

Students give presentation at math conference

By Phillip Zhang
STAFF WRITER

Four TPHS students, accompanied by math teacher Abby Brown, went to Champaign, Ill. to attend and present at the annual Wolfram Technology Conference, held Oct. 12-14.

"I am very proud of how my students represented our class and school," Brown said. "This is just the beginning of many wonderful opportunities for us."

The students included Ryan Chuang (12), Samantha Patterson (12), Jenny Tan (12) and Jeffrey Tsao (11), all of whom are currently in Brown's Advanced Topics in Mathematics II class, a project-based, high-level math course being offered for the first time at TPHS. Students in the class use the computer algebra system Mathematica, developed by Wolfram Research, Inc., to work on community service-oriented projects.

Brown contends that Mathematica has yet to fail to accomplish what she wants it to do. It is a program that can be used to work in nearly all forms of known mathematics—a kind of "super calculator."

According to Wolfram Research, the annual conference

serves as an open forum to see how Mathematica has matured and how it continues to grow.

"It was surprising to see people writing code in the hotel lobby and speaking in the Mathematica language so casually," Tsao said. "I could be listening to a session one hour and talking to the presenter over dinner that evening."

According to Brown, the students were greeted warmly and mingled easily with the other conference attendees despite being the only high school-aged presenters at the conference.

"It amazed me to see how down-to-earth people were and how willing they were to talk and interact with us," Tan said. "We met some truly brilliant people who were as interested in us as we were in them."

During the conference, students had opportunities to meet with scientists, professors and software developers from around the world.

"I went to over 20 sessions [and] met more people than I can remember," Patterson said. "I even had lunch with one of the mathematical consultants for the CBS series 'Numb3rs.'"

The students gave a talk entitled "Mathematica Projects by

High School Students" in which they shared a few of the various projects they and their classmates were developing. Brown also presented materials she developed over the summer while working at Wolfram Research.

"It's an honor for any professional to give a conference presentation to others in their field," Brown said. "Sharing their work in this setting [gave the students] an experience that few professionals ever have."

Wolfram Research and conference sponsors are excited about the students' work and are optimistic about their continued collaboration with TPHS.

"Abby Brown and her students gave a stunning performance, truly not something you see every day," said co-founder of Wolfram Research Theodore Gray. "We are tremendously excited to see that what we hoped about the future of Mathematica in education may actually be true."

Students in the Advanced Topics in Mathematics II class will continue their project work throughout the school year, and they plan to launch their own Web site, www.MathematiClub.com, which will contain activities and resources for middle and high school students.

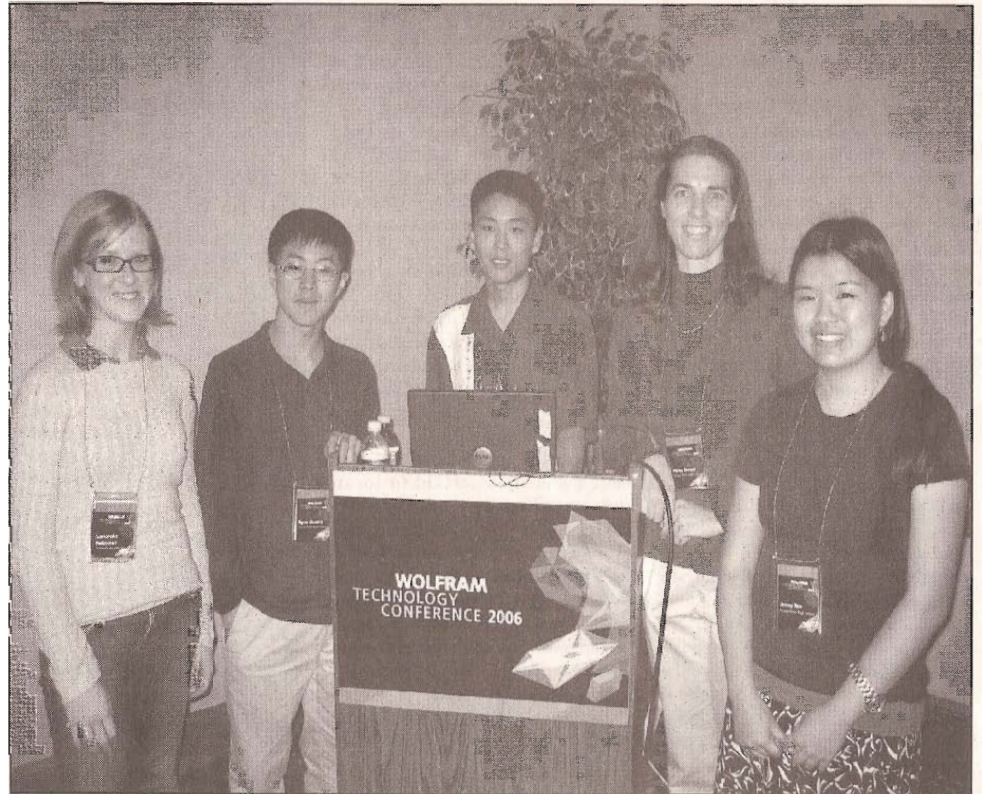


PHOTO USED BY PERMISSION OF ABBY BROWN

MATHEMATICA IN ACTION: (LEFT TO RIGHT) Samantha Patterson (12), Ryan Chuang (12), Jeffrey Tsao (11), teacher Abby Brown and Jenny Tan (12) represent TPHS after giving a successful presentation about Mathematica at the annual Wolfram Technology Conference in Champaign, Ill.