# **Modeling Forum**

# **Results of the 1998 Mathematical Contest in Modeling**

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# Introduction

A total of 472 teams of undergraduates, from 246 institutions from 8 countries, spent the second weekend in February working on applied mathematics problems. They were part of the twelfth Mathematical Contest in Modeling (MCM). On Friday morning, the MCM faculty advisor opened a packet and presented each team of three students with a choice of one of two problems. After a weekend of hard work, typed solution papers were mailed to COMAP on Monday. Nine of the top papers appear in this issue of *The UMAP Journal*.

Results and winning papers from the first thirteen contests were published in special issues of *Mathematical Modeling* (1985–1987) and *The UMAP Journal* (1985–1997). The 1994 volume of *Tools for Teaching*, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the contest, contains all of the 20 problems used in the first ten years of the contest and a winning paper for each. Limited quantities of that volume and of the special MCM issues of the *Journal* for the last few years are available from COMAP.

# **Problem A: The Scanner Problem**

### Introduction

Industrial and medical diagnostic machines known as Magnetic Resonance Imagers (MRI) scan a three-dimensional object, such as a brain, and deliver

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their results in the form of a three-dimensional array of pixels. Each pixel consists of one number, indicating a color or a shade of gray that encodes a measure of water concentration in a small region of the scanned object at the location of the pixel. For instance, 0 can picture high water concentration in black (ventricles, blood vessels), 128 can picture a medium water concentration in gray (brain nuclei and gray matter), and 255 can picture a low water density in white (lipid-rich white matter consisting of myelinated axons). Such MRI scanners also include facilities to picture on a screen any horizontal or vertical slice through the three-dimensional array (slices are parallel to any of the three Cartesian coordinate axes).

Algorithms for picturing slices through oblique planes, however, are proprietary. Current algorithms

- are limited in terms of the angles and parameter options available,
- are implemented only on heavily used dedicated workstations,
- lack input capabilities for marking points in the picture before slicing, and
- tend to blur and "feather out" sharp boundaries between the original pixels.

A more faithful, flexible algorithm implemented on a personal computer would be useful

- for planning minimally invasive treatments;
- for calibrating the MRI machines;
- for investigating structures oriented obliquely in space, such as post-mortem tissue sections in animal research;
- for enabling cross sections at any angle through a brain atlas consisting of black-and-white line drawings.

To design such an algorithm, one can access the values and locations of the pixels but not the initial data gathered by the scanner.

## Problem

Design and test an algorithm that produces sections of three-dimensional arrays by planes in any orientation in space, preserving the original gray-scale values as closely as possible.

## **Data Sets**

The typical data set consists of a three-dimensional array A of numbers A(i, j, k), where A(i, j, k) is the density of the object at the location  $(x, y, z)_{i,j,k}$ . Typically, A(i, j, k) can range from 0 through 255. In most applications, the data set is quite large. Teams should design data sets to test and demonstrate their algorithms. The data sets should reflect conditions likely to be of diagnostic interest. Teams should also characterize data sets that limit the effectiveness of their algorithms.

### Summary

The algorithm must produce a picture of the slice of the three-dimensional array by a plane in space. The plane can have any orientation and any location in space. (The plane can miss some or all data points.) The result of the algorithm should be a model of the density of the scanned object over the selected plane.

# **Problem B: The Grade Inflation Problem**

### Background

Some college administrators are concerned about the grading at A Better Class (ABC) College. On average, the faculty at ABC have been giving out high grades (the average grade now given out is an A–), and it is impossible to distinguish between the good and the mediocre students. The terms of a very generous scholarship only allow the top 10% of the students to be funded, so a class ranking is required.

The dean had the thought of comparing each student to the other students in each class, and using this information to build up a ranking. For example, if a student obtains an A in a class in which all students obtain an A, then this student is only "average" in this class. On the other hand, if a student obtains the only A in a class, then that student is clearly "above average." Combining information from several classes might allow students to be placed in deciles (top 10%, next 10%, etc.) across the college.

### Problem

Assuming that the grades given out are (A+, A, A-, B+, ...), can the dean's idea be made to work?

Assuming that the grades given out are only (A, B, C, ...), can the dean's idea be made to work?

