



UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE
Making a World of Difference

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

 @UILCIANDE

2024 • INVITATIONAL A

Dec. 6, 2023



Image created using Adobe Firefly

DO NOT TURN THIS PAGE UNTIL YOU ARE INSTRUCTED TO DO SO!

UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

INVITATIONAL A • 2024

- 1. Forcing the nearby airport to close and causing officials to put driving restrictions in place, Etna, the tallest and most active volcano in Europe, erupted. Where is Etna located?**
 - a. Iceland
 - b. Romania
 - c. Italy
 - d. Greece
- 2. In early October, soldiers from what group attacked southern Israel, killing more than 1,000 people and abducting some 150 others in a surprise, large-scale assault?**
 - a. Jaish-e-Mohammed
 - b. Al-Quaida
 - c. Hamas
 - d. Al-Shabaab
- 3. While searching the south pole of the moon for possible reserves of water, Russia's pilotless spacecraft Luna-25 spun into an uncontrolled orbit and crashed. Where?**
 - a. Siberia
 - b. Antarctica, near the south pole
 - c. the Takla Makan Desert in northern China
 - d. the surface of the moon
- 4. Representatives in Congress ousted Kevin McCarthy from what position, the first time in history a person has been ousted from that position?**
 - a. vice president
 - b. speaker of the House
 - c. president pro tempore
 - d. majority leader
- 5. Former NFL player Michael Oher, whose net worth has been estimated at \$22 million, asked a court to end the conservatorship formed by the family who took him in when he was 18. What movie was based on his life?**
 - a. "The Blind Side"
 - b. "Friday Night Lights"
 - c. "We Are Marshall"
 - d. "Varsity Blues"
- 6. Who released the album "We're Safety Now Haven't We" featuring pithy singles such as "Phone Away" and "Protect Ya Noggin"?**
 - a. Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce working for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration
 - b. Bureau of Consumer Protection hired spokespeople Ryan Seacrest, Drake and Beyoncé
 - c. the U.S. Product Safety Commission
 - d. Iam Tongi, Megan Danielle and Colin Stough

7. **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended in September that all Americans 6 months old and older receive a reformulated vaccine for what?**
 - a. pneumonia
 - b. measles, mumps and rubella
 - c. smallpox
 - d. COVID-19

8. **A small town in Kansas became a battleground over the First Amendment after the local police force and county sheriff's deputies did what?**
 - a. arrested a Black teenager who was taking out the trash at his own home
 - b. removed a dozen books from the library because they didn't reflect "community values"
 - c. provided protection to Republican political candidates visiting the state fair but refused to provide protection to visiting Democratic candidates
 - d. raided the office of *The Marion County Record*

9. **Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, declared that Israel would oversee Gaza "for an indefinite period." However, whom did U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken say should govern Gaza?**
 - a. the United States
 - b. the Palestinian Authority
 - c. He agreed. Israel should.
 - d. Egypt

10. **Scientists confirmed it is "on the move" after being stuck to the ocean floor for 37 years. What?**
 - a. the world's biggest iceberg
 - b. pieces of the Titanic
 - c. an asteroid, likely the one that caused the extinction of the dinosaurs, off the Yucatán Peninsula
 - d. a 142-year-old sunken ship, a steel bulk freighter called the Huronton

11. **The prison term for Enrique Tarrio, 22 years, was the most severe penalty handed down so far to any of the more than 1,100 people charged in connection with the Capitol attack. What group did he lead?**
 - a. Oath Keepers
 - b. Three Percenters
 - c. Proud Boys
 - d. QAnon

12. **About 40 miles west of Abilene on Interstate 20, Sweetwater has unwittingly become home to what is possibly the world's largest collection of what?**
 - a. unwanted wind turbine blades
 - b. different breeds of rattlesnakes
 - c. Cadillacs buried in the ground nose first
 - d. flamingos

13. **Though Ken was chosen as one of 12 nominees up for induction, Barbie's sidekick lost out to Cabbage Patch Kids, the Fisher-Price Corn Popper and Nerf foam toys. Lost out for what?**
 - a. having a hit song based around him
 - b. being a lead character in the top-grossing movie of the year
 - c. being on the cover of People magazine
 - d. being inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame

