UCF Computer Programmers to Compete in Sweden

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Brain Power- UCF's Programming Team take on computer problems

The UCF team will be challenged to use their programming prowess and mental endurance to solve a semester's worth of real-world computer problems in just five hours.

Three University of Central Florida students will put their computer knowledge to the test as they compete for a world championship at the "Battle of the Brains" competition April 18 to 22 in Stockholm, Sweden.

UCF is one of 21 U.S. universities competing in the 33rd annual World Finals of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) International Collegiate Programming contest, sponsored by IBM. The world finals will feature the top 100 teams out of more than 7,000 teams from around the globe that competed in regional competitions.

Michael Do, of Orlando, Jeremy Elbourn, of New York, and Stephen Fulweider, of Little Rock, Ark., will be challenged to use their programming prowess and mental endurance to solve eight to 10 complex, real-world computer problems, a semester's worth of work, in just five hours.

Huddled around a single computer, each team will race against the clock in a battle of logic, strategy and mental endurance. The team that solves the most problems correctly in the shortest amount of time will be the world champions and win bragging rights, scholarships and IBM prizes.

At the regional competition in October, five teams of students from UCF competed against 60 other teams from the Southeast, including teams from the Georgia Institute of Technology and the University of Florida. All of UCF's teams placed in the top 10.

In the past 27 years, UCF has finished in the top three at the regional competition every year — a record unmatched by any other team in the southeast region. In previous world finals, UCF has placed as high as second.

"It's great to be one of the top 100 out of 7,000," said Ali Orooji, faculty advisor for the UCF team.

Orooji and the students have spent 25 Saturdays preparing for the competition. The seven-hour practices include lectures, practice problems and follow-up discussions.

"Different students have different backgrounds, and we need to prepare them to know everything," Orooji said.

This year, for the first time, students were able to practice during the week, too.

A UCF alumnus and graduate of the College of Engineering & Computer Science has made a private donation to the team. The donation allowed the students to devote extra time to training for the competition instead of working about 20 hours a week to support themselves. The donor has also funded a new lab for the programming teams.

Despite the hard work that goes into training, Orooji said that coaching the competition is "a lot of fun," and he calls the students "the future of computing."

"You feel good when you see a student work hard, and you feel great when you see them win and go to a world competition," he said.