

2006 UConn Physics Olympiad

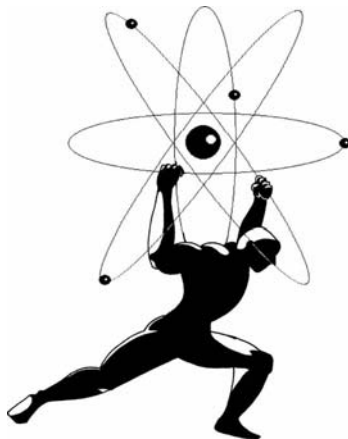


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Summary

On May 25th, 2006 the Department of Physics at the University of Connecticut held its first-ever Physics Olympiad. The event was a day-long opportunity for local high school students to compete in physics related, hands-on tasks at the UConn campus.

The Olympiad was a great success! Thanks to funding from our donors, we were able to host 17 teams from 10 different high schools in Connecticut. With a crew of over 20 people, the day went as planned. Our guests had a great time and the teachers were delighted.

Our Mission

The event was envisioned to serve multiple goals. The overarching purpose was to excite students with the reality of Physics. After spending a full year solving problems and studying for the AP Physics test, we wanted to show students that Physics is an exciting hands-on collaborative enterprise. Our message to the students: Physics is Fun!

The Olympiad was modeled after the Yale Physics Olympics, in an attempt to foster interest in physics and create connections with schools and students in our area. In a time when everything points to a crisis in science education at the high school level, we wanted to offer up our resources to local high schools and show that physics can be fun and exciting.

The Olympiad was an event to build connections with our communities and to reach out to our high school teachers and provide an event that would fit into their curriculum. The committee had also hoped to create some interest amongst our guests in attending UConn, preferably the UConn Physics Department.

Organization

In January 2006, a group comprising of graduate students, staff, undergraduate students and faculty formed the Organizing Committee. Ms. Carol Artacho Guerra was elected as the Chair for the committee, and a timeline of tasks was created for the group. Within the committee, groups were formed to tackle the major tasks: catering, space, prizes, volunteers, fundraising, mailings and inventing tasks for the Olympiad.

Funding & Finances

Financial support from this event came from a variety of donations and awards. Ms. Artacho Guerra applied for the Marsh White Outreach Award from the Society of Physics Students, a professional organization for students operating under the umbrella of the American Institute of Physics. 'Marsh W. White Awards are made to Society of Physics Students

Chapters "to support projects designed to promote interest in physics among students and the general public".

The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut contributed funding for the Olympiad. Additionally, the Early College Experience Program run by the University also donated some funds. The Department of Physics at UConn provided funds, space and resources to the enterprise.

A private donation was received from Mrs. Sharon Carini, from Sherman, CT, in memory of Dr. Paul R. Carini. Committee members made their contribution in the form of time and by purchasing their own staff T-shirts for the event.

The total cost of the event was \$2500. These expenses included breakfast and lunch for all our guests, prizes, volunteer shirts, mailings, giveaways and equipment for the tasks. For a breakdown of expenses, please see Appendix A.

Our financial goal was to make the event free for all participants so as to make the Olympiad as accessible to as many schools as possible. Due to the constraints of our budget, we limited the number of teams in attendance. However, several schools expressed interest in bringing an additional team and at least three schools could not bring a team due to lack of space. We hope that we will be able to expand our program in the future by raising additional funds.

Participants

Ten high schools participated in the Olympiad; bringing a total of 17 teams, 82 students, to campus. The Department hosted ninety five guests: students, teachers and additional chaperones.

The event was advertised through mailings to schools within a thirty mile radius of Storrs and through teachers participating in the Upward Bound program during the school year. The result was a fairly diverse group of students, with schools coming from a variety of districts.