Can any other schemes produce a desired ranking?

A concern is that the grade in a single class could change many students' deciles. Is this possible?

### **Data Sets**

Teams should design data sets to test and demonstrate their algorithms. Teams should characterize data sets that limit the effectiveness of their algorithms.

## **The Results**

The solution papers were coded at COMAP headquarters so that names and affiliations of the authors would be unknown to the judges. Each paper was then read preliminarily by two "triage" judges at Southern Connecticut State University (Problem A) or at Carroll College (Montana) (Problem B). At the triage stage, the summary and overall organization are the basis for judging a paper. If the judges' scores diverged for a paper, the judges conferred; if they still did not agree on a score, a third judge evaluated the paper.

Final judging took place at Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, California. The judges classified the papers as follows:

	Outstanding	Meritorious	Honorable Mention	Successful Participation	Total
Scanner	4	31	47	106	189
Grade Inflation	3	48	69	163	283
	7	79	116	269	472

The seven papers that the judges designated as Outstanding appear in this special issue of *The UMAP Journal*, together with commentaries. We list those teams and the Meritorious teams (and advisors) below; the list of all participating schools, advisors, and results is in the **Appendix**.

#### **Outstanding Teams**

#### Institution and Advisor

#### **Team Members**

#### **Scanner Papers**

"A Method for Taking Cross Sections of Three-Dimensional Gridded Data" Eastern Oregon University LaGrande, OR Norris Preyer

Kelly Slater Cline Kacee Jay Giger Timothy O'Conner "A Model for Arbitrary Plane Imaging, or the Brain in Pain Falls Mainly on the Plane" Harvey Mudd College Claremont, CA Michael Moody

"A Tricubic Interpolation Algorithm for MRI Image Cross Sections" Macalester College St. Paul, MN Karla V. Ballman

"MRI Slice Picturing" Tsinghua University Beijing, China Ye Jun Jeff Miller Dylan Helliwell Thaddeus Ladd

Paul Cantrell Nicholas Wenninger Tamás Németh-Csőri

Ni Jiang Chen Jun Li Ling

#### **Grade Inflation Papers**

"Alternatives to the Grade Point Average for Ranking Students" Duke University Durham, NC Greg Lawler

"A Case for Stricter Grading" Harvey Mudd College Claremont, CA Michael Moody

"Grade Inflation: A Systematic Approach to Fair Achievement Indexing" Stetson University Deland, FL Erich Friedman Jeffrey A. Mermin W. Garrett Mitchener John A. Thacker

Aaron F. Archer Andrew D. Hutchings Brian Johnson

Amanda M. Richardson Jeff P. Fay Matthew Galati

### **Meritorious Teams**

Scanner Papers (31 teams)

California Polytechnic State Univ., San Luis Obispo, CA (two teams) (Thomas O'Neil) East China Univ. of Science and Technology, Shanghai, China (Yuanhong Lu) Fudan University, Shanghai, China (Xi Zhou) Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA (Ran Libeskind-Hadas) Lawrence Technological Univ., Southfield, MI (Ruth G. Favro) Macalester College, St. Paul, MN (Susan Fox) N.C. School of Science and Mathematics, Durham, NC (two teams) (Dot Doyle) Nankai University, Tianjin, China (XingWei Zhou) Nat'l. Univ. of Defence Technology, Changsha, HuNan, China (Cheng LiZhi) Nat'l. Univ. of Defence Technology, Changsha, HuNan, China (Wu Yu) Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, IN (Aaron D. Klebanoff) Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA (Steven D. Johnson) South China Univ. of Technology, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China (Xie Lejun) Southeast University, JiangSu, Nanjing, China (Zhou Jian Hua) Southeast University, JiangSu, Nanjing, China (Wu Hua Hui) Tsinghua University, Beijing, China (Hu Zhiming) University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (John P. Lambert) University of Colorado–Boulder, Boulder, CO (Anne Dougherty) University of Massachusetts-Lowell, Lowell, MA (Lou Rossi) University of Missouri–Rolla, Rolla, MO (Michael G. Hilgers) University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA (Robert A. Beezer) Univ. of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, Anhui, China (Rong Zhang) University College–Cork, Cork, Ireland (J.B. Twomey) Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA (Sebastian Schreiber) Worcester Polytechnic Inst., Worcester, MA (Bogdan Vernescu) Xi'an Jiaotung University Xi'an, Shaanxi, China (He Xiaoliang) Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China (Zhou Yicang) XiDian University Xi'an, Shaanxi, China (Liu Hongwei) Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH (Thomas Smotzer)