14. **It's the coffee giant's most popular seasonal beverage, with hundreds of millions sold since its launch in 2003. And it has produced a huge — and growing — industry of imitators. What Starbucks drink celebrated its 20th anniversary this past fall?**
- the Chai Tea Latte
 - the Pumpkin Spice Latte
 - the Frappuccino
 - the Pink Drink
15. **Texas senators considered whether Attorney General Ken Paxton violated the duties of his office. Ultimately, how did the Senate vote?**
- Senators voted to acquit.
 - Senators found Paxton guilty and removed him from office.
 - Senators voted to stop the trial.
 - Senators sent the decision to the courts with no determination.
16. **In late September, U.S. President Joe Biden became the first president to do what?**
- to visit a country, Ukraine, at war
 - to join a picket line in the UAW strike
 - to adopt a rescue dog, Commander
 - to ignore Congress and keep spending government funds despite not having any budgetary authority
17. **The U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of New York added 10 charges to a growing list of charges against George Santos in October. Those charges included what?**
- money laundering, defamation, sexual assault
 - fraudulently inflating the value of his assets
 - conspiracy, wire fraud, false statements, identity theft
 - efforts to overturn the 2020 election
18. **After Chuck Schumer, the Senate majority leader, announced the change, the outcry was swift, with 46 Republican senators signing a letter condemning it. What?**
- approval of Biden's nomination for chairman of the joint chiefs of staff
 - a procedure for approving a budget that would avoid any future shutdown
 - revision of rules that now require confirmation of judicial appointees only by committee, not the entire Senate
 - a relaxation of the dress code in the chamber
19. **From Oregon to Texas, people looked up to the sky Oct. 14, 2023, to view the "ring of fire" as the moon nearly (but not completely) covered up the sun. What was this event called?**
- an annular solar eclipse
 - a lunar eclipse
 - a total solar eclipse
 - a hybrid eclipse
20. **In October, NASA launched a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket to an asteroid about the size of Massachusetts. What was unique about this asteroid?**
- Scientists detected chlorophyll deep in an ice cave, possibly indicating life.
 - A radio signal from the asteroid said, "Attempt no landing here."
 - There are active volcanoes on it and ice on both poles.
 - About 30% to 60% of it is metal.

21. **According to the American Ornithological Society, we can say goodbye to a lot of familiar bird names, like Anna's Hummingbird, Gambel's Quail, Lewis' Woodpecker, Bewick's Wren, Bullock's Oriole. Why?**
 - a. The society is renaming all bird species named after people.
 - b. Society officials said the birds are extinct in the wild in the U.S.
 - c. The society is working with agencies all across the world to codify the naming of birds.
 - d. Birds living on lands protected by Native Americans will use names assigned by the tribe.

22. **Which of the following is NOT one of the companies against which the United Auto Workers was striking last fall?**
 - a. Ford
 - b. Stellantis
 - c. General Motors
 - d. Toyota

23. **With an electorate frustrated with the country's surging violence and ailing economy, Daniel Noboa, a 35-year-old heir to a banana empire, was elected president of what country in October?**
 - a. Brazil
 - b. Mozambique
 - c. Ecuador
 - d. El Salvador

24. **Five Americans who had been imprisoned in Iran were freed in September. What did the U.S. do in exchange?**
 - a. released 150 prisoners of war
 - b. agreed to free \$6 billion in Iranian oil assets
 - c. purchased an additional \$6 billion in Iranian oil
 - d. provided Iran with F-16 fighter jets to counter Russian air superiority

25. **The International Olympic Committee announced that five new sports will be added to the schedule for the Summer Games in Los Angeles in 2028. Which one of these will be added?**
 - a. pickleball
 - b. duckpin bowling
 - c. cricket
 - d. cornhole

26. **The line was more than 2 miles long. There were no restrooms and limited Wi-Fi. But more than 5,000 visitors showed up to tour the southern New Mexico site where the world's first atomic bomb was detonated. Where?**
 - a. the Trinity Site
 - b. Los Alamos
 - c. Manhattan
 - d. Ghost Ranch

