

# UCF competes on world stage

A computer team matches wits and skills with teams from around the globe.

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SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

The arena was a 15,000-square-foot room divided by 6-by-8-foot tables, which served as stations for IBM computers.

The gladiators were 78 teams that had won regional contests from universities worldwide.

The event was the Association for Computing Machinery International Collegiate Programming Contest sponsored by IBM in Shanghai last month.

The teams of three university students competed to solve eight or more complex, real-world problems within a five-hour period.

Huddled against one computer, teams try to beat the clock to win the war of logic, strategy and mental endurance.

Their only weapons are computer programs, tested and tried strategies, knowledge, experience, practice and encouragement from their coaches.

Ever since it entered the contest 23 years ago, the University of Central Florida has been placing within the top three winners at the regional level.

This year was no exception.

Three students — computer science majors Adam Campbell, 22, Raymond Ho, 20, and Benjamin Douglass, 23 — went to the contest hosted by Shanghai Jiao Tong University after placing second among the colleges in the Southeast.

"You get to compete with the best," Campbell said.

Added Ho: "People we have already heard of via the Net."

But the competition is really



Members of the world champion team Shanghai Jiao Tong University celebrate their victory. Teams compete to solve 8 complex problems within a 5-hour period in a war of logic, strategy and endurance.

tough at the international level. Even though the three had practiced long and hard and worked out their strategies, they were only able to finish three out of the 10 problems and earned an honorable mention.

Faculty adviser Dr. Ali Orooji said the contest fosters creativity, teamwork, and innovation in building new software programs, and enables students to test their ability to perform under pressure.

Winning isn't important.

"Being a part of a prestigious contest like that brings the talented students under the limelight, and many have been hired by the sponsors," said Orooji, who has been the contest director and a host in the past.

"It's a good thing to have on your résumé."

Three coaches, research scientist Jason Daly, 30, and Glenn Martin, 34, a senior research scientist at UCF's Institute for Simulation and Training, and Chris Gouge, 34, a former UCF student who telecommutes for a company in California, spent 20 Saturdays helping students practice the problems in the past year.

They say they bring "experience, expertise and knowledge" to the equation.

Preparation is tough.

"It's not an insignificant amount, so many hours on Saturdays," Orooji said.

Participation has grown to involve several tens of thousands of the students and faculty in computing disciplines at more than 1,582 universities from 71 countries on six continents.

Some of the computer-science problems require skill and knowledge only; others require advanced algorithms.

Examples of problems are find the shortest path between two cities or delineate the places where cell phone towers can be placed to guarantee maximum coverage.

Contests such as these are important, said Gabby Silberman, program director at IBM's Center for Advanced Studies in New York, because they foster an interest in the subject.

"It creates a big awareness. We get the attention of the public, get noticed by the universities, and we get to put the message of our programs out there," Silberman said.

For more about the contest: [icpc.baylor.edu/icpc/Finals/](http://icpc.baylor.edu/icpc/Finals/).