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Contact: Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

Neal Vermillion of Oconomowoc, Wis.

IWU Junior to Appear on "Jeopardy," Top-Rated Quiz Show

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Remember, your answer must be in the form of a question!

That caution, made famous by "Jeopardy" host Alex Trebek, will be on the mind of an Illinois Wesleyan University political science and history major, March 7-8, when he tapes an appearance on the popular game show and takes a shot at winning \$25,000.

Neal Vermillion, an IWU junior from Oconomowoc, Wis., was tapped last month to compete in "Jeopardy's" contest featuring college students.

Results of the taping will be top secret until the shows are broadcast the weeks of May 1 and May 8.

Vermillion's appearance on "Jeopardy" will interrupt a semester, where he is studying American politics and public law in Washington, D.C., as part of the Washington Semester Program, sponsored by The American University. He also is working two days a week as an intern in the office of Sen. Russell Feingold (D-Wis.).

Cheering Vermillion on at the Culver City, Calif., taping will be a contingent of IWU alumni, wearing IWU sweatshirts, as well as Ellen Myers, wife of IWU President Minor Myers, jr. All "Jeopardy" contestants will wear sweatshirts from their colleges.

"I really don't know what to feel--I may still be in shock," Vermillion said. "I've always dreamed of being on 'Jeopardy.' It's a dream come true and probably won't hit me until I get to California."

As a freshman, Vermillion and his roommate routinely watched "Jeopardy," an interest that has continued throughout college.

Vermillion believes he has just the right skill to be a winner on "Jeopardy": "When I read and hear things--especially trivia--my mind retains them. My mind retains the types of facts that are well suited to 'Jeopardy'--

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especially geography and history."

Vermillion, who has never appeared before on television, is looking forward to meeting "Jeopardy" host Alex Trebek and telling him about how he became interested in the game show.

Vermillion's long-shot chance to appear on "Jeopardy" began last August, when he was watching the show and a commercial encouraged college students to send in post cards, if they wanted to tryout for the program. Ellen Myers recalled that a "Jeopardy" official told her that the quiz show received about 60,000 post cards nationally.

In October, Vermillion received a letter from "Jeopardy" and on a Saturday in early November he found himself in Milwaukee with dozens of other college students, participating in the "Jeopardy" College and Teen Test. Other students were taking the test in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Houston.

Vermillion and the other wantabe contestants plowed through 50 questions displayed on TV monitors. The students had 10 seconds to scribble down their answers.

Vermillion passed the first round and joined eight other students for additional testing. They filled out informational forms, had their pictures taken, and told funny stories--a staple of the "Jeopardy" format, when Trebek introduces contestants.

The next step was to play a mock game, practicing the fine art of squeezing the "Jeopardy" buzzer.

"I was in the second group of three," Vermillion recalled. "The aim was to test our game playing ability and to see if we could handle the pressure. I did pretty well. A few times I was the first to ring the buzzer.

"We played for about five minutes," Vermillion added, "and then one at a time we talked about ourselves--especially how we would spend the \$25,000, if we won."

If Vermillion wins the "Jeopardy" loot, he plans to apply it to law school after he graduates from IWU. He also wants to take a trip to Europe and visit Nazi concentration camps, an interest that is an outgrowth of a

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course he took at IWU last year examining the Holocaust.

A mailing snafu almost scuttled Vermillion's chance to appear on "Jeopardy." The game show sent a congratulatory letter to him at his IWU address. The letter was returned by the post office since Vermillion was in Washington, D.C. However, the "Jeopardy" staff was persistent in tracking him down and called his parents in Wisconsin to find his whereabouts. But they had to settle for leaving a message on the Vermillion family telephone answering machine since nobody was home. Finally, Vermillion got the good news, when he called his parents from a pay telephone in Union Station, Washington's railroad terminal and a shopping center near Capitol Hill. He received the letter a few days later in the mail.

Vermillion is among 15 students selected for the "Jeopardy" college competition. He is going into the experience feeling upbeat, observing: "I feel pretty confident that I can do well on the show. It will be strange--the bright lights and the TV cameras. I won't be playing 'Jeopardy' sitting on my bed. But, I think, the taping will go so fast that I'll just get into the flow of things."

The Washington Semester Program Vermillion is participating in focuses on federal judiciary policy, an appropriate topic since he is eyeing a career as an attorney. The program is divided up into three segments: a seminar involving two courses, a one-course research project or elective course, and an internship, accounting for one course. The program was established in 1947 and is a cooperative venture involving about 200 member colleges and universities, including Illinois Wesleyan.

Vermillion has attended briefings, as part of the Washington Semester Program, with members of Congress and Capitol Hill staffers, lobbyists, journalists, advertising executives who produce political commercials, and others.

"I had heard good things about the Washington Semester program from other IWU students who had taken it," Vermillion said. "It's helping me decide about my future and law school. Going to Washington is as good a way as any to learn about the system and see if I like law and politics."

With a minor in international studies, Vermillion is contemplating a career in international law, or serving as a Foreign Service Officer with the

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U.S. State Department, or perhaps becoming a judge.

"No matter what field I go into," Vermillion said, "this has been a great learning experience. You go beyond the textbooks and see how the system works behind the scenes. You also can make connections that will help to get a job after graduation."

Vermillion is the son of Robert and Carol Vermillion, 568 Vermillion Ave., Oconomowoc, Wis. Robert Vermillion teaches English at Oconomowoc High School, the high school Neal attended. Carol Vermillion teaches third grade at an elementary school.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,800 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. In recent years, the university's endowment has grown to more than \$92 million; a \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$24 million science building will open in 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 164 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *U.S. News* ranks IWU the second most efficient national liberal arts college--a key gauge of the campus' quality academic program and relatively reasonable cost. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition. IWU's 1994 freshman class scored an average 27.9 on the ACT exam, compared to the national average of 20.7.

<p>Editor's Note: For more information, Neal Vermillion can be reached at 202/895-4667.</p>
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