

SFU Press Releases Collection

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World championships next stage for computing competitors

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They're not pipers, or wrestlers. These SFU students are on their way to the world championships for excellence in another field - computer programming.

Two teams of SFU computing science undergraduates are reaping glory after winning two of the top four spots in the annual Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) programming competition in Portland, Oregon on Nov. 13. Both SFU teams beat out rivals Stanford University and the University of California, Berkeley with their second and fourth place finishes in the regional competition. To sweeten the win, cross-town rivals UBC took first and third, making the top four a complete sweep for the Canadian entrants.

The first and second place finishers qualify for the world championships in Shanghai, China in April. "It's an amazing accomplishment," says SFU computing science faculty advisor Bradley Bart, who coached both the second place 'white' team and fourth place 'red' team. "To come out ahead of Stanford and Berkeley, which have traditionally dominated the top six, is incredible." "Our students brought a lot of determination to the competition," adds James Delgrande, chair of the school of computing science. "They came through in a big way." The teams are each made up of three computing science undergraduate students who must try to solve 10 programming problems as quickly and accurately as they can over the course of five hours. For each problem, students work to create a solution, then test it, and forward it to a panel of judges, who either accept or reject it. "Points are awarded for programs that produce the correct output, but the judging is brutal," says Bart. "The slightest mistake in your output will earn you zero points.

"The speed of the competitors is also a factor in the scoring, which lends itself to an intense competition environment." The SFU and UBC teams were the only teams to solve all 10 problems. Berkeley, which took fifth spot and Stanford, claiming sixth spot, each solved eight problems. There were 78 teams in all.

SFU has competed for several years and last made it to the world championships in 1996. Bart, who has been coaching since 2001, says his teams, which included three first time competitors, performed with amazing speed and confidence. "They were pumped," he says.