#### Grade Inflation Papers (48 teams)

Benedictine College, Atchison, KS (Jo Ann Fellin, OSB) Bucknell University, Lewisburg, PA (Sally Koutsoliotas) Colby College, Waterville, ME (Jan Holly) College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA (Larry Leemis) Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO (Barry A. Balof) David Lipscomb Institute, Nashville, TN (Mark A. Miller) E. China Univ. of Sci. and Tech., Shanghai, China (Xiwen Lu) Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, VA (John Horst) Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA (Marc Chamberland) Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, MN (Gary Hatfield) Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA (Ran Libeskind-Hadas) Humboldt State Univ., Arcata, CA (Roland Lamberson) Johns Hopkins University, Batlimore, MD (Daniel Q. Naiman) Lafayette College, Easton, PA (Thomas Hill) Lawrence Technological Univ., Southfield, MI (Howard Whitston) Loyola College–Maryland, Baltimore, MD (Timothy J. McNeese) Messiah College, Grantham, PA (Douglas C. Phillippy) Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD (John August) N.C. School of Science and Mathematics, Durham, NC (John Kolena) Natl. Univ. of Defence Technology, Changsha, HuNan, China (Wu MengDa) Nazareth College, Rochester, NY (Kelly M. Fuller) Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, NE (P. Gavin LaRose) Pomona College, Claremont, CA (Richard Elderkin) Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Terre Haute, IN (Aaron D. Klebanoff)

Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN (Joanne Snow) Salisbury State University, Salisbury, MD (Steven M. Hetzler) Shanghai Normal University, Shanghai, China (Shenghuan Guo) Southeast University, JiangSu, Nanjing, China (Shen Yu Jiang) Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT (Ross B. Gingrich) Trinity University, San Antonio, TX (Diane G. Saphire) Tsinghua University, Beijing, China (Ye Jun) Tsinghua University, Beijing, China (Hu Zhiming) U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY (Kellie Simon) United States Air Force Academy, USAF Academy, CO (Harry N. Newton) United States Air Force Academy, USAF Academy, CO (Mark Parker) Univ. of Science and Technology of China, Hefei, Anhui, China (Yi Shi) Univ. of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, Stevens Point, WI (Nathan Wetzel) University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks, AK (John P. Lambert) University of Dayton, Dayton, OH (J.M. O'Hare) University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA (Perry Fizzano) University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (James G.C. Templeton) Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN (Rick Gillman) Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC (Edward Allen) Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC (Jeff A. Graham) Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC (Scott Sportsman) Western Connecticut State Univ., Danbury, CT (Judith A. Grandahl) Worcester Polytechnic Inst., Worcester, MA (Arthur C. Heinricher) Xidian University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, China (Mao Yongcai) Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH (Paul Mullins)

# Awards and Contributions

Each participating MCM advisor and team member received a certificate signed by the Contest Director and the appropriate Head Judge.

INFORMS, the Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences, gave a cash award and a three-year membership to each member of the teams from Macalester College (Scanner Problem) and Stetson University (Grade Inflation Problem). Moreover, INFORMS gave free one-year memberships to all members of Meritorious and Honorable Mention teams.

The Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM) designated one Outstanding team from each problem as a SIAM Winner. The teams were from Macalester College (Scanner Problem) and Harvey Mudd College (Grade Inflation Problem). The Harvey Mudd team presented its results at a at a special Minisymposium of the SIAM Annual Meeting in Toronto in July. Each of the three Harvey Mudd team members was awarded a \$300 cash prize. Their school was given a framed, hand-lettered certificate in gold leaf.

The Mathematical Association of America (MAA) designated one Outstanding team from each problem as an MAA Winner. The teams were from Eastern Oregon University (Scanner Problem) and Duke University (Grade Inflation Problem). Both teams presented their solutions at a special session of the MAA Mathfest in Toronto in July. Each team member was presented a certificate by MAA President-Elect Tom Banchoff.