Tasks

All tasks were created by Physics graduate students during the course of the Spring semester. Scoring guidelines and instructions were generated by these students. Grads responsible for creating the tasks were also in charge of overseeing the tasks on the day of the Olympiad. Prior to the event, four faculty members from the Physics Department tested each task, providing feedback to the graduates responsible for each task. This allowed grads to

make adjustments to tasks and scoring schemes to the tasks and provide an even better experience to our guests.

Students' teams competed in five different tasks involving different areas of Physics. All tasks were hands-on and had to be completed within a thirty minute time period. A description of individual tasks and scoring guidelines can be found in Appendix B, or visiting our website <http://www.phys.uconn.edu/olympics/>

Prizes

Teams who received the best score in each task received a small commemorative plaque for their classroom. The overall winner of the event received a large plaque.

Each students received an Olympiad pen at the beginning of the day. As an appreciation gift, students received a carabiner and a certificate of participation.

For a detailed list of winners and rankings, please see Appendix C or visit our website <http://www.phys.uconn.edu/olympics/>

Results

The Olympiad was a success without question. Raisa Roginsky, winner of the Teacher of the Year Award, from Guilford High School, wrote "thanks very much for the event! good timing, great organization!" Kim Lowell, Physics Teacher from Newtown High School, says "My students and I had a great time. We look forward to coming again next year!!" Students from Bloomfield High School rated the Olympiad with "a 10. It was excellent in every way". They also wrote "The Olympics were tons of fun. UConn should absolutely continue this in years to come :)". Mr. Fontaine, from Tolland High School, wrote "Our students could not stop talking about the Olympiad and were appreciative of the gifts and the support from your entire entourage. It was a great time for all of us and I already know of some underclassmen that are looking forward to their chance to take part at next year's Olympiad."

The Committee and volunteers also enjoyed the event. The Olympiad gave our graduate students an opportunity to participate in an outreach event, interact with students at the high school level and share their enthusiasm for Physics.

Looking Forward

The Committee met after the event to debrief and discuss our impressions of the day. We all considered the Olympiad a successful event that should be continued in the future.

In terms of planning, the Committee agreed that starting the process earlier would allow for easier planning and provide more opportunity to find sources of funding. If the event grows, as we expect it will considering the positive response of participants, we will need the additional time and funds to increase the capacity of the event.

As for the event itself, the next Organizing Committee could focus the intent of the event. The Committee discussed formulating more defined goals for the Olympiad which would allow us to target the event and guide it towards more specific purposes (i.e. specific diversity goals, science curriculum). Our main goal will remain to promote interest in Physics and provide an event free of charge to participants.

Appendix A: 2006 UConn Physics Olympiad Budget

UConn Physics Olympics May 25, 2006 BUDGET			
<u>Income:</u>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date Rec'd</i>	<i>FRS</i>
Society of Physics Students Marsh White Award	\$ 300.00	1/31/10	430428
University Outreach Office of Educational Partnerships	\$ 300.00	4/7/10	253702
CLAS Dean's Office	\$ 300.00	4/8/10	253702
Other Donations: UConn Foundation - Private Donor	\$ 750.00	6/3/10	Foundation
Committee Members	\$ 171.75		
Physics Department	\$ 676.94		
Total Income	\$ 2,498.69		
<u>Expenses:</u>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Date Paid</i>	<i>FRS</i>
Save the date posters color copies (20)	\$ 5.00	Feb-10	
Stationery: Invitations: letterhead/envelopes/postage/labels	\$ 57.62	Mar-10	
Donations requests: letterhead/envelopes/postage	\$ 7.98	Apr-10	
Staff Tee Shirts 9 "all day" volunteers	\$ 110.10	May-10	
14 committee members self-pay (\$171.75)	\$ 171.75	May-10	
Token Gifts for Participants carabiners (1-100ct pack)	\$ 104.79	Apr-10	
pens (1-100ct pack)	\$ 83.41	May-10	
participant certificates	\$ 20.00	May-10	
Awards/Prizes (Plaques) Individual tasks (5); overall team award	\$ 172.70	May-10	
Registration name tags	\$ 12.68	May-10	
Catering morning refreshments (110 people) and lunch (125 people)	\$ 1,046.00	May-10	
Posters and signage displayed during event (approx. 30 color signs)	\$ 7.50	May-10	
Task Supplies	\$ 546.16	May-10	
Administrative Student Help (approx)	\$ 153.00		
Total Expenses	\$ 2,498.69		
Net Income/Loss	\$ -		

