



2020 NACLO PRESS RELEASE

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The NACLO organizing committee is pleased to announce the top U.S. students and Anglophone Canadian students for NACLO 2020. The NACLO contest consists of two stages: an Open Round and an Invitational Round. Students solve problems in language analysis drawn from languages around the world. The problems range widely across traditional and computational topics in linguistics, from phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics to writing systems and natural language processing.

In the Open Round of this year's contest on January 23, 2020, 1,432 students from across the U.S. and Canada competed at more than 200 university and high school sites. The top 10% of the Open Round participants, 145 students, were invited to participate in the Invitational Round on March 7. The two rounds featured problems about Mongo, Chintang, Old Persian Cuneiform, Breton, Paiwan, Cypriot Greek, Thai, Iñapari, Large Flowery Miao, Sanskrit, Indonesian, Yoruba, Nakanai, Maasai, and Arapaho, as well as computational topics such as attention models, Unification Grammar, chatbots, and spam detection using natural language processing.

The Anglophone Canadian team is chosen through NACLO while the Francophone Canadian team is chosen through OLCLO. Although the two competitions work closely together to create challenging problems, they are distinct organizations.

This year, the top four US students (Team Red) are Wesley Zhang (Individual Round winner) of San Diego, California; Ryan Chi of Cupertino, California; Ziyang (Heidi) Lei of Wallingford, Connecticut; and Cerulean Ozarow of Brooklyn, New York. The next four students (Team Blue) are Nathaniel Satriya of Cupertino, California; William Pan of St. Louis, Missouri; Jonathan Huang of Saratoga, California; and Ben Neithardt of Exton, Pennsylvania.

The top four Anglophone Canadians are Tianhua (Ken) Jiang of Ottawa, Ontario; Tianqi (Max) Jiang of Ottawa, Ontario; Thomas Frith of Toronto, Ontario; and Cole Franklin of Toronto, Ontario.

Four students are alternates for the US teams: Willie Jeng of Irvine, California; Jeremy Zhou of Houston, Texas; Riley Kong of San Jose, California; and Kevin Xu of Exeter, New Hampshire. Two students are alternates for the Anglophone Canadian team: Nathan Kim of Toronto, Ontario and Zed Li of Waterloo, Ontario.

NACLO was partially funded by the US National Science Foundation, the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics, and the Linguistics Society of America.

Unfortunately, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, IOL 2020 was cancelled. However, team members and alternates were given a chance to test their linguistic abilities and solve challenges as a group. Team leaders Dragomir Radev, Lori Levin, and Aleka Blackwell as well as former team member Pranav Krishna organized a six-week-long activity where the team solved problems on East Tusom (authored by David Mortensen of CMU), Dzubukuá and Kipeá (authored by Andrés Salanova of the University of Ottawa), Chios dialects of Modern Greek (authored by Aleka Blackwell of MTSU), and Yoloxochitl Mixtec (authored by Jonathan Amith of Gettysburg College).

The students took on the challenges enthusiastically and thoroughly enjoyed the activities.

- "The IOL being cancelled was pretty heartbreaking for me and probably the other finalists as well, but luckily we still got the chance to work with teammates online and solve challenging linguistics puzzles. I am grateful to Lori and everyone at NACLO for providing us the closest to the IOL experience during these weird times," reflected USA alternate Willie Jeng.
- Fellow USA alternate Riley Kong agreed, adding, "Even though I was disappointed that we couldn't attend IOL this year, I thought that the alternative problems this year were unique and exciting. I got to work on problems that I thought were extremely interesting. Because the problems were introduced by the linguists-cum-problem makers themselves, I felt like I had a personal connection to each problem."
- According to William Pan of USA Blue, "I was disappointed by the cancellation of the IOL and the opportunity to meet new friends in person. I still enjoyed being able to solve problems in the substitute program with others from around the country who share the same strengths in computational linguistics."
- Thomas Frith of Canada agreed, stating, "While the cancellation of the IOL was rather depressing, the summer activities still provided an opportunity to bond with other awesome people over some rather difficult and fun problems. I look forward to entering NACLO once more this year."
- "NACLO was a great experience for me! I was very excited when I found out that I qualified for IOL this year, and although I was a bit disappointed that the international competition didn't actually happen, I was glad to be able to meet other qualifiers in the U.S. and Canada and do some linguistics over the summer with them," asserted Nathaniel Satriya of USA Blue. "I'm thankful that I got to experience a bit about what linguistics research actually is like. I hope to study and perhaps conduct research in linguistics or a related field while I'm in college, as it's a very interesting subject that grows more applicable and important as people all over the world become more easily able to connect through technology."
- "I thoroughly enjoyed participating in NACLO this year. I'm really glad that I got exposure to a field that is not taught in school (and better yet, one that I am interested in). Although it was extremely unfortunate that the IOL was cancelled, the summer tasks that we participated in were intriguing, challenging, and fun," reflected Ben Neithardt of USA Blue. "They provided me with an even more in depth look at the study of language and if anything, the activities only further increased my interest in studying linguistics."
- USA alternate Kevin Xu shared similar thoughts: "This year was my second time taking the NACLO, and my first time even getting past the open round. It was also my final year of high school, so it was disappointing to learn that IOL was cancelled. I was really looking forward to getting to know and meet the team leaders and other team members. There is a growing linguistics community at my school, but I think taking part in an international community for

