

UCF fields 1 of world's best teams — in computers

□ Three students will vie for top honors at an international contest this week.

By Joni James

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Nearly every Saturday for the past 20 weeks, they have trapped themselves inside a windowless, fluorescent-lighted room at the University of Central Florida.

The dozen admit they're nerds — spending their weekends writing computer programs for make-believe problems instead of tossing Frisbees or studying in the sun. But they're also among

the best college computer programmers in the world.

This week, three of the 12 will try to prove they are *the best* — a goal that has eluded UCF's award-winning student programming teams for 15 years despite unprecedented success in winning regional competitions.

UCF sophomore Eric Heimburg, seniors Bryan Kline and Michael Kujawa and alternate team member Joel Davis will fly to San Jose, Calif., to compete against 49 other teams in the International Collegiate Programming Contest organized by the Association for Computing Machinery, the largest organization of

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Practice for contest. Michael Kujawa (foreground) looks over computer questions in the UCF computer science building on Saturday in preparation for a competition this week. His teammates are Eric Heimburg (left) and Bryan Kline (right).

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THE ORLANDO SENTINEL

Computer contest's winning team earns \$12,000

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computing professionals.

On Saturday, team members — even those not going to the international competition — reported one last time to a UCF computer laboratory to help the three-person team prepare. They ran a mock, five-hour competition featuring eight problems given to contestants in the 1990 international contest. One problem, for example, concerned creating a routing system for Meals on Wheels drivers.

"Is it fun? If you stretch the definition of the word," Kline, 21, of Palm Beach joked before getting down to work. "You have to enjoy the competition."

"It's just like any major athletic contest," said Kujawa, 22, of Winter Park. "You train and train."

Each of the teams in San Jose — from Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to Chinese University of Hong Kong and Politehnica University of Bucharest in Romania — repre-

sent the top contenders out of 1,000 teams on five continents. Each beat dozens of others in its region to win the right to be there.

UCF fielded four teams at its regional competition in November, capturing first, third, sixth and ninth place among the 56 teams from Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and South Carolina. But only the top UCF team, along with the second-place team from the University of Miami and the fourth-place team from Florida State University, is invited to San Jose.

The stakes are high. The top three teams will take home \$12,000, \$6,000 and \$3,000 respectively from sponsor Microsoft Corp. Fourth through 10th places are worth \$1,500 each. Colleges may spend the money on scholarships or equipment.

"You don't do it for the money," said Associate Professor Ali Orooji, the UCF team coach for the past eight years. "It's really the bragging rights you're after. You ask the students, 'If there was no money, would you still do it?'"

"They say yes."