Appendix B: 2006 UConn Physics Olympiad Tasks

Elliptical Target (aka Stop the Mad Scientist)

Free Fall & 2-D Kinematics

Objective

Well, it was bound to happen. Late last night, one of our most brilliant scientists, Dr. Nolan the Large has finally lost his rocker. You see, Nolan was supposed to attend the “Super Mathematician and Revolutionary Thinker”, or SMART conference which took place in China this year. But alas, in all of his hard work and preparation, Nolan missed the deadline to submit his travel forms to the department, and now he has no way of getting to the conference. He was depressed for days, and this depression was worsened by the failure of his favorite baseball team, the New York Mets. Even his fantasy baseball team was losing. Poor Nolan.

But then, from out of his office I heard a scream, EUREKA! Nolan has discovered a way to get to the conference afterall. You see, my friends, Nolan is quite athletic and quite in shape, and can walk for miles. Now, although he cannot walk directly to China, he has realized that if he used enough kinetic energy, he can walk his way through the Earth itself and arrive in China! Thus, he has been walking outside the physics building here at UCONN furiously through the night, and has not shown one bit of tiring.

We must try to stop him. For as we all know, although he does possess some of the prowess of the Incredible Hulk, he would surely not survive walking through the core of the earth. But Nolan has a temper, so we cannot just attack him, or he will destroy us all. However, like all super-humans, he has a weakness. Yes my friends, Water. If we can hit him with a localized burst of water, we can surely stop him without consequence. Now, this is not as easy as it sounds, because if he sees us coming, he will make us pay! Thus, we must attack from above.

As I said, we cannot get too close, thus using only a simple measuring device, you must make an estimate as to the average velocity of Nolan’s laps to China, as well as the height of the physics building. Using this information, you must determine when to drop a water balloon onto his head to stop him (how long after the beginning of his lap). Do not worry, if you hit him, he will not become violent, but he may curse in which case we will feed him some candy. We can only allow you three shots for your personal safety against this determined scientist. Good luck friends!

NOTES:

- 1) You are only allowed 3 drops...use them wisely
- 2) You must drop using the dropping mechanism, which must be at least 4 feet above guard rail, and over guard marker.
- 3) You will receive points based on your estimates, so please do them carefully.
- 4) You should have 3 measurements in total, Height, balloons time of flight, Nolans lap speed.

Grading Procedures

- 1) Collect all data from students
- 2) Students receive 1 point for each piece of data correct (3 points max)
- 3) 2.5 points are awarded for direct hit (balloon hits nolans head)
- 4) 1 point awarded for a grazing hit (hits nolans swinging arms, feet)
- 5) .5 points awarded for a splash hit (water splashes and hits Nolan)
- 6) Record final scores

Materials

- 75 small water balloons
- 5 rolls of kite thread
- 1 pair of scissors
- 11 ALL WOODEN hockey sticks or broom sticks or some kind of large wooden stick (do not have to be the same, in fact better if not the same)
- 10 stopwatches
- 5 assorted balls (basketball, hockey, baseball, tennis, does not matter)

Comments

The test balls fall at a different speed than the balloons do.

Snap Crackle Pop

Density, Mass & Volume

Objective

As we all know, there is a huge issue in this country with the way that we consume products. Our great society is unfortunately based on a “use once and throw away”, or single serving attitude. Think of all of the examples that we use, between paper cups, Styrofoam plates, fast food containers, and many more. But it does not stop there. Many of the products we use in everyday life come in exorbitant packaging and are made from non-recyclable materials. This leads to an enormous problem in terms of waste management across the country. Where can we put all this waste with all the Urban Sprawl?