linguistics would have been a very special experience. That said, I am grateful for the activities that were created for the US team members/alternates this summer. Despite my personal scheduling conflicts with time zones, I was able to call and work with my team on several tasks, such as the ones on Dzubukua and Chios Greek. I especially appreciated how the tasks were structured to be more similar to actual research. It made working on the tasks feel more meaningful, and it gave us a small glimpse at what a college major or career in linguistics might look like, too."

- Cerulean Ozarow of USA Red concurred, stating, "NACLO is great fun—the puzzles are delightful to solve and it's really neat to learn about languages from around the world and computational linguistics techniques. I was naturally disappointed about the cancellation of the IOL, but I really appreciated the organizers' efforts to create an alternate program for the qualifiers—I was unfortunately only able to work on one of the problems, but it was a lot of fun to try to solve, and what I saw of the other problems helped me gain a better understanding of what linguists actually do. On the whole, NACLO has definitely furthered my interest in the field of linguistics and made me keen to possibly pursue it in college and as a career."
- "One of the reasons I decided to participate in NACLO this year was the topic of extinct languages—it has always been fascinating that we can study the way people communicated hundreds of years ago, though it is a bit sad knowing that no one will really communicate that way again. In that way, I love the NACLO rounds with their puzzles from which I can deduce how some foreign language functions, and I really enjoy the fact that every problem feels solvable with enough logical deductions and without some outside knowledge. The alternative tasks over the summer exposed me to a wide range of new linguistics terms and offered me a team in which I could discuss these interesting problems," noted Jonathan Huang of USA Blue, reminiscing, "I still remember working pretty late at night over the Dzubukua task, where our team jokingly glossed one of the words as 'bakery' even though I would wager that the Kiriri people did not have some Panera nearby. It's been fun: my experience with NACLO has evolved from the little puzzles from the Open Round to the more interactive tasks over the summer to the papers I can read on random languages and my own attempts at studying a new language. I've enjoyed this season of NACLO, and I really hope to participate again next year!"
- Ryan Chi of USA Red shared many of the same sentiments that his teammates expressed: "When I learned that I'd finally qualified for the USA team in my fifth (and final) year of NACLO, I was beyond excited. But then came the news—IOL had been cancelled. It was an immense disappointment. However, even COVID-19 couldn't deprive my summer of linguistics. Thanks to Lori, Drago, Aleka, David, Andres, and Jonathan, I spent a memorable six weeks tackling Tusom, Dzubukua, Greek, and Mixtec with my new friends from all over the US and Canada. Distanced we may have been—but that didn't stop us from bonding over our shared love of languages."

Other members of the NACLO Organizing Committee include Ethan Chi (Stanford), Adam Hesterberg (Google), James Hyett (University of Toronto), Shuli Jones (MIT), Pranav Krishna (MIT), Kevin Liang (University of Pennsylvania), Daniel Lovsted (McGill University), Tom McCoy (JHU), and Ji Hun Wang (Stanford). See https://www.nacloweb.org/organizing_committee.php for a full list of members.

The NACLO organizing committee would like to recognize its 2020 graders: Yue Chen, Ethan Chi,

Gordon Chi, Harry Go, Ryan Guan, Peace Han, Evan Hochstein, James Hyett, Shuli Jones, Pranav Krishna, Sandra Kuebler, Ben LaFond, Stella Lau, Kevin Liang, Daniel Lovsted, Mindren Lu, Tom McCoy, Margarita Misirpashayeva, Sophie Mori, Larry Moss, Sonia Reilly, Kate Rosenberg, Joshua Sims, Corinne Soucy, Kenneth Steimel, Eli Strauss-Reis, Francis Tyers, and Brian Xiao.

The teams' sponsors include the Linguistic Society of America (LSA), the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics (NAACL), the US National Science Foundation (NSF), Brandeis University, Carnegie Mellon University, Yale University, Middle Tennessee State University, and individual donors.

Registration for NACLO 2021 is now open! Check <http://www.nacloweb.org> for more information. The next IOL will be held in Ventspils, Latvia on July 19-23, 2021.

More Information

NACLO - <http://www.nacloweb.org/> - practice problems, contest rules, and registration details

OLCLO - <https://www.facebook.com/olympiadelinguistique> - registration updates and details

IOL - <http://www.ioling.org/> - all past IOL problems and results

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