

The Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences/ University of Alberta Math Fair

Ted Lewis

Close to 700 elementary and junior high students from 25 schools visited the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS)/University of Alberta Math Fair on November 5, 2002. This all-day event, held in Dinwoodie Lounge in the U of A's Students' Union Building, was sponsored by PIMS and presented by Venera Hrimiuc and Ted Lewis's Math 160 students. In the other half of the lounge, Andy Liu ran a problem-solving session. The students spent about two hours at the event, splitting their time between the math fair and the problem-solving session.

The math fair is part of the curriculum of Math 160, a course for elementary education students. There were 26 hands-on puzzles for the visiting students to try. The puzzles were all mathematical and were designed so that the students did not need to solve them with a pencil and paper—just their wits. Although the puzzles were aimed at K–6 students, many of the junior high students also found the puzzles entertaining. Part of the challenge for the

university students was adapting their puzzles on the fly to a variety of grade levels. They met the challenge with great success.

In his problem-solving session, Andy taught the students some mathematical games. Of course, many were willing and eager to play against Andy. He never lost, and the problem-solving session was appropriately dubbed the “Math Unfair.”

A booklet about math fairs is available through the U of A branch of PIMS (contact Shirley Mitchell). If you are interested in holding your own math fair or would like to attend a workshop on math fairs, contact Andy or Ted (in Edmonton) or Indy Lagu or Sharon Friesen (in Calgary):

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