So my friends, we have a very simple task on hand. We want to design a more efficient packaging for breakfast cereals. Latex balloons provide a good candidate for the new packaging as the material is biodegradable, and it expands, so when there is no cereal left, the packaging is minimal. So this sounds like a great idea (aside from the fact that we may no longer be able to include a toy with the cereal, or run games on the back that no one reads anyway). So, please provide us with an estimate of just how much of our cereal we can fit into this new package. Use whatever means necessary (except liquefying or adding liquids, no-one likes soggy cereal) to see how efficient our new package will be.

NOTES:

- 1.) You will be given a balloon into which you must put as many Rice Krispies as possible.
- 2.) You have access to many potential tools to facilitate this process.
- 3.) When you think you have filled your balloon with as many Krispies as you can, call a Judge over to your area.

Grading Procedures

- 1.) Using a known value of balloon material weight (as determined during the prep), measure the weight of the krispies + balloon via a balance. Subtract off the known value, and record the krispie weight.
- 2.) Olympians should not be crushing the rice krispies, if seen doing this issue a warning, if it continues, disqualify them.

Materials

Rice Krispies Galore
2 straws
1 empty soda bottle
3 rubber bands
1 pair of scissors
3 sheets of paper
Masking tape
1 garden trowel
10" of string
1 funnel
1 white board marker
3 paper clips
2 index cards
3 Skewers

Comments

Allowing students to mash the krispies is not a good idea.
Beware of the cleanup involved in this task.
Count on about 2 packs of krispies per group.

Legos for Big Kids (aka Spreading the Brick Plague)

Center of Mass & Stationary Equilibrium

Objective

There is no way to avoid it, but every year it seems like the more vaccines we make, the more mutated viruses appear in our world. Once again this is the case, as a terrible disease called Philo-Influenzia-Sophistica is spreading. The president himself said that there could not be any more dangerous virus for our country than this one. It seems as though once one person is infected, they become overwhelmed with thought, and soon enough, all others around them are doomed! Our very society as we know it is being threatened!

Despite how we feel, on the “brick” of being infected ourselves, we must find a way to contain the problem. Now, our top scientists have shown that the spreading of this disease comes in a very strict and rectangular pattern. Thus, we wish to know, that once it is airborne, how far can it grow in 10 days? So my friends, here is our task. In front of you are 10 bricks that show how far the disease can travel in one day. We want to see the farthest the Airborne (minimum of 1 brick height off the ground) virus will spread. Be diligent and be creative, as we need to know how far the disease, once airborne can travel. Be well and godspeed!

NOTES:

- 1.) You will be given 10 bricks, and only 10 bricks to work with.
- 2.) You must use these bricks to ultimately create a structure that that extends across the other side of line.
- 3.) You may only have bricks touching the ground on ONE side of the given line.
- 4.) When you think you have your best structure, call a judge over.
- 5.) The judge will measure the horizontal distance from the line to the furthest hanging brick.
- 6.) Your bricks must hang at least 10 seconds during the horizontal measurement for it to count.
- 7.) The team who has the longest horizontal distance will take first place in the Bricks task, with the 2nd longest taking second place, and so on.

Grading Procedures

- 1.) Measurements will be done in centimeters
- 2.) The line will be a piece of tape, so the measurement will be made on the side edge of the tape closest to where the bricks touch the ground.
- 3.) In measuring the furthest point of the bridge, look for the clearest point that's furthest and go from there. If it is unclear, use your best judgment.

Materials

10 bricks per group

Comments

Watch out for toes.

Add string or rubber bands to make it more exciting and spice things up.

