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(for immediate release)

NACLO Teams win silver and bronze medals in the team contest in addition to individual medals and honorable mentions at the 2021 International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL) in Ventspils, Latvia

Three NACLO teams, each consisting of four high school students, brought back huge success at the 18th International Linguistics Olympiad, held from July 19 to 24 in Ventspils, Latvia, with teams from around the world joining the contest virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The teams took home a silver medal (USA Red), a bronze medal (Canada Moose), and an honorable mention (USA Blue) as well as a gold medal, four bronze medals, and three honorable mentions in the individual contest.

On July 20 and 21, 2021, 12 students selected through the 2021 NACLO competition joined virtually 216 contestants in 54 teams from 34 countries and territories participating in the 18th International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL). Eight students represented the United States in two teams (USA Red and USA Blue) and four students represented Canada Anglophone (team Canada Moose). The 12 students were selected through NACLO. This annual competition, held since 2007, has two rounds, which are held at universities and high schools throughout the USA and Canada. This year the contest was offered virtually as well in light of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Over 1,000 students participated in the three-hour open round. The top 10% of the students from the open round were invited to the next round, a more difficult, four-hour contest.

The IOL consists of two events: the individual and the team contest. The individual contest is a six-hour exam consisting of five problems. This year, the individual round featured the following languages: Ekari, Zuni, Kilivila, Agbirigba, Rikbaktsa. In the team contest, team members collaborate to solve one particularly challenging problem. This year, the problem involved a variety of phenomena present in three languages: Garifuna, Lokono, and Kariña. Problem solving at the IOL relies on the ability of contestants to decipher the mechanisms of languages by using logical reasoning to test a range of hypotheses.

In the individual contest, the US teams brought home five individual medals and two honorable mentions. One US team member, Jonathan Huang of USA Red, earned a gold medal and ranked third among all IOL participants in the individual contest. Four team members earned bronze medals: Jeremy Zhou of USA Blue, Riley Kong of USA Red, Jonathan Song of USA Blue, and Benjamin Myer Neithardt of USA Blue. Evelyn Sun of USA Red and Adithya Ram Kalyanam of USA Blue received honorable mentions. Additionally, by adding this year's bronze medal to his 2019 IOL silver medal, Jeremy Zhou of USA Blue entered the IOL Hall of Fame which honors those contestants who bring home medals in multiple years.

In the individual contest, the Canada Anglophone (Canada Moose) team member Kunaal Chandrashekar brought home a bronze medal, and Thomas Frith was awarded an honorable mention.

In the team contest, team USA Red (Lydia Wang of Milpitas, California; Jonathan Huang of San Jose, California; Evelyn Sun of Frederick, Maryland; and Riley Kong of San Jose, California) won this year's silver medal. Team Canada Moose (Thomas Frith of Oakville, Ontario; Kunaal Chandrashekar of Mississauga, Ontario; Ellina Zhang of Maple, Ontario, and Leonardo Tenenbaum of Toronto, Ontario) was awarded a bronze medal. In addition, team USA Blue (Jeremy Zhou of Houston, Texas; Benjamin Neithardt of Exton, Pennsylvania; Adithya Kalanam of Reminderville, Ohio; and Jonathan Song of Cary, North Carolina) was the top ranked team among the five teams who earned an honorable mention in the team contest.

In addition to the competition, the NACLO teams participated in virtual enrichment activities, such as lectures on Livonian, an indigenous of Latvia, and on Digitalization Trends in Latvia and Ventspils, as well as social activities and games held by Zoom.

The USA team members and team leaders traveled to College Park, Maryland, where they were hosted by the Language Science Center at the University of Maryland from July 16 to July 24, 2021. The team was trained on site prior to the contest by team leaders Lori Levin of Carnegie Mellon University, Aleka Blackwell of Middle Tennessee State University, and Tom McCoy of Johns Hopkins University. Following the contest, the USA team visited the two major language museums in the country, both in the DC area: the National Museum of Language (<https://languagemuseum.org/>) and Planet Word (<https://planetwordmuseum.org/>). Speaking of her experience, USA Red Team member Evelyn Sun said, "I loved getting to know my teammates and chatting about all things linguistics and many things not :) and of course, the competition itself was fun as always! I'm very grateful to have had this opportunity to meet so many wonderful people: teammates, coaches, and organizers alike." Gold medalist Jonathan Huang said, "My week at IOL 2021 was by far the highlight of my senior year at high school. I will never forget the late night games of Concept, the hypotheses on why College Park had so many random steam vents, or the intense Biblical Hebrew study sessions. Of course, it is amazing that we won second place in the team contest, and I am proud that all of us represented the USA well at the competition."

The Canada Anglophone team members participated in the IOL from Toronto, Ontario. They were accompanied by team leader Daniel Lovsted (2014 IOL gold medalist). They participated in virtual training sessions prior to the contest, independently and with the USA team members under the

guidance of NACLO coaches. Speaking of his IOL experience, team member Thomas Frith said, “IOL was a fantastic experience not only for the joy that I take in solving the problems presented, but also working as part (and sometimes trying to coordinate times of work) of such an awesome gang as we are. For me, it’s been more of a pleasure to work with others on the Canadian team, and to meet with others via IOL social events than working on the problems has necessarily been. It’s also been nice to know that our teamwork paid off. Thank you very much to everyone involved in NACLO, and in the IOL.”

This year’s NACLO coaches were: Ethan Chi (2018 IOL silver medalist), Adam Hesterberg (2007 IOL gold medalist), Ryan Chi (2020 USA Red), Ken Jiang (2019 IOL gold medalist), Nathan Kim (2019 IOL silver medalist), Pranav Krishna (2018 IOL gold medalist), Ben LaFond (2018 IOL gold medalist), David Mortensen (Systems Scientist, Language Technologies Institute, Carnegie Mellon University), and Dragomir Radev (A. Bartlett Giamatti Professor of Computer Science, Yale University).

Other members of the NACLO organizing committee include Ethan Chi of Stanford University, Kevin Liang of the University of Pennsylvania, and Shuli Jones of MIT. A full list of NACLO organizers can be found on page 3 of <https://www.nacloweb.org/resources/problems/2021/NACLO2021ROUND1.pdf>.

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 2022 will start in the second half of September 2021. Check <http://www.nacloweb.org> for more information.

The 19th IOL will be held in Castletown, Isle of Man, July 25-29, 2022.

More Information

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

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

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