



May 17, 2011

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cal Poly Math Students Move Up in Annual Putnam Math Competition

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Cal Poly moved up in the rankings this year at the annual Putnam Exam -- one of the most difficult math competitions in North America. Cal Poly's team ranked 62 among 546 participating universities in the United States and Canada, up from 114 last year.

Math majors Paul Coombs and Matthew Tytel tied as Cal Poly's top Putnam scorers with 38 points each. The two achieved Cal Poly's highest individual score in recent memory, said Math Professor Lawrence Sze, who coached the group.

Tytel and Coombs ranked 383 out of 4,296 competitors.

They are two of only four students in the entire 23-campus California State University system to have ranked in Putnam Exam's "Top 470" contestants. In the University of California system, only UC Berkeley had more than two students place among Putnam's top 470.

The six-hour exam consists of 12 problems solved in two three-hour sittings, no calculators allowed. The maximum score possible is 120 points, 10 points per problem. The median score hovers at zero or one annually.

"What it's really doing is testing not the breadth of knowledge, but the ingenuity and problem-solving skills of those taking the exam," said Sze.

Cal Poly's Mathematics Department offers a two-unit class every fall for students who want to test themselves with the exam. Sze and math professors Jonathan Shapiro and Morgan Sherman take turns coaching the class and take the practice exam with the students each December.

Other Cal Poly students who scored on the Putnam Exam include: James Hall (21 points, rank 746.5); Jeremy Kun (20 points, rank 883); Trevor Jones (10 points, rank 1,669.5); Michele Jenkins (9 points, rank 2,008.5); Kevin Lamb (8 points, rank 2,048); Michael Bower (8 points, rank 2,048); Trent Speier (2 points, rank 2,135). Ranks at half steps occur when the ranks of students with the same score are averaged together.

To try your hand at some previous Putnam problems on the American Math Association's Web site:

<http://amc.maa.org/a-activities/a7-problems/putnam/-pdf/2010.pdf>

Read the archived Time Magazine story on the exam:

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,400000,00.html>

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