# Judging

Director Frank R. Giordano, COMAP, Lexington, MA

Associate Directors

David C. Arney, Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY

Robert L. Borrelli, Mathematics Dept., Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA

### Scanner Problem

Head Judge

Marvin S. Keener, Executive Vice-President, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK

Associate Judges Kelly Black, Mathematics Dept., University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH Paul Boisen, Defense Dept., Ft. Meade, MD Courtney Coleman, Mathematics Dept., Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA Patrick Driscoll, Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY (INFORMS) William Fox, Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY Debbie Levinson, Dept. of Mathematics, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO (SIAM) Mark Levinson, Edmonds, WA (SIAM) Jack Robertson, Head, Mathematics and Computer Science, Georgia College and State University, Milledgeville, GA (MAA) Theresa M. Sandifer, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT John L. Scharf, Carroll College, Helena, MT Lee Seitelman, Glastonbury, CT

#### **Grade Inflation Problem**

### Head Judge Maynard Thompson, Mathematics Dept., University of Indiana, Bloomington, IN Associate Judges Karen Bolinger, Dept. of Mathematics, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, Clarion, PA James Case, Baltimore, Maryland Doug Faires, Dept. of Mathematics and Statistics, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH Jerry Griggs, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC (SIAM) Mario Juncosa, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA John Kobza, Industrial and Systems Engineering, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, VA (INFORMS) Mario Martelli, Dept. of Mathematics, California State University, Fullerton, CA Vijay Mehrotra, Onward Inc., Mountain View, CA (INFORMS) Veena Mendiratta, Lucent Technologies, Naperville, IL Don Miller, Dept. of Mathematics, St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN Catherine Roberts, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ (SIAM) Kathleen M. Shannon, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, MD (MAA) Robert M. Tardiff, Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, Salisbury State University, Salisbury, MD Michael Tortorella, Lucent Technologies, Holmdel, NJ Marie Vanisko, Carroll College, Helena, MT Daniel Zwillinger, Zwillinger & Associates, Arlington, MA

#### **Triage Session**

#### Scanner Problem

*Head Triage Judge* Theresa M. Sandifer, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT

#### Associate Judges

Therese L. Bennett, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT Ross B. Gingrich, Southern Connecticut State University, New Haven, CT Cynthia B. Gubitose, Western Connecticut State University, Danbury, CT C. Edward Sandifer, Western Connecticut State University, Danbury, CT

#### **Grade Inflation Problem**

(all were from Mathematics Dept., Carroll College, Helena, MT)

*Head Triage Judge* Marie Vanisko Associate Judges

Peter Biskis, Terence J. Mullen, Jack Oberweiser, Paul D. Olson, and Phillip Rose

### Sources of the Problems

The Scanner Problem was contributed by Yves Nievergelt, Mathematics Dept., Eastern Washington University. The Grade Inflation Problem was contributed by Dan Zwillinger, Zwillinger & Associates, Arlington, MA.

## Acknowledgments

The MCM was funded this year by the National Security Agency, whose support we deeply appreciate. We thank Dr. Gene Berg of NSA for his coordinating efforts. The MCM is also indebted to INFORMS, SIAM, and the MAA, which provided judges and prizes.

I thank the MCM judges and MCM Board members for their valuable and unflagging efforts. Harvey Mudd College, its Mathematics Dept. staff, and Prof. Borrelli were gracious hosts to the judges.

## Cautions

#### To the reader of research journals:

Usually a published paper has been presented to an audience, shown to colleagues, rewritten, checked by referees, revised, and edited by a journal editor. Each of the student papers here is the result of undergraduates working on a problem over a weekend; allowing substantial revision by the authors could give a false impression of accomplishment. So these papers are essentially au naturel. Light editing has taken place: minor errors have been corrected, wording has been altered for clarity or economy, and style has been adjusted to that of *The UMAP Journal*. Please peruse these student efforts in that context.

#### To the potential MCM Advisor:

It might be overpowering to encounter such output from a weekend of work by a small team of undergraduates, but these solution papers are highly atypical. A team that prepares and participates will have an enriching learning experience, independent of what any other team does.