27. **From Missouri to Arkansas, water levels reached new record lows in what river, preventing shipments of grain and other goods from moving downriver?**
 - a. Mississippi River
 - b. Rio Grande River
 - c. Missouri River
 - d. Colorado River

28. **Texas sued to get back millions of dollars in Medicaid reimbursements in a lawsuit that appears to be the first of its kind brought by a state against what abortion provider?**
- Whole Woman's Health
 - Planned Parenthood
 - Tenet Healthcare
 - The Abortion Care Network
29. **It rose to 12.4% in 2022 from 7.8% in 2021, the largest-one-year jump on record. What?**
- the birthrate
 - the cost of raising a child from birth to age 18
 - the poverty rate
 - the cost of four years of college
30. **After dozens of school districts across Texas sued the Texas Education Agency, a Travis County judge temporarily blocked the agency from doing what?**
- releasing this year's annual school ratings
 - administering the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness test
 - giving raises to retired schoolteachers
 - creating new alignments for high school sports
31. **Gov. Greg Abbott said a fourth special session of the Texas Legislature would begin an hour after the third special session ended. What was at the top of the agenda for the Legislature?**
- providing COVID-19 vaccines for all adults in Texas
 - giving retired Texas educators a 3% raise
 - funding the Texas Broadband Infrastructure Fund to finance high-speed broadband access to every household in the state
 - providing education savings accounts for all Texas schoolchildren
32. **FTX co-founder Sam Bankman-Fried's first official day of testimony in his criminal trial saw the former mogul deflect blame for the loss of billions of dollars. What type of business was he in?**
- trading penny stocks
 - selling cryptocurrency
 - selling luxury real estate including the finest hotels and golf courses
 - posting on social media including X
33. **Spectators at the University of Nebraska's football stadium in Lincoln set the world record for the largest crowd at a women's sporting event as 92,003 fans watched which sport?**
- volleyball
 - basketball
 - tennis
 - softball
34. **After finding small metal pieces in the product, Tyson Foods (the parent company of Jimmy Dean and Hillshire Farm) recalled nearly 30,000 pounds of what food product?**
- Tyson frozen chicken strips
 - Jimmy Dean plant-based sausage patties
 - Hillshire Farm smoked sausage links
 - Tyson dinosaur-shaped chicken nuggets

35. **On Nov. 7, 2023, Ohio became the 24th state to legalize what?**
- abortion under any circumstances
 - recreational marijuana
 - the right to carry a gun anywhere
 - Canadian citizens crossing the border without a passport or visa
36. **The Smithsonian’s National Zoo shipped Mei Xiang, Tian Tian and Xiao Qi Ji to Chengdu, China. The animals were put in metal crates, trucked to the airport and loaded onto a FedEx Boeing 777 freighter. What animals?**
- spotted owls
 - snub-nosed monkeys
 - pandas
 - bats thought to contain the original COVID-19 virus
37. **Which university fired football coach Jimbo Fisher, triggering a contract buyout of more than \$77 million, the largest in college football history?**
- The University of Texas at Austin
 - Texas A&M University
 - Florida State University
 - University of Notre Dame
38. **Congress gave the power for administration officials to negotiate some drug prices as part of U.S. President Joe Biden’s efforts to lower health care costs. The first 10 drugs in the program treat diabetes, cancer and other conditions. What legislation gave executive officials that power?**
- The American Rescue Plan Act
 - Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
 - the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act
 - The Inflation Reduction Act
39. **As part of an effort to improve air quality and reduce planet-warming pollutants, New Jersey officials said they would ban the sale of what by 2035?**
- home heating oil units
 - new gasoline-powered vehicles
 - cows
 - private airplanes
40. **The rare baby giraffe that took the world by storm now has a name, Kipekee, after 40,000 people voted. The moniker, which means “unique” in Swahili, was revealed on the “Today” show. What was almost unique, as in one of only two on the planet, about the animal?**
- It was the world’s tallest.
 - It was a true albino.
 - It didn’t have any spots.
 - It was born with webbed feet and could swim.

THE ESSAY

NOTE: *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

Technology has been all over the news this academic year. Lawsuits. Political action. Advancements. Monetary decisions. Discuss public perception and understanding of technological changes and technological advancements in the news recently from political, scientific and economic angles.

