



NEWS

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El Camino College Physics Team Brings Home its Second Consecutive Victory *Students win silver medal in international competition*

Sometimes the best answer is no answer at all. That's a lesson learned from the El Camino College Physics Team, which recently took home its second consecutive silver medal in an international competition.

Physics team members Evan Nunez, Alex Polanski and Tim Wilson participated in the 2016 University Physics Competition, an international contest for undergraduate students who work in teams to solve a physics problem over the course of 48 hours.

"The competition was grueling but extremely rewarding," said Evan. "It seems our training from the department and self-motivation were the main factors to our success."

Nearly 200 student teams submitted papers for judging in the competition. Teams were given the choice of two topics – methods of radioactive waste disposal or the differences in mass between dinosaurs and the largest ancient mammals.

Alex said the team, trained by faculty adviser and physics professor John Coroneus, chose the first question, and started researching whether it would be more effective to shoot radioactive nuclear waste into the sun for disposal or into the asteroid belt where it would eventually decay.

Teams had 48 hours to research the problem, decide on the necessary physics and mathematical principles to address the problem, find helpful data and write a technical paper on the issue. Alex said his team determined neither option was a realistic solution to the problem.

"I've been in academic competitions before, but this was a whole new experience," Alex said. "It is amazing how much you can learn about a new subject when you only have 48 hours. Since these questions are so open ended, it is really about finding a conclusion and then developing the conceptual argument and the mathematics to support it. All in all, it was a great (but exhausting!) experience."

During the contest, teams used books, journals, computers, the internet, programs they wrote, and other "nonliving" resources, but they did not consult with any people outside of their team. Professor Coroneus prepared the students for the competition through mock questions and skill building, but as outlined in the contest rules, did not speak to them about this problem; they were entirely on their own.

“As with previous teams, I’m very proud of the students for taking on the additional work in preparation and the time when writing their paper for the competition,” said Coroneus. “Like other teams in the past, they were able to take the next step as aspiring scientists and engineers in working out the details of a novel and open-ended problem.

“The continued success of El Camino College students demonstrates the quality of the physics and astronomy programs here. We teach to a very high level, thus enabling the tremendous accomplishments of our students both here and in their future endeavors.”

The El Camino College team ranked 27 out of 146 on their problem, directly competing with many four-year colleges and universities in United States and abroad such as Cornell University, Georgia Institute of Technology, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Toronto, Autonomous University of Barcelona, and Civil Aviation University of China.

“Completing all the research and writing up a formal paper within 48 hours was extremely difficult, but after earning a silver medal and placing higher than an Ivy League university team from Cornell, it was well worth the work we went through to answer the waste disposal question,” Tim said.

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Photo available online

http://www.elcamino.edu/administration/publicrelations/photos/2017/DAN_7589.jpg

ECC physics team members Evan Nunez, Tim Wilson and Alex Polanski (pictured from left with professor John Coroneus) recently won their second consecutive silver medal in an international competition.