



Montgomery Blair High School Magnet Foundation Inc.



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CONTACT: Sherrie Emoto, board@mbhsmagnet.org

Address:

MBHS Magnet
Foundation Inc.
P.O. Box 101
Kensington, MD
20895

Six Montgomery Blair High School Magnet Students Advance in Computational Linguistics Competition

Silver Spring, MD—Six Montgomery Blair High School Science, Mathematics, and Computer Science Magnet Program students qualified for the second round of testing, which takes place on March 13, to determine the four members of the U.S. team for the 2014 International Computational Linguistics Olympiad, to be held this July in Beijing, China. This means that these students were among the top 165 scorers on the first round of the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad (NACLO) Competition, in which 1,645 students participated on January 30. The six students (with their grade levels) who will advance are Daniel Amir (12) of Bethesda; Megan Chao (12), Michelle Noh (12), Scott Wu (12), and Victor Xu (11) of Rockville; and Robert Martin (12) of Silver Spring.

NACLO gives students the opportunity to solve linguistic puzzles and use logic skills to explore the diversity and consistency of language. For example, problems may involve deciphering sentences in an obscure language, analyzing foreign grammars, and identifying computational properties of a language. In three hours, using only paper and pencils, students are presented eight challenging problems to solve using speed and creative thinking.

This year thirty Blair students participated in Round 1 of the NACLO competition, comprising about 1.8% of the North American participants. However, the six Blair Magnet students who qualified for Round 2 represent 3.6% of all the qualifiers. In fact, Montgomery Blair had the fifth highest number of qualifiers of any North American testing location.

Blair Linguistics Club co-founder Daniela Ganelin (along with Alan Du) explains, “NACLO is really a fun competition. It’s pure logic, a bit like a three-hour Puzzlepalooza.” Puzzlepalooza refers to the week-long puzzle competition that enthusiastic Blair magnet staff members host each spring.

Blair magnet math teacher and Linguistics Club sponsor Mr. William Rose praises the club and its founders, “Blair Magnet

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students Daniela Ganelin and Alan Du founded the Blair Linguistics Club two years ago and have turned it into one of the most fascinating and innovative leaning-based clubs in the school. Club members take turns preparing and delivering lectures on diverse topics including phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, neuro-linguistics, first-language acquisition, and many others. In addition, they take time each week to practice for the NACLO competition by completing problems from previous years. They also have frequent linguistics professors and PhD student guest lecturers come to speak to the students about their research, providing one of the strongest links in the school to local universities.”

NACLO Round 2 qualifier Robert Martin offers his gratitude, “The Blair Magnet has taught me many of the skills that I have used to reach NACLO Round 2, from logic to analysis to reasoning skills. I would like to thank Linguistics Club sponsor Mr. Rose and everyone involved in the club for helping all of us prepare for and get excited about NACLO. Linguistics Club rules!”



Blair Magnet senior Robert Martin and five of his classmates advanced to Round 2 of competition to select four students who will represent the U.S. at the 2014 International Computational Linguistics Olympiad. (Photo courtesy of Mrs. Pam Martin)

In 2012, Blair Magnet alumnus Sam Zbarsky was one of four students to represent the U.S. as a member of its linguistics team. In fact, he earned an honorable mention at the 2012 International Linguistics Olympiad, which was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia on July 29-August 4 of that year.

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About The Montgomery Blair High School Magnet Foundation

This organization was founded by a group of concerned students, teachers, administrators, and alumni in 2008. Its purpose is to promote science, mathematics, and computer science education by supporting the Magnet Program at Montgomery Blair High School in its efforts to develop resources and refine practices needed to provide a rigorous and enriched education for students, staff, and the community at large. The Foundation is incorporated in the state of Maryland and is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

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