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

ANSWER KEY

ESSAY PROMPT

Technology has been all over the news this academic year. Lawsuits. Political action. Advancements. Monetary decisions. Discuss public perception and understanding of technological changes and technological advancements in the news recently from political, scientific and economic angles.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED Dec. 6, 2023 might include, but should not be limited to...

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 21. A |
| 2. C | 22. D |
| 3. D | 23. C |
| 4. B | 24. B |
| 5. A | 25. C |
| 6. C | 26. A |
| 7. D | 27. A |
| 8. D | 28. B |
| 9. B | 29. C |
| 10. A | 30. A |
| 11. C | 31. D |
| 12. A | 32. B |
| 13. D | 33. A |
| 14. B | 34. D |
| 15. A | 35. B |
| 16. B | 36. C |
| 17. C | 37. B |
| 18. D | 38. D |
| 19. A | 39. B |
| 20. D | 40. C |

- *ChatGPT resignation* — ChatGPT-maker Open AI has pushed out its co-founder and CEO Sam Altman after a review found he was “not consistently candid in his communications” with the board of directors. Hours after that announcement, Microsoft officials announced they were hiring Altman. A few days later, Altman returned to ChatGPT with new board just days after previous one fired him.
- *Spamouflage* — Meta said it purged thousands of Facebook accounts that were part of a widespread online Chinese spam operation trying to covertly boost China and criticize the West. The campaign, which became known as “Spamouflage,” was active across more than 50 platforms and forums including Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and X, formerly known as Twitter, according to a Meta threat report. “We assess that it’s the largest, though unsuccessful, and most prolific covert influence operation that we know of in the world today,” said Meta Global Threat Intelligence Lead Ben Nimmo.
- *U.S. sues Google* — The U.S. government is taking on one of the world’s most powerful companies: Google. A court battle kicked off in September in which the U.S. Justice Department argued that Google abused its power as a monopoly to dominate the search engine business. It’s the government’s first major monopoly case to make it to trial in decades and the first in the age of the modern internet. The Justice Department’s case hinges on claims that Google illegally orchestrated its business dealings, so that it’s the first search engine people see when they turn on their phones and web browsers.
- *Image creating by AI* — In September, OpenAI, the San Francisco artificial intelligence start-up, folded image-creation technology into ChatGPT, its popular online chatbot. Called DALL-E 3, the AI can produce more convincing images than previous versions, showing an improved knack for images containing letters, numbers and human hands, the company said.
- *Netflix and DVDs* — Netflix shipped its final DVD discs on Sept. 29, bringing to an end a service it offered years before it became the streaming giant it is today.
- *Netflix opening brick-and-mortar stores* — After effectively driving brick-and-mortar movie rental stores out of business Netflix announced plans to open its first permanent bricks-and-mortar locations, initially targeting two in the U.S. in 2025. (The company has not said where those will be.) The outlets — Netflix Houses — will be kind of mini theme parks: They’ll serve food and drink, sell merchandise and include “immersive” installations based on its hit titles like “Squid Game” or “Stranger Things.”
- *International agreement* — The U.S., Britain and more than a dozen other countries Nov. 26 unveiled what a senior U.S. official described as the first detailed international agreement on how to keep artificial intelligence safe from rogue actors, pushing for companies to create AI systems that are “secure by design.” In a 20-page document, the 18 countries agreed that companies designing and using AI need to develop and deploy it in a way that keeps customers and the wider public safe from misuse.
- *Executive Order* — On Oct. 30, President Biden issued an Executive Order to promote the safe, secure, and trustworthy development and use of artificial intelligence. Others termed it “ambiguous.” Before signing the order, Biden said AI is driving change at “warp speed” and carries tremendous potential as well as perils. “AI is all around us,” Biden said. “To realize the promise of AI and avoid the risk, we need to govern this technology.”
- *X declining in value* — X, the social media company formerly known as Twitter, could lose as much as \$75 million in advertising revenue by the end of the year as dozens of major brands pause their marketing campaigns after its owner, Elon Musk, endorsed an antisemitic conspiracy. Musk’s company filed a defamation lawsuit against the liberal advocacy group Media Matters for America.