

NYU-Poly hosts FIRST Lego League robotics competition

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NYU-Poly mentored 13 of the competing teams through its robotics program, AMPS/CBRI, or "Applying Mechatronics to Promote Science/Central Brooklyn Robotics Initiative." (Photos courtesy of Khalek Kirkland, Principal M.S. 113; additional photos below and in [photo gallery](#))

The drama of competition filled Polytechnic Institute of NYU's gymnasium on January 10 when more than 350 students from 37 middle and high schools took part in the Brooklyn finals of the New York City FIRST Lego League Championship.

The day was the culmination of weeks of designing, building, and testing of autonomous robots using engineering concepts. FIRST, or "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology," the non-profit organization that conducted the competition, inspires young adults from around the globe to seek careers and education in science and technology. Its programs include the FIRST Tech Challenge and FIRST Robotics Competition for high school students, and Junior FIRST Lego League for students aged 6 to 9.

According to the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, which featured the Lego event on the cover of its January 13 issue, "for some competitors there was triumph, for others despair – when their robots flipped over or crashed...But for all, it was an experience that left them high on technology and determined to build a better robot next year."

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A student from M.S. 113. In addition to designing robots, students give presentations to demonstrate their expanded knowledge of engineering principles.

"[The students] learn that learning is fun, and they learn applied science," said Dr. Noel N. Kriftcher, executive director of the David Packard Center for Technology and Educational Alliances at Polytechnic. Dr. Kriftcher coordinates the robotics program with Professors Vikram Kapila and Magued Iskander.

Six of the 13 NYU-Poly-mentored teams will go on to compete in the citywide finals on March 7 at the Javits Center. The event is open to the public.

The National Science Foundation awarded NYU-Poly a \$3 million/5-year GK-12 Fellows grant to fund its Applying Mechatronics to Promote Science program. The Independence Community Foundation and additional funding from JP Morgan Chase supports the school's Central Brooklyn Robotics Initiative. Further support to enhance AMPS/CBRI projects comes from a Motorola Innovation Generation Grant and the New York Space Grant Consortium.



Students look on with suspense as their team's robot makes it through the table-top challenge.

Below is an excerpt from the Daily Eagle about Park Slope's M.S. 51 team, which won the event's Research Award (read the full article "[Crowds Roar as Robots Compete in Brooklyn](#)").

Park Slope's M.S. 51 is known for art and talent, with a show choir and a vocal music program, said Coach James Hoffman (wearing a beanie with a propeller on top). But 25 kids joined the robotics team anyway. "We were one of the original Lego teams; we've been doing this for seven years."

"These are our geeks," he said proudly, introducing eight members who served as the Research Squad: Annabelle White, Renon Biscaino, Brigid Connelly, Andrea Sumrall, Joaquina Terrones, Ingrid Wiemer, Gabriela Pedrero and Polly Kyle, all seventh graders.

Speaking as a chorus, the girls said that that this year's research topic involved figuring out a solution to a climate problem.

"We decided to build a canal under the Verrazano Bridge, to block water from rising if the ice shelf melted into water," they said. As part of the research, Andrea wrote rap music and choreographed the moves, while Gabriela and Polly wrote the lyrics.