
Students to compete in 'Battle of the Brains'

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Six UCF teams will be putting their brainpower together to compete in the 36th annual "Battle of the Brains," an Association for Computing Machinery International Collegiate Programming Contest sponsored by IBM, on Saturday.

UCF will be joining students from the Florida Institute of Technology, Florida International University, Jacksonville University, University of Florida and University of South Florida at the Florida Institute of Technology to compete in the Southeast USA Regional Contest for a spot as one of the 100 teams to attend the World Finals in Warsaw, Poland May 14-18, 2012.

"The ACM-ICPC offers us the unique opportunity to gather the smartest programmers from around the world in one room," said Doug Heintzman, director of strategy at IBM Software Group and sponsorship executive of the ICPC. "These students possess the capacity, passion and drive necessary to become the future innovators of our industry, and we look forward to the opportunity to recruit from such an elite pool of young talent."

This year's regional competitions are expected to attract tens of thousands of students from universities in approximately 90 countries on six continents, all with the same dream to win the final round of the competition and walk away with scholarships, a guaranteed job or internship with IBM and bragging rights to the holy grail of programming — the "World's Smartest Trophy."

"Just as Olympians are the elite of their chosen sport, the world finalists of the ACM-ICPC are the top echelon of young IT talent," said Salvatore Vella, vice president of architecture and technology at IBM Software Group. "They are the future architects of a smarter planet. We are continually impressed by the creativity exhibited year after year, which speaks to the value of this competition."

The prestigious contest fosters creativity, teamwork and innovation in building new software programs, and it enables students to test their ability to perform under pressure and is the oldest, largest and perhaps most prestigious programming contest in the world.

"The questions designed for the Battle of the Brains are not just mathematical or scientific equations; they incorporate the complex real-world challenges that we face every day," Vella said. "The problem sets will require the finalists to manipulate technologies such as analytics and collaboration software to create solutions for issues from infrastructure to business transactions. This caliber of material exposes students to the larger global implications of technology and their ability to create a smarter, more sustainable planet."

Teams of three UCF students who have successfully earned a spot on the programming team will apply their skills and maintain their mental endurance to solve these complex, real world problems under a grueling



Shannon Scheidell / Central Florida Future
Shown practicing above, six UCF teams will compete in the 36th annual "Battle of the Brains," sponsored by IBM, on Saturday.

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coveted spot on the World Finals roster.

Computer science graduate student Matt Fontaine said that UCF has competed in the competition for the last 29 years and has earned the top three spots of the regional competition every year except for last year.

Fontaine has always been interested in puzzle solving and has been training himself exceptionally hard this year to bring UCF back to the top and ultimately win a spot at the finals.

"This year we want to get back on top and have been training really hard this year to do that," Fontaine said. "I started out this year by taking small steps and trying to practice problems every day. I try to see some kind of challenging problem at least once a week, because it reminds me how hard I will need to work at the competition to win a spot at finals, which would be really exciting."

Fontaine also practices every Saturday with other UCF competitors and Ali Orooji, UCF's designated coach, associate professor and programming team faculty adviser since 1989, to help train for the competition.

"All the UCF teams, we all practice together, and it is very competitive while we practice because during the competition we will be trying to beat each other, but we also share ideas and help each other out, because we want UCF to be back on top," Fontaine said.

Orooji enjoys the competition and the chance to work with UCF's top problem-solving students and has high hopes for this year.

"We are hoping to win the regional contest on Oct. 29, advance to the final round and finish in the top 20 in the world," Orooji said.

Although winning would be the best possible outcome, Fontaine doesn't think it is the only benefit of the competition.

"It's about how fun it is to solve challenging problems, but also during the way I have learned algorithms that have helped me in other classes and have made me better at programming overall," Fontaine said.

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