Clip to be Square (aka Gravity vs. Magnet)

Gravitational & Electromagnetic Forces

Objective

Today folks, the match we have all been waiting for. The fight of the century, the battle of the giants, the clash of the titans, the be all to end all...who will win, who will be able to have bragging rights as the "Strongest" Force in nature...the world will soon find out!

Introducing first, in the red corner weighing in at extremely small masses. A force so powerful it was once thought to be two separate forces. The ultimate singular tag-team, who packs a wallop with charge, has the capacitance to take down even the mightiest of foes, and the resistance against all who try to stand in its way, the current reigning champion, The Electromagnetic Force!

And in the Blue corner, weighing in at an immense mass, the challenger. The menace that bombarded Newton with apples, Einstein with black holes and Astronomer's with Dark Matter, the force that not only holds the moon to the earth, but your feet to the ground, that binds the universe, and defines our notion of up and down, the force that all the fans are "falling for", the elusive, the geometric, the very fabric of space and time itself...The Gravitational Force!

Well, although the battle of these two forces might very well result in the destruction of not only the earth, but the universe as a whole if the two were to really "battle". Luckily for us, There is a much simpler way to settle once and for all who is stronger. We can all see how strong gravity is by just picking something up and drop it. Can a simple nail pick up paper clips alone? No it cannot, but if we introduce a force, the electromagnetic force into the nail, we may be seeing quite different results.

Thus, it is your objective to make an electromagnet. One strong enough to pick up the paper clips in front of you. Depending on how you choose to make it, you will be able to pick up more and more clips. Once you think you have the strongest magnet possible, call over a judge and we will tally how many you can lift.

NOTE:

We are looking for how many clips you can pick up in a single trial, so be sure to test before you call over a judge. Be creative, and the clips must be picked up by the magnet only.

Grading Procedures

1.) Judges will count how many paperclips the team can pick up using the electromagnet.

- 2.) Paperclips cannot be physically attached to the magnet, they must be picked up via magnetism only.
- 3.) Paperclips can be attached to each other, if they think of it.

Materials

- 1 9Volt Battery
- 1 Hobby Battery
- 1 D-Cell Battery
- 3 feet of coated copper wire
- 3 feet of copper wire
- 3 feet of aluminum wire
- 1 foot Ethernet wire (CAT5)
- 1 iron nail
- 1 aluminum nail
- 1 pair of wire cutters/strippers
- 1 roll of electrical tape
- 100 paper clips

Comments

Batteries get VERY hot. Use alligator clips if you can to avoid touching the batteries and the leads with your bare fingers.

Huff Puff (aka Paper Bridges)

Mass, Stress & Torque

Objective

You and your group have been selected to design a new prototype for an ant bridge. These bridges will be designed to fit into the latest in state of the art ant farms. Now this is no small task. Remember that ants are hard workers and can walk long distances while carrying multiples of their bodyweight. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that after a hard days work, all the ants get home to their families safe.

Using the materials at hand, it is up to you to give the design of this ant bridge. You will be scored on the following...multiply the amount of weight by the distance (in 1-dimension) in which the bridge spans, and the bridge must support its final weight for more than 5 seconds without collapsing. Please note that the bridge must be free standing as well (no hands to support it). When you are ready to be judged, signal the judge over. There is no minimum amount of weight, or maximum, and the same goes for the length. Good luck friends!

NOTE:

Each group will only have access to 2 sets of materials, so that you can get 1-trial run

and 1 real bridge. To receive the second set of materials, you must submit all unused materials to the Staff, and they will distribute the new set.

