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## PRESS RELEASE

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The 2026 Academic WorldQuest winning team from Xavier College Preparatory High School, from left: Coach Tonya Carr, Trey Morrison, Luke Macwan, MacKenzie Johnson, Haleigh Liles.

### Xavier College Preparatory High School wins 21st Annual Academic WorldQuest at CSUSB Palm Desert Campus

PALM DESERT, Calif. – Nine Coachella Valley high schools competed in the 21st annual Academic WorldQuest competition on Feb. 12.

The event, which took place at the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus (PDC), was facilitated and coordinated by Michael Karp, an assistant professor of history at PDC and member of the World Affairs Council of the Desert board of directors.

"We had a memorable competition this year," said Karp. "We had a number of family and friends supporting schools, and as always, dozens of volunteers gave their time to make the event happen. I think everyone present will remember Bryson Freeman deciding to compete for Indio by himself, as the rest of his team could not make it. On top of that, he won this year's Most Improved Award for Indio High on his own. From our top three winners to all the students who spend months studying global history and affairs — Bryson's tenacity and spirit are what WorldQuest is all about."

Xavier College Preparatory High School took first place at this year's competition. Team members included MacKenzie Johnson, Haleigh Liles, Luke Macwan, Trey Morrison and Coach Tonya Carr.

Palm Desert High School captured second place, and Palm Valley School took third after a tiebreaker round with Desert Hot Springs High School.

The Palm Desert High School team members included Sareen Bhakta, Liya Kakar, Yatharth Mahajan, Sophie Tran and Coach Tricia Lizza. The Palm Valley School team included team members Zander Eaton, Shayan Habibipour, Evan Wang, Pip Watson and Coach Vahe Oksazian.

After five individual rounds and nearly two hours of competing, Xavier College Prep finished on top with a score of 44 out of 50. The team will move on to compete against other high school teams throughout the country in the National Academic WorldQuest competition on April 27-28.

Scholarships were awarded to each student in the top three teams: first place, \$300; second place, \$200; and third place, \$100. The Maddie and Dr. Tom Headrick Most Improved Award, which includes a total of \$400 for the winning team, went to Indio High School. Because the rest of his team could not attend, Indio High was represented solely by freshman Freeman.

Sponsored by World Affairs Council of the Desert, the Academic WorldQuest is a team competition that challenges the students' knowledge of world affairs.

The topics this year included Migration and Immigration, Tariffs and Trade, The U.S. Constitution and Foreign Policy, The Belt and Road Initiative, and Current Events.

This year's competing high schools also included Coachella Valley High School, Desert Hot Springs High School, La Quinta High School, Palm Springs High School and Shadow Hills High School. Certificates of recognition and \$25 participation scholarships were given to all participating team members.

Karp served as chair for the WorldQuest committee and was assisted by Kim Burge, Lisa Corbin, Tom Headrick, Charles Porter, Priscilla Porter, Yul Roe, Paula Sinclair, Karen Speros

and Tux Tuxhorn. Edna Martinez, the associate vice president of the Palm Desert Campus, and Jim McFarlin, who is the acting president and chairman to the World Affairs Council of the Desert board of directors, opened the event by welcoming students, volunteers, teachers, administrators and families.

Event sponsors included the Anderson Children's Foundation, the Auen Foundation, the City of Palm Desert, the Priscilla and Charles Porter Charitable Trust and the Walter Clark Legal Group.

For more information about the Academic WorldQuest, visit the [World Affairs Council of the Desert website](#).

**About the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus:** The [CSUSB Palm Desert Campus](#) is dedicated to providing a transformative educational experience in the Coachella Valley. With a focus on academic excellence and community engagement, the campus offers undergraduate and graduate degree programs designed to meet the diverse needs of its students and the region.

For more information about the CSUSB Palm Desert Campus, contact Mike Singer in the Office of Marketing and Communications at [msinger@csusb.edu](mailto:msinger@csusb.edu) or (760) 341-2883, ext. 78107, or visit the PDC website at [www.csusb.edu/pdc](http://www.csusb.edu/pdc).

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