## US and Canadian Teams Collect Medals at International Linguistics Olympiad

One hundred and two high school students from around the world converged on Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh this week for the 9th annual International Olympiad of Linguistics (IOL), the first time the competition has been held in the US. In the Individual round, competitors struggled independently with problems about Faroese orthography, Menominee morphology, Vai syntax, Nahuatl semantics, and the structure of the barcode language EAN-13, while in the team round, groups of up to four students worked out the metrical rules of Sanskrit poetry.

Twenty-seven teams participated, representing nineteen countries, among them Australia, Bulgaria, India, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The United States, competing for the fifth year, sent twelve students in three teams. Canada participated for the first time with a single team of four students. Other countries attending for the first time were Brazil, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam.

US students did exceptionally well, winning a total of six individual medals, one gold, four silver, and one bronze, as well as five honorable mentions and three awards for the best solution received for a single question. One US team, Team Red, won an additional two team awards, placing first in the team portion of the competition and having the highest combined score of its members on the individual round.

Canadian students won one bronze medal and one honorable mention. Canada received awards for the best new team at the competition and the best performance by an individual student from a new team at the competition.

Students for the US and Canadian teams were chosen from over one thousand students based on their performance on the two rounds of the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO) held in February and March of this year. Dr. Dragomir Radev of the University of Michigan was the coach of the US teams and NACLO program chair and Patrick Littell of the University of British Columbia coached the Canadian team. Dr. Lori Levin of Carnegie Mellon University served as chair of the local organizing committee for the IOL.

The members of the US and Canadian teams were:

* “USA Red”: Aaron Klein, of Brookline, MA; Duligur Ibeling, of Maple Grove, MN; Wesley Jones, of Germantown, TN; and Morris Alper, of Palo Alto, CA
* “USA White”: Erik Andersen, of Sunnyvale, CA; Allen Yuan, of Farmington Hills, MI; Chelsea Voss, of San Jose, CA; and Arjun Srinivasan, of Herndon, VA
* “USA Blue”: Alexander Wade, of Reno, NV; Ophir Lifshitz, of Rockville, MD; Caroline Ellison, of Newton, MA, and Rachel McEnroe, of Jackson NJ.
* “Team Canada”: Daniel Mitropolsky, of Toronto, ON; Keunjae Go of Vancouver, BC; Jordan Ho, of Toronto, ON; and William Zhang, of Vancouver, BC.

Morris Alper won one of four gold medals awarded to top scorers in the individual round of the competition. Students from Estonia and Russia also earned gold medals, but Alper was awarded the Alfred Zhurinsky memorial prize for achieving the single highest individual round score of the competition. The prize is named for the founder and organizer of the original linguistics competitions, which began in Moscow forty-six years ago.

Four US participants received silver medals: Allen Yuan, Wesley Jones, Alexander Wade, and Duligur Ibeling. One US student, Aaron Klein, took home a bronze medal, as did a Canadian student, Daniel Mitropolsky. Five US students and one Canadian student won honorable mentions: Ophir Lifshitz, Arjun Srinivasan, Caroline Ellison, Erik Andersen, Chelsea Voss, and William Zhang.

Awards were also given for the best solution to individual problems. Alper shared the prize for the best solution to problem 2 (Faroese Orthography) with a student from Slovenia, Ellison won outright the best solution prize to problem 3 (Vai translation), and Wade shared the best solution prize to problem 4 (Nahuatl translation) with a student from Russia.

One US team, “USA Red”, consisting of Alper, Jones, Klein, and Ibeling took home two additional awards: a gold medal for the best performance on the team portion of the competition, and a cup for the team with the highest combined score on the individual portion of the competition.

The Canadian team was honored as the best new team in the competition, and Mitropolsky had the highest score of any member of a new team.

This year's US and Canadian teams as well as the entire North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad were sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the North American Chapter of the Association for Computation Linguistics (NAACL), Yahoo!, and the University of  
Michigan.

In January 2011, the Linguistics Society of America awarded NACLO its "Linguistics, Language, and the Public" award for increasing awareness of linguistics in the general public.

The primary purpose of NACLO is to raise public awareness of linguistics and computational linguistics. "Usually, college students don't even hear about computational linguistics until they are well along in their undergraduate studies," says Levin. "Our hope is that competitions such as the Computational Linguistics Olympiad will identify students who have an affinity for linguistics and computational linguistics before they graduate high school and encourage them to pursue further studies at the university level."

The 10th International Linguistics Olympiad will be held in Slovenia in 2012. The US and Canadian teams will be selected as part of NACLO 2012, to be held across the USA and Canada in Winter 2012.

Contact information, links:   
NACLO: <http://www.naclo.cs.cmu.edu/> (includes questions from previous national linguistics olympiad)  
IOL: [http://ioling.org/](http://www.ioling.org/) (includes links to contest questions and full results for the international linguistics olympiad)

Photographs, and interviews with participants from this year’s international Olympiad may also be found at:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/2011-International-Linguistics-Olympiad/230095130337783>

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USA Team Red: Morris Alper, Aaron Klein, Duligur Ibeling, and Wesley Jones



US Linguistics Olympiad team members, along with their coaches. Front row: Wesley Jones, Chelsea Voss, Aaron Klein, Allen Yuan, Duligur Ibeling. Middle row: Ophir Lifshitz, Rachel McEnroe, Lori Levin, Caroline Ellison, Morris Alper. Back row: Erik Andersen,Arjun Srinivasan, Alexander Wade, James Pustejovsky, Dragomir Radev



Team Canada: Front row: Jordan Ho, Keunjae Go, William Zhang, Daniel Mitropolsky. Back row: Patrick Littell