Grading procedures

- 1) measure the span of the bridge in centimeters
- 2) Record total weight supported by the bridge
- 3) Multiply the span length times the weight and record this number
- 4) Scores are comparisons of the above number

Materials Needed

printer paper 8.5x11
small index cards
paper clips
masking tape
sets of lab weights
scissors

Appendix C: 2006 UConn Physics Olympiad Winners & Rankings

Award Summary

Overall Winner

Flux (Southington High School)

Southington High School

Teacher: Keith Gregorian-Michaelsen

Clip to be Square

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Tolland High School

Teacher: Ernie J. Fontaine III

Huff Puff

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Shelton High School

Teacher: Ed Seppa

Snap Crackle Pop

Flux (Southington High School)

Southington High School

Teacher: Keith Gregorian-Michaelsen

Legos for Big Kids

Flux (Southington High School)

Southington High School

Teacher: Keith Gregorian-Michaelsen

Elliptical Target

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Tolland High School

Teacher: Ernie J. Fontaine III

Official Scores

Clip to be Square

Winner: Tolland A (Tolland High School)

52 Clips picked up with their electromagnet!

Milford 1 (Jonathan Law High School)

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Flux (Southington High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

Newtown (Newtown High School)

Milford 2 (Jonathan Law High School)

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Warhawks 1 (Bloomfield High School)

Trumbull 1 (Trumbull High School)

P&V (Guilford High School)

Massless/Frictionless (Southington High School)

Shelton 2 (aka The Torque of the Town)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Tolland B (Tolland High School)

Huff Puff

Winner: Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

*With a bridge of paper, index cards and paper clips that supported 1645 grams
(over 3 lbs.) over a span of 21.3 cm!*

Milford 1 (Jonathan Law High School)

Tolland B (Tolland High School)

Milford 2 (Jonathan Law High School)

P&V (Guilford High School)

Newtown (Newtown High School)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

Trumbull 1 (Trumbull High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Warhawks 1 (Bloomfield High School)

Shelton 2 (aka The Torque of the Town)

Flux (Southington High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Massless/Frictionless (Southington High School)

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Legos for Big Kids

Winner: Flux (Southington High School)

With a structure of bricks extending 43.6 cm from the base of the bottom brick.

Honorable Mention: Newtown (Newtown High School) for a very, very, very close second.

Shelton 2 (aka The Torque of the Town)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Tolland B (Tolland High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

Milford 1 (Jonathan Law High School)

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Warhawks 1 (Bloomfield High School)

Massless/Frictionless (Southington High School)

Milford 2 (Jonathan Law High School)

Trumbull 1 (Trumbull High School)

P&V (Guilford High School)

Snap Crackle Pop

Winner: Flux (Southington High School)

With a balloon that held 989.8 grams (2 lbs.) of Rice Krispies.

Honorable Mention: Milford 1 (Jonathan Law High School) for a very impressive balloon, even if it popped at the last minute leaving you with nothing to show.

Milford 2 (Jonathan Law High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Warhawks 1 (Bloomfield High School)

P&V (Guilford High School)

Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Shelton 2 (The Torque of the Town)

Newtown (Newtown High School)

Massless/Frictionless (Southington High School)

Tolland B (Tolland High School)

Trumbull 1 (Trumbull High School)

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Elliptical Target

Winner: Tolland A (Tolland High School)

Honorable Mention: Newtown (Newtown High School) for a performance so good that even a very close second did not seem that it was good enough, as far as our judges were concerned.

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Flux (Southington High School)

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Massless/Frictionless (Southington High School)

P&V (Guilford High School)

Warhawks 1 (Bloomfield High School)

Shelton 2 (The Torque of the Town)

Milford 1 (Jonathan Law High School)

Milford 2 (Jonathan Law High School)

Tolland B (Tolland High School)

Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

Trumbull 1 (Trumbull High School)

Overall

Winner: Flux (Southington High School)

Honorable Mention: Bloomfield High School for fashionable attire, team spirit, talented dancing and spunk. These fabulous young women made quite an impression on our staff!

Newtown (Newtown High School)

Warhawks 2 (Bloomfield High School)

Titans (Mark T. Sheehan High School)

Shelton 1 aka Velocity Raptors (Shelton High School)

Nasty (Guilford High School)

Ohm My Voltage (Westbrook High School)

Tolland A (Tolland High School)

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Trumbull 2 (Trumbull High School)

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