

NACLO Press Release

July 2012

More than 1400 high school students from the USA and Canada participated in this year's sixth installment of the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO). The top scorers of NACLO are eligible to represent their countries at the Tenth International Olympiad in Linguistics (IOL), which will be held in Ljubljana, Slovenia July 29 to August 3, 2012.

More than 40 teams are expected to participate in this international event, the largest number ever. The United States has competed in the IOL since 2007. In these years, US students have won four individual gold medals, ten silvers, and ten bronzes. In the team challenge, the US team has received gold medals in four of the last five years. It has also finished first three times in the alternative team contest in which the points of all team members in the individual challenge are combined.

The NACLO competition included two rounds. In early February, 1400+ students took part in the open round at more than 100 university and high school locations. Approximately 125 students with the highest scores from the US and the top 10 students from Canada then advanced to the invitational round, held in early March. This year's US teams for the ILO are:

Team Red:

Darryl Wu, Bellevue WA
Anderson Wang, Ambler PA
Samuel Zbarsky, Rockville MD
Allan Sadun, Austin TX

Team Blue:

Alexander Wade, Reno NV
Aaron Klein, Brookline MA
Aidan Kaplan, Montclair NJ
Erik Andersen, Sunnyvale CA

Alexander, Aaron, and Erik were also on the 2011 US team.

Students compete in the Computational Linguistics Olympiad by solving challenging problems using data from a variety of languages and formal systems. There is no prerequisite knowledge. Students discover facts about languages and formal systems in the course of solving the puzzles. This year the students worked on 16 challenging problems in linguistics and computational linguistics.

Dragomir Radev of the University of Michigan is the program chair of NACLO and head coach of the US team for the IOL. Among his many responsibilities, Radev gathers ideas from industry and academic researchers around the world. Radev aims to create challenging and stimulating problems that address cutting edge issues in the field of computational linguistics. Though not yet widely known to the general public, computational linguistics is a rapidly emerging field with applications in such areas as search engine technologies, machine translation, and artificial intelligence.

While the linguistics competition is fun, it also requires dedication and hard work by many people, all of whom are volunteers. In addition to Radev, Lori Levin (Carnegie Mellon University) is the NACLO chair and an IOL team coach. Patrick Littell (University of British Columbia) is a member of the organizing committee and team leader for the Canadian IOL team. The organizing committee also includes School Liaison Amy Troyani (Pittsburgh Allderdice High School), Administrative Chair Mary Jo Bensasi (Carnegie Mellon University) and Sponsorship Chair James Pustejovsky (Brandeis University), as well as problem authors and jury members Eugene Fink (Carnegie Mellon University), David Mortensen (University of Pittsburgh), and 2007 international gold medalist Adam Hesterberg, a recent graduate of Princeton University. Many other college professors, high school teachers, and college students also volunteer their time

NACLO is sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics (NAACL), The Linguistics Society of America, Carnegie Mellon University, the Gelfand Center for Community Outreach, the University of Michigan, and the

University of Pittsburgh Intelligent Systems Program, as well as donations from many academic departments and individual donors.

Universities and corporations view the program as a way of helping high school students discover their talents and interests in the areas of language, linguistics and natural language processing. 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.

Contact information:

NACLO : www.naclo.cs.cmu.edu

IOL : ioling.org

Dr. Lori Levin, Carnegie Mellon University. NACLO chair, local organizing chair for the IOL (ls1@cs.cmu.edu)

Prof. Dragomir Radev, University of Michigan, program chair of NACLO, US team leader for the IOL, (radev@umich.edu)

Patrick Littell, University of British Columbia, Canadian team leader for the IOL, (littell@alumni.ubc.ca)