

Thursday, March 19, 2009
3:00–3:50 p.m.
Harrelson 330

Becoming President with less than 25% of the Vote

Chuck Wessell

In 1961, George Pólya wrote a short paper in which he derived a theoretical minimum percentage of the popular vote a U.S. presidential candidate could receive and still win the electoral college. In this talk we'll review Pólya's work, tweaking it slightly to account for the twenty-third amendment, which granted the District of Columbia three electoral votes and passed after Pólya's paper was published.

We will then use computers and data from the 2008 presidential election to see how realistic Pólya's solution is. Some preliminary computed results will be shared, and a programming challenge will be made to interested students. If time allows, we'll have a brief discussion on how states that can split their electoral (currently Maine and Nebraska) complicate this problem.

NCSU Society for Undergraduate Mathematics

SUM Series