

# 2 LI students among top 10 Intel science winners

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Intel science finalists Chelsea Jurman, 17, left, of Roslyn High School and Preya Shah, 17, of Ward Melville High School. (Newsday Photos / Tony Jerome)

Two Long Island high school seniors emerged Tuesday night with \$45,000 in prizes between them from the national Intel science contest, following four rounds of judging and a White House handshake with President Barack Obama.

Chelsea Jurman, 17, of Roslyn High School, captured fifth place and a \$25,000 scholarship. Preya Shah, also 17, of Ward Melville High School in Setauket, took eighth place and a \$20,000 scholarship.

Long Island students have placed among the contest's top 10 every year but one over the past decade.

"It's been absolutely amazing," said Shah, who designed a cancer-killing drug.

Jurman, whose research focused on underage drinking, admitted to being "a little nervous, but also excited."

This year's highest award went to Eric Larson, 17, of Eugene, Ore., for research that classified mathematical objects called fusion categories. He received a \$100,000 scholarship.

Last night's black-tie awards dinner in Washington, D.C., capped six days of judging and other activities, including a Monday meeting on the White House steps with Obama.

During the 15-minute session, Obama mentioned that his older daughter, Malia, 10, had said she was interested in curing diseases after a recent lesson in cell structure at school.

"They were having a conversation at the dinner table, talking about the Ebola virus," recounted finalist Christine Shrock, 17, also a student at Ward Melville, part of the Three Village district.

The student research contest was founded 67 years ago and is the nation's oldest. Since 1998, it has been sponsored by Intel Corp., a California-based computer chip maker.

Ten top winners are chosen annually from among 40 finalists and receive prizes of \$20,000 or more. Other finalists receive \$5,000 and laptops.

Panels of science experts put finalists through four rounds of questioning, including many curveballs designed to test contestants' ability to think on their feet. For example: If you were sent back in time a million years, what would you take with you?

Teachers adept at training teen researchers say there's really no way to anticipate such questions, though they do spend hours practicing oral presentations. Beyond that, teachers say, the best approach is rolling with the punches.

"Take a deep breath and relax," Ward Melville High research director George Baldo tells his students.

"Enjoy it," added Allyson Weseley, who oversees Roslyn High's research program. "It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience."