

Long Island Students Visit Stony Brook University to Take Part in NACLO

NACLO sounds like an insurance or auto parts company, yet in reality it is the North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad, a contest for U.S. and Canadian students. Sponsored by the National Science Foundation, it consists of a challenging and fun set of puzzles in computational linguistics which middle and high school students solve during a three hour test.

A few weekends ago at Stony Brook University, a room packed with students listened to Richard Larson, Chair of the Department of Linguistics, give an overview of linguistics, the scientific study of human language. They then heard Linguistics Professor Lori Repetti and Computer Science Professor Yejin Choi describe computational linguistics as an interdisciplinary field combining language, computer science and logic. There are many computational linguistics applications not well known to the public, such as internet search algorithms and automatic language translation. Individuals skilled in these applications are highly prized in today's connected world.

Twenty-four of these students visited Stony Brook's Center for Science and Mathematics Education (CESAME) on January 31 to take the qualifying exam. Top-scoring students will be invited to take a more advanced exam and those who excel on this exam qualify for the International Linguistics Olympiad.

When asked what they enjoyed about the experience, student comments were overwhelmingly positive. One answered, "The feeling of elation after I completed question 1." Another stated, "For someone that loves languages and mathematics it doesn't get much better." A third said, "Learning about an exciting area of research I didn't even know existed!" All students who answered the questionnaire noted they would like to learn more about these fields.

Professor Larsen was thrilled at both the turnout and response. He noted that "we want to attract talented students into our field and this kind of activity is a perfect way to interest students at an early age." Stony Brook Provost and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Dennis Assanis stated, "We are continually on the lookout for ways to attract talent to Stony Brook University as well as opportunities to work with the Long Island community. NACLO is an ideal vehicle to do this and will definitely be back next year."