

## **Buchholz students win national geography tournaments; one will represent U.S. on international team**

Two Buchholz High School students have brought home national championship trophies from the United States Geography Olympiad (USGO), and one of them will be going on to compete on the international stage.

Sophomores Albert Zhang and Qingyu Zhang (no relation) won the varsity and junior varsity championships, respectively, at the competition. As the varsity winner, Albert will now join three other students from around the nation as members of the U.S. team, which will compete in the International Geography Olympiad (iGEO) this summer.



The USGO competition was established in 2013 to test students' geography skills and encourage a greater focus on geography education. Success in the competition requires much more than being able to find places on a map. Participants take both written and multiple choice exams that cover topics ranging from geomorphology (the study of the physical features of the surface of the earth) to cultural, economic, historical geography and current events. They also take a geography skills exam that tests their practical map skills and reasoning.

"You really have to understand how the world works through a spatial lens and why things are where they are," said Albert Zhang. "That could mean natural features like sand dunes, rivers and mountains, or they can be human features, like languages or culture."

Qingyu's participation in the USGO this year was almost a fluke. His primary focus was the National History Bee and Bowl, which were held in the same hotel in Virginia during the same weekend as both the USGO and the U.S. Geography Bee. He took fourth place in the History Bowl, fifth in the History Bee and fourth in the Geography Bee, but surprised himself by finishing first in the USGO. He thinks his preparation for the history competitions gave him an edge on those parts of the USGO that involve politics and sociology.

"I like geography, but I think I was able to win because I learned a lot of geography as a side effect of learning history," he said. "You really have to know where things are to be good in history."

Only varsity-level students go on to the iGEO. Based on his birthdate, Qingyu missed the age cutoff for varsity by four days, but plans to compete again next year for the chance to qualify at the international level.

"Now that I know I have the capability to do well, I think I'm going to focus on physical geography and try to do even better," he said.

Both Albert and Qingyu are members of BHS' highly successful math team. Qingyu has also participated in other academic competitions, including the Science Olympiad. Albert has also participated in debate, but says geography is his primary interest. In fact, he was the national JV USGO champion in 2018.

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Albert says he's interested in traveling and that the study of geography fuels his 'wanderlust.'

"The more I study geography the more I want to see and experience these places for myself," he said. "It makes me more curious about the world."

He'll have an opportunity to feed that curiosity when he competes the iGEO in Hong Kong from July 30 through August 5. He and his three U.S. teammates will spend two days training together for the competition, which will include a written test, a multimedia test and a fieldwork exercise. There will also be opportunities for cultural exchanges and tours of the city.

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