



## **AUB engineering students top-ranked in national computer programming contest**

Tuesday, June 29, 2010

An AUB team of engineering students grabbed first place in a computer programming contest recently held at the Lebanese American University, beating 19 other teams to the top.

The three-member team, also known as Spontaneous Self-Combustion and consisting of third-year students Mario Ghandour Achkar and Jad Hachem and fresh graduate Oussama Hariz, solved seven of eight programming problems using algorithms and computer programming languages such as JAVA, C++, or C.

Organized by the Computer Science and Mathematics Department at the Lebanese American, the second Lebanese Collegiate Programming Contest was held on June 25-26, 2010, under the supervision of the ACM-ICPC (Association of Computing Machinery - International Collegiate Programming Contest).

The five-hour contest garnered the participation of 19 teams from 11 universities in Lebanon, all of which were given eight programming problems to solve.

AUB participated with three teams all of which achieved good results, ranking first, second, and fifth. Team expenses were covered by the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at AUB.

Coach Nagi Nahas commended the AUB teams, highlighting the importance of such contests.

"These contests build team spirit and teach students to produce programs that are free of errors," he said. "You see, in the real world, there have been several disasters that were caused by minor software glitches, and it's so important for students to learn to be rigorous."

Nahas gave a few examples on small software glitches causing disasters, such as the explosion in 1996 of the Ariane 5, an unmanned European space rocket, and the failure of the London Ambulance Service to save people from fire due to a minor software glitch that crippled it.

"That's why the rules in these contests are harsh and students cannot get credit for partially correct answers," explained Nahas. As a result, such contests compel students to train themselves on complex algorithms which allow them to create programs that solve problems faster, he added.

"Such contests motivate students to improve their skills while having fun, too," Nahas said.

Student Oussama Hariz could not agree more. "The experience was both fun and educational," Hariz said. "We had to be competitive while working as a team."

Teammate Mario Ghandour Achkar gave high marks to the entire experience. "I sharpened my algorithm skills while at the same time having fun," he said.

The two other AUB teams, Syntax Error, consisting of students Elio Abi Karam, Contestant, Abbas Bazzi, and Badih Ghazi, and Slashroot, consisting of Farah Charab, Samer Chucri, and Marc Farra, placed second and fifth respectively. Members of the winning team were each given a Blackberry.

Next goal for the young AUB programmers: the November Arab Collegiate Programming Contest which will take place in Lebanon and attract participants from the region. Go AUB!