

geometry and topology as a Postdoctoral Fellow at MSRI in 2009–10, then her NSF Fellowship award will take her to Barnard, which has an historic legacy as a college for women, to be mentored by the distinguished topologist Dusa McDuff.

At the Statistical and Applied Mathematical Sciences Institute (SAMSI), the new postdoctoral fellows will be joining the existing postdoctoral program, as this ensures that the fellows will become involved in highly interdisciplinary research, a potential key for their future employment. For those interested in an eventual academic position, the appointments will involve teaching at one of the partner universities of SAMSI (Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Jean-Philippe Lessard, currently at Rutgers, has been selected by the School of Mathematics at the Institute for

Advanced Study (IAS) for an appointment at Rutgers beginning in September of 2009. Lessard is developing new techniques to deal with large amounts of data using Morse Homology, an abstract and notoriously difficult-to-calculate notion of algebraic topology. His goal is to make it computable.

Julia Chifman, a postdoc at the Mathematical Biosciences Institute (MBI), will be exploring the genetic relationship between species. The evolutionary history of a group of organisms can be illustrated through graphs called phylogenetic trees. Julia will use her training in algebraic methods to work on the mathematical structure of these trees.

For more information on the NSF Mathematics Institutes and their new program, visit <http://www.mathinstitutes.org> and the web sites of the individual institutes. 🌱

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## Highlights from the 2008 Putnam Competition

By Joseph A. Gallian

The 69th annual Putnam competition, held in December 2008, had 405 teams and 3627 participants from 545 institutions. The number of institutions was a record high, but the number of individual participants was down 126 from the record high in 2007. The four top ranked teams — Harvard, Princeton, MIT and Stanford — were the same as in 2007. Princeton finished second behind Harvard for the eighth time since 1985. Harvard finished first for the 27th time and placed in the top five for the 54th time.

The top fives scores on the 120 point exam ranged from 117 to 101. The score of 117 is the third highest since 1967. A score of 22 was enough to rank in the top 500. The median score was 1. MIT had five out the top 16 finishers and an amazing 48 out the top 189. In keeping with recent trends, four of the top five finishers and eight of the top 16 finishers had previously won Gold medals at the International Mathematics Olympiad.

Sophomores Brian Lawrence of Caltech and Arnav Tripathy of Harvard were repeat Putnam Fellows (top

five finishers) from 2007, while junior Yufei Zhao from MIT matched his top five finish of 2006. Freshman Seok Hyeong Lee from Stanford and sophomore Bohua Zhan from MIT were the other two Putnam Fellows. The Elizabeth Lowell Putnam Prize went to Viktoriya Krakovna of the University of Toronto.

Harvard increased its total number of Putnam Fellows in the 69 competitions to 97. MIT, which has the second highest number of Putnam Fellows over the years, increased its total to 49. Harvard received an award of \$25,000 for finishing first while each Putnam Fellow received \$2,500.

A comprehensive up-to-date history of the Putnam competition is available at <http://www.d.umn.edu/~jgallian/putnam06.pdf>. 🌱