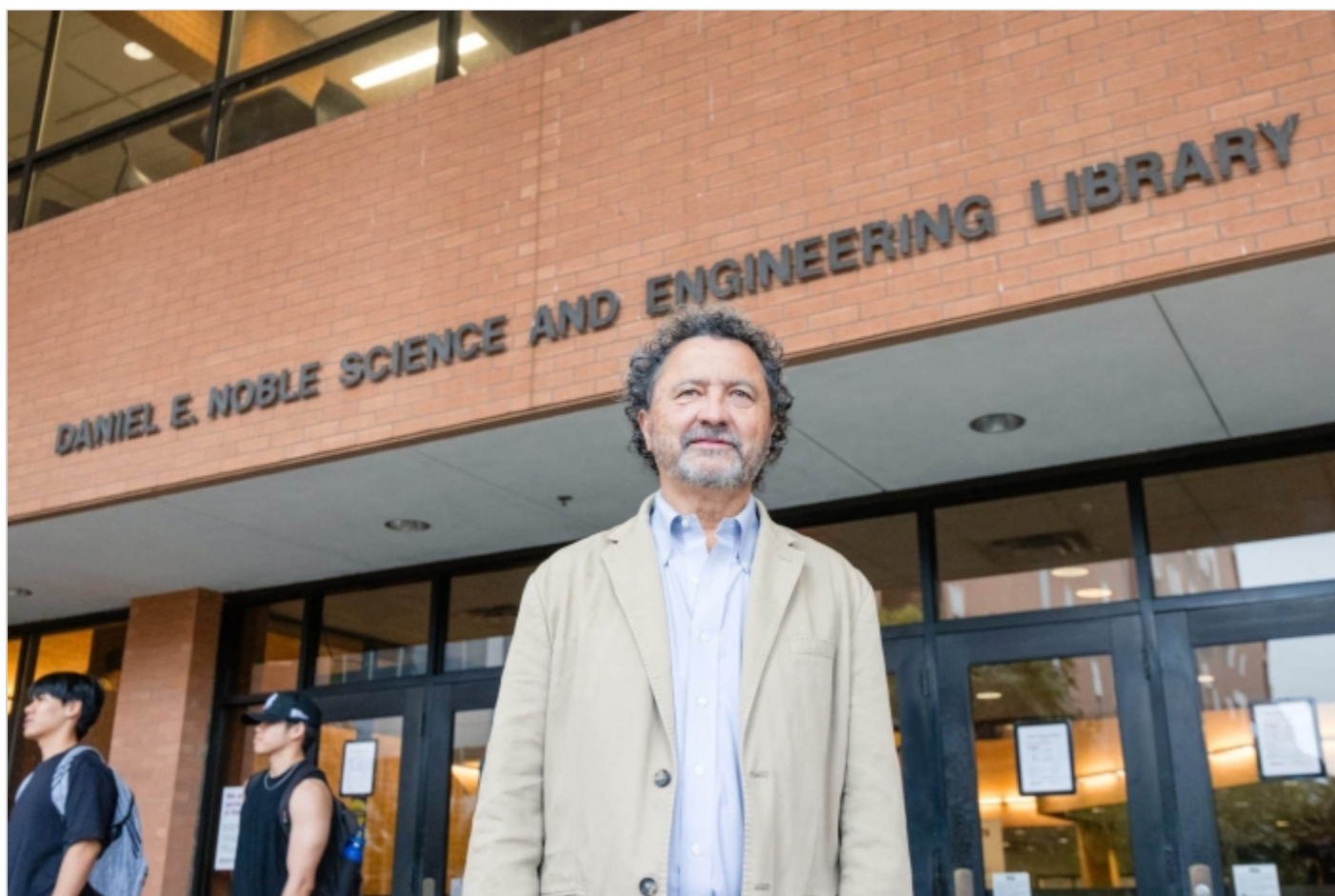
"Vladimiro was not only a remarkable scientist, but also one of my dearest friends," said Palma, now an associate professor of chemistry at Pennsylvania State University. "He was deeply passionate about science, equity and fairness. He consistently advocated for the most vulnerable individuals, both within and outside the university. He had endless curiosity and could find genuine interest in virtually any topic."

"At one point in my career, I seriously considered leaving academia, but through our collaborations, I rediscovered the excitement and passion for science," Palma added. "The scientific community will certainly miss his contributions, but above all, we will miss his personality, charisma and friendship."