# **Appendix: Successful Participants**

### KEY:

- P = Successful Participation
- H = Honorable Mention
- M = Meritorious
- O = Outstanding (published in this special issue)
- A = Scanner Problem
- B = Grade Inflation Problem

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Calif. State Univ.	Bakersfield	John Dirkse		P,P
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FLORIDA Florida Inst. of Technology Florida Southern College	Melbourne Lakeland	Gary W. Howell William G. Albrecht Charles B. Pate Allen Wuertz	Р	P,P P P
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IDAHO Boise State University	Boise	Alan R. Hausrath	Р	
ILLINOIS Greenville College Illinois Wesleyan University Northern Illinois University Wheaton College	Greenville Bloomington Dekalb Wheaton	Galen R. Peters Zahia Drici Hamid Bellout Paul Isihara	P P	P H,P

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		Timothy L. Hardy		Р
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Bethel College	North Newton	Monica Meissen	Р	
Ashurry Callage	147:1	Konnath D Diata		тт
Asbury College	Vuimore	Kenneth P. Rietz	п	н
Bellarmine College	Louisville	John A. Oppelt	Р	п
Brescia College	Owensboro	Chris A. Hanri		ľ
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Boston University	Boston	Glen Hall		Р
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	Lowell	J. "Kiwi" Graham-Eagle Lou Rossi	P M	
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5		Bogdan Vernescu	М	
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0		David Seely		Р
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Hillsdale College	Hillsdale	John P. Boardman	Р	Р
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		Scott Schneider		Р
		Howard Whitston		Μ
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		Anthony M. Szpilka		Р
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NEW MEXICO	I C		Ð	
New Mexico State Univ.	Las Cruces	Joseph Lakey	Р	
NEW YORK				
Buffalo State College	Buffalo	Robin Sanders	D	Η
Great Neck South HS	Great Neck	Kobert Silverstone	Р р	
Illiaca College	Illiaca	John C. Maceli	1	Р
Nassau Community Coll.	Garden City	Abraham S. Mantell	Р	*
Nazareth College	Rochester	Kelly M. Fuller		M,H
Niagara University Pace University	Niagara Pleasantville	Steven L. Siegel Robert Cicenia	Р	Р

St. Bonaventure Univerity St. Bonaventure Francis C. Leary H   Albert G. White P H   SUNY Geneseo Geneseo Chris Leary P   U.S. Military Academy West Point Chuck Mitchell P   James S. Rolf H Kellie Simon M   Charles C. Tappert H H
Albert G. White P   SUNY Geneseo Geneseo Chris Leary P   U.S. Military Academy West Point Chuck Mitchell P   James S. Rolf H Kellie Simon M   Charles C. Tappert H P
SUNY Geneseo Geneseo Chris Leary P   U.S. Military Academy West Point Chuck Mitchell P   James S. Rolf H Kellie Simon M   Charles C. Tappert H H P
U.S. Military Academy West Point Chuck Mitchell P James S. Rolf H Kellie Simon M Charles C. Tappert H
James S. Rolf H Kellie Simon M Charles C. Tappert H
Kellie Simon M Charles C. Tappert H Welle College
Welle College Aurore Carol C. Shilonoly, P.
Wens Conege Autora Carol C. Shinepsky P
Westchester Comm. College Valhalla Rowan Lindley P
Sheela Whelan P
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Duke University Durham Greg Lawler O
N.C. School of Sci. & Math. Durham Dot Doyle M,M
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Salem College Winston-Salem Debbie L. Harrell H
Paula G. Young P
Univ. of North Carolina Chapel Hill Douglas G. Kelly H
Jon W. Tolle P
Pembroke Raymond E. Lee P
Wake Forest University Winston-Salem Edward Allen M
Stephen B. Robinson H
Western Carolina University Cullowhee Ieff A. Graham M
Scott Sportsman M
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College of Wooster Wooster Reuben Settergren P
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Brad Gubser P P
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Miami University Oxford Douglas E. Ward P
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Xavier University Cincinnati Richard I. Pulskamp P

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, 0	, 0	Shi Xiaoding	Р	
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-		Yonghua Hu	Р	
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ΙΙΤΗΙΙΔΝΙΔ				
Vilnius University	Vilnius	Ricardas Kudzma		Р
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