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Reigning Champs: UCF Programming Team Grabs Fourth Consecutive Win

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In a super-contest of computer programming known as the “Battle of the Brains,” a University of Central Florida team of computer science students dominated over their competitors from universities in the U.S. Southeast and gave UCF its fourth consecutive victory.

The win also marks the 34th consecutive year that the UCF Programming Team has achieved a top-three ranking in the Association for Computing Machinery’s Southeast Regional International Collegiate Programming Contest. UCF’s long-standing success record is unmatched by any similar team in the nation.

UCF sent five teams to the 2015 contest in Melbourne, Fla., Saturday that featured 109 teams from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina. UCF placed first and third. Second place went to Georgia Tech, and fourth place went to Clemson University. UCF’s three other teams placed eighth, 10th and 15th.

The contest begins with teams receiving a set of 10 complex problems that draw on competitors’ skills in math, logic, graphs, charts, geometry and more. Each three-member team shares one computer to solve the most problems in five hours, writing a computer program for each solution. A penalty point system is used to resolve ties.

UCF computer science students Evan Dorundo, of Boca Raton, Fla., Michael Kirsche, of Weston, Fla., and Stephen Royal of Jacksonville, Fla., solved all 10 problems, and they did it 39 minutes before the contest officially ended.

“Our winning team solved three problems more than the second-place team,” said Programming Team faculty advisor Ali Orooji, associate professor, UCF Department of Computer Science. “The last time that happened was in 1990. A team usually wins by only one problem or by penalty points. Winning by three problems is amazing.”

“No team has solved an entire set of 10 problems since I started coaching in 2003,” said Arup Guha, a team coach and lecturer in the UCF Department of Computer Science. “They did it and

they had time to spare.”

The second place team from Georgia Tech solved seven problems, as did UCF’s third place team: computer science students Josh Linge, Tyler Woodhull, Timothy Buzzeli. Guha noted that third place is the highest regional rank ever achieved by a UCF team with a freshman competitor (Buzzeli).

By winning the regional contest, Dorundo, Kirsche and Royal will travel to Phuket, Thailand in May to compete in the World Finals against the elite 100+ teams advancing from a pool of 10,000 regional teams from 90 countries. Dorundo and Royal each have competed at the world level once before.

The secret to UCF’s success is devoted practice, 35 to 40 Saturdays a year. UCF’s seven-hour practice sessions simulate the five-hour contest, with extra time spent on analysis and feedback.

“We owe so much of our success to our coaching staff who devote countless hours to the team effort,” Orooji said. The seven coaches are UCF faculty, former team members and industry professionals.

UCF Programming Team ^[1] members are highly successful beyond student competitions. Most have job offers before they graduate, according to Orooji. “Every year, Google, Facebook, Microsoft, Amazon and many other high-tech companies seek out UCF Programming Team members to hire them,” he said. “Our students are very much in demand.”

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[1] UCF Programming Team: **<http://www.ucfprogrammingteam.org/>**

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