Mujica is survived by countless students, collaborators, friends and family members who he has inspired around the world.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Vladimiro Mujica, theoretical chemist in Arizona State University's School of Molecular Sciences, died on April 26 at the age of 71. Photo by Daniel Robles

Gallery



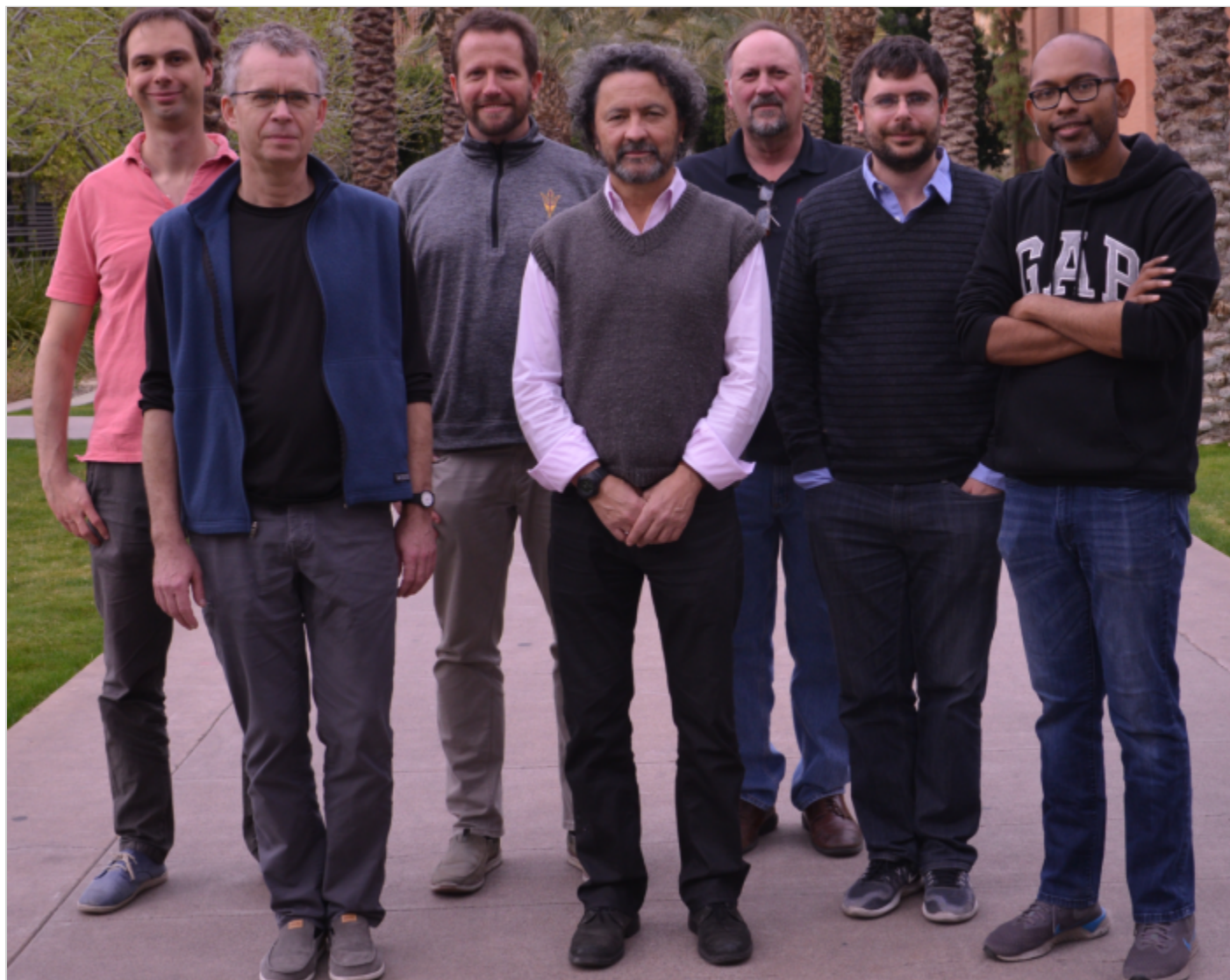
Mario Galante (left), assistant research scientist and postdoctoral scholar in Muijica's group, remembers Mujica (right) as someone who constantly encouraged collaboration and genuine human connection.



Mujica (second from right) with ASU faculty at the 2013 American Chemical Society annual meeting in New Orleans.



Mujica (left) and Julio L. Palma at the “Transport at the Nanoscale” conference in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in November 2018.



Mujica (center) standing with ASU School of Molecular Science faculty in 2020.