

Math team places among top North American colleges

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Alfred University's three-member team placed within the top 100 of the 500 colleges and universities participating in the 2005 William Lowell Putnam Mathematics Competition. The Putnam Competition is the elite collegiate mathematics competition in North America. Held annually on the first Saturday of December, it is a daylong exam in which the best college math students from across the United States and Canada tackle 12 diabolical problems in three-member teams. In December 2005, 3,545 contestants participated in the 65th annual contest. The exam is constructed to test originality as well as technical competence. AU's 2005 team included Jim Krysiak, a senior mathematics major from Lyndhurst, NJ; K.C. Flynn, a senior from West Hartford, CT; and Aaron Cooke, a senior glass engineering science major from Hamburg, NY. They scored a total of 25 points, which placed Alfred University 89th out of 500 colleges. (For the quantitatively literate, that's the top 18th percentile.) To understand just how competitive the exam is, the top 10 schools were Carnegie Mellon, Duke, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, Toronto, Waterloo (Ontario, Canada), and Yale universities; California Institute of Technology; and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The Alfred University Mathematics Division began participating in the Putnam competition in 2002. "In the past four years, AU's Putnam team has enjoyed phenomenal success, placing in the top 18th percentile in 2003 and 2005 out of approximately 500 schools in North America," said Dr. Eric C. Gaze, the team's faculty coordinator and assistant professor of mathematics. "This would be equivalent to our basketball team finishing 89th in the country out of all basketball programs. It is not often that a small Division III school can compete against the Harvards and MITs of the academic world, and we are thrilled with the prospect of creating a winning tradition here at Alfred University." "Congratulations to these dedicated problem-solvers for an outstanding performance, and special congratulations to (Jim) Krysiak, a four-year starter on the AU Putnam team and this year's high scorer," said Dr. Robert C. Williams, Cole Professor of Applied Mathematics at Alfred University. The William Lowell Putnam Mathematics Competition began in 1938 and is designed to stimulate a healthy rivalry in mathematical studies in the colleges and universities of the United States and Canada. William Lowell Putnam, a member of the Harvard class of 1882, wrote an article for the December issue of the Harvard Graduates' Magazine in which he described the merits of an intellectual intercollegiate competition. To establish such a competition, his widow, Elizabeth Lowell Putnam, created a trust fund in 1927 known as the William Lowell Putnam Intercollegiate Memorial Fund. The first competition supported by this fund was in the field of English; a few years later a second experimental competition was held, this time in mathematics between two institutions. It was not until after Mrs. Putnam's death in 1935 that the examination assumed its current form and was placed under the administration of the Mathematical Association of America.