

Odds and Ends

Putnam Competition

The William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition (administered by the Mathematical Association of America) is an annual event in which over 3,500 undergraduates from over 500 colleges and universities from the United States and Canada participate. Every year, students have six hours to work on twelve extremely challenging questions, requiring very creative solutions rather than straightforward application of learned course material. There is a two-hour lunch break between the morning and the afternoon session. The examination cuts across the bounds of various disciplines of the undergraduate curriculum and also features self-contained questions that do not fit into any of the usual categories. Contestants can win cash prizes and prestigious scholarships. Typically, students prepare for this competition by enrolling in MATHS 271 for one credit hour in the fall semester. However, this is not a prerequisite for participation.

In March 2005, the winners and rankings of the 65th annual competition of the previous year were announced. The top 500 contestants were honored by name and institution. Among them, ranked 328, was Matt Davis of Ball State University. Congratulations Matt!

When asked about his Putnam experience, here is what Matt had to say: *“The Putnam Exam is a great way to stretch yourself mathematically. The test is all about taking things you already know, and applying them in ways that you probably never thought of before. At first, Putnam problems tend to be more confusing than anything else. The more you look at them, though, (and occasionally look at solutions for them), you’ll hopefully start to see new ways of thinking about concepts you already knew. Sooner or later, it becomes much easier to think creatively about math, which is the whole point. Hopefully, you’ll enjoy the process, and if nothing else, you can get a few lunches on the department’s tab along the way.”*

Actuarial Exams

The actuarial science majors at Ball State University did well on the May 2005 professional actuarial examinations. Twenty-five students passed at least one of the examinations. A few students successfully completed more than one exam. The Mathematics Department offers courses that prepare students for specific actuarial exams and this contributed to the strong performance by Ball State students.