

# Watch Tonight: UNH student appears on Jeopardy!

**UNH graduate student competes on the game show  
Monday, Oct. 13 at 7:30 p.m.**

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Thursday, October 9, 2014

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JEOPARDY! HOST ALEX TREBEK WITH UNH PH.D. STUDENT DAN TRAN PHOTO COURTESY OF JEOPARDY! PRODUCTIONS, INC.

It doesn't take a Ph.D. to win at Jeopardy! but UNH graduate student Dan Tran had to wait until he was just shy of his doctorate to finally get the chance.

Tran's round on the famous game show was taped this past summer at Sony Pictures Studios outside Los Angeles and will air next Monday, Oct. 13, at 7:30 p.m. on Boston's CBS affiliate WBZ-TV.

"I've been taking the Jeopardy! online test for the last seven years to no avail," says Tran, a Ph.D. candidate in the UNH department of physics and the Space Science Center within the UNH Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space.

It's no wonder that his previous tries came up empty; some 100,000 other trivia aficionados reportedly take the Jeopardy! online test every year in hopes of big prize money and a little bit of fame. But the eighth time turned out to be the charm for Tran and he was invited to an in-person audition in his hometown of Boston last May where he and several other chosen ones were put through the paces of yet another test and a Jeopardy! practice round.

"Just being able to practice using the buzzer is important," Tran says of the game's signature means of beating your competitors to the punch. "I don't think people realize that half of Jeopardy! is your timing—how well you use that buzzer. It's great if you know a lot of stuff, but if you get out-buzzed you're not going anywhere."

Tran buzzed right through his audition and flew out to California in August to play the game for real.

And how did he do? Mum's the word.

"People have been badgering me about that but there are a lot of things I can't disclose for contractual reasons. I'm a huge Jeopardy! fan and I'm big into the sanctity of the game. Everyone will have to wait until Monday night."

Tran says he's been a lifelong fan of the game show but only started watching it "seriously" while an undergraduate astronomy and physics student at Boston University.

"I'm a big trivia fan in general and since I've been a graduate student here at UNH, I've regularly attended two or three trivia nights per week at various bars," he says.

Bar hopping by night to drink in as much trivia as possible, Tran works days with associate professor James Connell of the Space Science Center on a space-flight instrument prototype project called PICAP—short for Positron Identification by Coincident Annihilation Photons. PICAP is designed to detect positrons, the antimatter counterpart of electrons, in a leaner, lighter way compared to more massive and energy-hungry space instruments.

Jeopardy! fans in general tend to steer clear of subjects like physics, according to Tran, and he of course can't say if he had the opportunity to strut his stuff in that category, or if he won or lost.

Says Tran, “Win or lose this has been a big accomplishment in my life. I’ve wanted to get on the show when Alex Trebek was still the host. It was a very surreal experience meeting him.” He adds, “I’m still very young but this does fulfill an item on my bucket list. Now, my focus is to finish here at UNH by the end of the academic year and move on to other things.”

## SUCCESS



University of New Hampshire

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