

## First Day Handout Math 490 Putnam Challenge

Math 490, Putnam Challenge, meets Wed. 9:10-10:00 in Blocker 202. Grades will be based on attendance and participation. The class is intended as a seminar in how to go at problems considerably harder than those encountered in regular classwork, and as preparation for students intending to participate in the national-level William Lowell Putnam mathematical competition.

This competition is held on the first Saturday in December, and is open to undergraduates who have not already competed four times.

First-day handouts are supposed to include a mention of the Aggie honor code and course policies on academic integrity. This course doesn't afford much in the way of opportunities to commit infractions. (Ringers to stand in and check off attendance???) So, instead, a word about the Putnam competition.

Every effort is made by the organizers of the competition, and local contest supervisors, to ensure the integrity of the competition. Fairness and integrity go both ways, and the organizers take various measures to be fair at their end. First, the contest problems are edited carefully to ensure that the questions are stated as clearly as possible. Next, at the time of the contest, electronic communications devices are banned from the competition site, as are notes, calculators, slide rules (!), laptop computers, etc. Then, the papers are marked with ID numbers, so that the graders will not know who is who or where who is from. They're graded three times, independently and with care and attention, so that the marking is as fair as human judgment can make it.

All this, so that the prestige and pride of accomplishment due the contestants can be real, and not marred by the kind of scandals that have plagued, say, the Tour de France. With everybody going to such trouble, we at our end have our own ethical obligation: keep this tradition of a clean contest alive and well.