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UCF computer team beats 40 rivals

By Cindy Schreuder

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

Computer science students from the University of Central Florida whizzed into first place during a regional programming competition, beating groups from 40 other Southeastern colleges and universities.

UCF's win Saturday means its four-member team will advance to an international computer programming contest in February.

Duke University in Durham, N.C., which placed second, also will advance to the competition in Washington, D.C.

The UCF win surprised older schools such as the University of Florida and the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, said Ali Orooji, UCF team advisor.

"Well-established universities, they expect to win," said Orooji, an assistant professor of computer science at UCF.

This will be the fifth time a UCF team has made it to the top level of competition, said Ronald Dutton, associate chairman of the computer science department.

Although UCF has never won, the school came close two years ago when it finished second.

Orooji and Dutton said they are pleased with this year's team and optimistic about their chances in the international competition.

"We believe in our team strongly," Orooji said.

UCF has been changing its computer science curriculum to stress problem-solving skills, which are important in

the competition, Dutton said. In action, he added, UCF has been attracting more qualified students in recent years.

Dutton said that this year's six-hour contest, which was held at Florida International University in Miami, must have been especially hard if the winning team could solve only four of nine problems.

Typically, the top teams solve at least seven or eight. The teams write programs designed to solve each problem.

The team members are: Bill Bro Don Cross, Peter Popovich and Michael Schnitzuis. They were chosen from about 30 to 35 students who tried out the team by solving problems.

The contest is sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery, a 70,000-member, professional society based in New York.