Three students from the College of Engineering (CEN) at American University of Sharjah (AUS) won first place at the prestigious Gulf Programming Contest held recently at Khalifa University/Abu Dhabi. This is the fifth time in a row an AUS team has won such an event.

The aim of the contest was to test students in computing-related majors to demonstrate their skills in programming and problem solving, network with students from other institutions and to prepare student teams for participating in global and regional programming events. This year, the contest was attended by 46 teams from 15 universities across the UAE and Gulf region. The contest lasted five hours, during which students attempted to solve nine programming problems.

The winning AUS team comprised Omar Al Muhairi, a senior student from the UAE who is double majoring in computer and mechanical engineering; Abdul Rahim Haddad, a senior student from Lebanon who is majoring in computer science; and Mohamed Amer, a senior student from Egypt majoring in computer engineering. The team was taught and guided by their coaches, Dr. Ghassan Qadah and Dr. Gerassimos Barlas, faculty members in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering.

“We feel very proud of these students for their dedication and hard work. We feel that they’re on par with students of other colleges around the world. AUS has made it again!” said Dr. Qadah. He also talked about his experience as a coach and his participation in the contest. "I have been coaching students since I joined AUS 12 years ago. The contest is important locally, regionally and globally. Over the last six years, we have won many of the local and regional programming contests," he added.

Al Muhairi talked about the importance of the award, mentioning how previous AUS winners of the competition were accepted in the master’s and PhD programs of prestigious universities including Stanford University and University of Calgary. Some other winners got job offers from some of the best employers in the world, including Microsoft and Facebook. "Teamwork was the key. The number-one point for students who want to win would be to practice and build teamwork skills," he said, giving advice to students who wish to follow his team’s success.

"University can’t always show us application behind our studies. The contest and the application required relates our methodical theories to our real-world skills," said Al Muhairi. All three students have ideas of what they want to do when they graduate, with Al Muhairi wishing pursue his PhD at MIT. Haddad and Amer, however, have slightly different plans. “We would like to go and work for Google. It's very challenging to get a job there, but at least by winning this competition, we might have a good chance,” he said.

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