

AIAA GHS hosts Rocket City Invitational quiz bowl tournament

By Robin Osborne, AIAA GHS Pre-college Outreach Director

This spring the AIAA Greater Huntsville Section (GHS) hosted its first-ever academic quiz bowl tournament for Alabama schools. The AIAA Rocket City Invitational was held on Saturday, March 26, in the Business Administration Building at University of Alabama Huntsville (UAH). The event attracted both local teams and ones from outside of Huntsville. A total of 18 teams, consisting of 84 students from 15 high schools and two middle schools, competed.

Tournament volunteers included members of both AIAA GHS and UAH's AIAA Student Branch, as well as volunteers from NASA Marshall Space Flight Center, Jacobs Space Exploration Group, ERC, Paragon TEC, SAIC, TriVector Services Inc, and Mississippi State University. A few former and current quiz bowl players traveled to Huntsville to help. Alabama Scholastic Competition Association (ASCA) board members Christopher Arthur and Claudette Smith also volunteered to support the event.

The tournament kicked off with a morning meeting in which Dr. Tracie Prater, AIAA GHS vice chair, welcomed the students, told them about AIAA, and fondly recalled some of her memories playing quiz bowl as a student in Kentucky. Afterward, Robin Osborne, AIAA GHS pre-college outreach director, recognized and awarded rocket trophies to AIAA GHS members with the highest scores in the middle school, high school, college, and open divisions for the pre-tournament AIAA "Buzzword" Challenge.

Buzzword is an online game developed by National Academic Quiz Tournament (NAQT) for individual players that takes 20-30 minutes to play. NAQT was commissioned by AIAA GHS to write a question set for Buzzword covering a wide variety of topics in aerospace and aviation. Players were organized into middle school, high school, college, and open (non-student) divisions. Awards were given to the top scorers in each division.

Jared Sauer, the winner of the college division, had the highest score across all four divisions. Mr. Sauer is a junior studying aerospace engineering at UAH with past ties to quiz bowl, having competed in middle and high school for Savannah Country Day School in Savannah, GA.

After the morning meeting, the quiz bowl tournament began with three pools of teams playing five round-robin preliminary games to determine which teams would advance to the afternoon playoffs. The eight teams that qualified for playoffs were, in alphabetical order, Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering (ASCTE), Grissom, Hewitt-Trussville, Hoover, New Century Technology, Spain Park, Sparkman, and West Point. The two middle schools, Discovery and Monrovia, had their own head-to-head playoffs during the afternoon.



**Middle School: Owen Bruyns
Discovery Middle School**



**High School: Ella Duus
New Century Technology**



**Open: Benjamin Lattner
U.S. Army Redstone Test**



**College: Jared Sauer
UAH**

Clockwise from top left: middle school, high school, college, and open division winners of the Buzzword challenge with AIAA GHS vice chair Dr. Tracie Prater.

The varsity playoffs were seeded based on the results of the preliminary games and consisted of quarter-finals, semi-finals, and double-elimination finals. The varsity team winners are listed below.



1st Place Varsity Team (\$1000 cash prize)
Hoover High School (Hoover, AL)
Coach Tim Caine



2nd Place Varsity Team (\$750 cash prize):
ASCTE (Huntsville, AL)
Coach Kerri Watson (not pictured)



4th Place Varsity Team (\$250 cash prize):
Spain Park High School (Hoover, AL)
Coach Todd Parker



3rd Place Varsity Team (\$500 cash prize):
Sparkman High School (Harvest, AL)
Coach Angela Silvey

Clockwise from top left: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th place team winners of the Rocket City Invitational.

Medals were awarded to the top ten individual scorers from the preliminary rounds. Those highest-scoring students were, in order, Tate Osborne of ASCTE (MVP), Kapil Nathan of Hoover, Brodie Henry of West Point, Sam Hellebrand of Decatur, Sam McKinney of Huntsville, Param Chauhan of Grissom, Alex Ivan of New Century, Andrew Goetz of Sparkman, and Katherine Spusta of Hewitt Trussville and Julian Jacobs of Buckhorn (tie).

The winner of the double-elimination middle school finals was Monrovia Middle School. They were awarded with pins depicting RS-25, which is the engine that powers the core stage of NASA's Space Launch System (SLS).

All trophies, medals, and cash awards were made possible through the generous sponsorships of Jacobs Space Exploration Group and ERC. Several of the winning teams commented that they planned to use their cash prizes to help fund their trips to national quiz bowl tournaments.

The Buzzword Challenge was funded through a special grant from The Boeing Company. The same Buzzword Challenge will be made available to the general public this summer, during the week of NASA's launch of the SLS. National winners in each of the four divisions (middle school, high school, college, and open) will be mailed rocket trophies.

The questions used in the Rocket City Invitational encompassed the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), as well as other areas such as history, literature, fine arts, and pop culture. Teams competed by answering tossup and bonus questions related to those subjects. Quiz bowl is akin to Jeopardy! for students. The questions, provided by NAQT, are complex and advanced for students' current grade levels.

The stat reports for the Rocket City Invitational are listed on both NAQT's [website](#) as well as The Quizbowl Resource Center's [website](#).

Thank you to these volunteers (listed in alphabetical order): Dr. Rob Adams, Christopher Arthur, Michael Baldwin, John Dankanich, John Eckhart, Lauren Fisher, Marco Garcia, Marissa Garcia, Nishanth Goli, Tim Kibbey, Matthew Koebbe, Paul Kovacic, Sophia Liu, Steven Liu, Joseph Mattingly, Tina Melton, Robin Osborne, Will Parker, Dr. Tracie Prater, Dalila Pugh, Jason Pullias, Veronica Rodriguez, Catherine Shelton, Ian Slamen, Claudette Smith, Dr. Darren Tinker, and Dr. Naveen Vetcha.

A special note of thanks is expressed to AIAA GHS member and NASA Chief Technologist John Dankanich, who, in addition to moderating at the Rocket City Invitational, traveled to Hoover, AL to moderate at this year's ASCA Varsity State Championship.

Thank you to Katelyn McGinnis, former UAH AIAA Chapter Vice Chair, for arranging to hold the tournament at UAH. Thanks also goes out to UAH AIAA member Marco Garcia for serving as a moderator.

Last, but not least, a note of appreciation goes out to Jay Foster, Event Scheduling Coordinator at UAH, for his support in setting up UAH facilities and resources for the tournament. Thank you to UAH for allowing AIAA GHS and the UAH Student Branch to use the Business Administration Building for this event.



**1st Place Middle School Team
Monrovia Middle School (Huntsville, AL)
Coach Gene Cox**