

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

By Katherine Connor

Apr 16, 2020



Incoming President of Quiz Bowl Club Represents Campus in 'Jeopardy!' College Championship

UC San Diego was one of 15 schools represented in the 2020 Jeopardy College Championship, thanks to Alistair Gray, a second year computer science and linguistics double major.

“I couldn’t believe it, honestly,” Gray said of learning he was selected to compete in the annual Jeopardy college tournament with a \$100,000 prize. “Even though it’s always been a dream, it’s not the kind of dream that you think is ever going to happen.”

Gray, a native of Sunnyvale, Calif., always loved trivia but didn’t watch Jeopardy much as a child. That changed when he got to UC San Diego and the Reville Atlantis dorm.

“Our whole suite would watch Jeopardy together and yell answers at the screen, which was very fun,” he said. “You know James Holzhauer? We caught his whole run, we were rooting for him the whole way. He was a bit of a hero among us.”

Gray, who was heavily involved in his high school's Quiz Bowl team, is now the incoming president of the Quiz Bowl Club at UC San Diego. He's also a member of the Acapella Choir, and a tutor in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

He decided to study computer science after being exposed to it early on, growing up in the Bay area.

"You just get exposed to coding at a young age and I really liked it, so I kept doing it."

His interest in linguistics was piqued when reading The Lord of the Rings series.

"I enjoy learning languages, and enjoyed the part of Lord of the Rings where Tolkien is just talking about his invented languages, as I dabbled with inventing languages myself. So it was a side interest that blossomed into another major."

In addition to English, Gray learned French in school and taught himself Latin. He's trying to learn a bunch of other languages as well, including Japanese, Chinese and Esperanto.

The Jeopardy Experience

The College Championship was filmed on Feb. 3 and 4, and Gray's episode aired on April 8. Though he didn't move on to the semifinals, Gray said it was a great experience. The best part? Meeting his fellow contestants.

"We're all still in touch; we're talking about it constantly now that they're airing our episodes and sharing the social media posts about us and such. They're all great people, really smart and really, really kind. Honestly, they were the best part of the process, meeting all these amazing wonderful people."

One other amazing person he got to meet was, of course, Alex Trebek.

"Oh, wow. He acts exactly the same way he does on TV. It's so funny seeing the contrast between him and everyone else. He's very sweet. Before the games and during commercial breaks, he takes questions from the audience and he's very funny too, although you don't really see that on TV. A very dry wit."

While his Quiz Bowl skills came in handy when preparing for the competition, Gray did put in extra time training, by re-watching all the old episodes from previous college tournaments to see what topics were asked about; buffing up on pop culture; and practicing his buzzer speed and wagering skills.

His advice for anyone else with a dream to make it on Jeopardy? Just go for it!

“Well, join your school’s Quiz Bowl program—just do it.” Gray said. “It’s not hard to just try to go for things. Then, who knows; they could work out. I never thought that I would actually get it; I always thought I didn’t have a TV personality or whatever, but then they chose me. And if I hadn’t just done it, then it never would have happened.”

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*