



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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Math major scores high at annual math competition

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EAU CLAIRE — A University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire mathematics major recently scored high on the Mathematical Association of America's prestigious [William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition](#).

Senior Noah Williams, a mathematics major from [Eau Claire](#), ranked 713 out of the 4,277 participants, from 578 different institutions, who took the exam.

Williams scored 20 out of a possible 120 points. During the test, students are allowed two three-hour sessions to try and solve 12 problems.

Due to the level of difficulty of the problems, the median score for this year's exam was one. Just over half of the participants received a score of either one or zero.

Dr. Manda Riehl, assistant professor of mathematics, said the test is so difficult because it requires students to pull knowledge from several areas.

"The exam includes questions from a wide variety of mathematical areas, and most problems don't fit into a nice neat 'box' whose solution only requires techniques from one course," Riehl said. "Instead, the problems often cut across several specialties at once, requiring a student to draw on a wide range of knowledge to solve a single problem."

Williams said this makes it difficult to prepare for the test.

"One never knows what to expect on an exam of this caliber since the problems incorporate a diverse range of mathematical topics and are often simple to state but require precise and thorough proofs," Williams said.

According to Dr. Alexander Smith, chair of the mathematics department, the exam tests students for creativity. He said scoring any points is considered a major accomplishment.

This was Williams' fourth time taking the exam. In prior years, he had received scores of zero and one.

"He did very well this time," said Dr. Simei Tong, associate professor of mathematics. "It shows that his mathematics knowledge has enhanced and his skill of solving problems has

sharpened throughout the years of course work, research activities and math tutoring. We are very happy and proud of his performance."

The William Lowell Putnam Mathematical Competition was established in 1938 in memory of its namesake. It is held each year on the first Saturday in December. The prizes for the top individuals or teams range from \$2,500-\$25,000. Over the years, many of the winners of the competition have become distinguished mathematicians, receiving the Fields Medal and the Nobel Prize in Physics.

Williams said he owes a lot of his success to those who guided and prepared him for the exam.

"I attribute my success in large part to the wonderful encouragement and support that I have received throughout my undergraduate experience from many outstanding faculty and staff in the UW-Eau Claire mathematics department," he said.

Williams will be pursuing graduate studies in mathematics at the University of Colorado Boulder in the fall.

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