UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

May 5, 2026
James Badham

UCSB team heads to world finals in Dubai for programming competition

A team of three UC Santa Barbara students is advancing to the World Finals of the International Collegiate Programming Contest (ICPC) after placing 16th out of 52 teams at the North America Championship (NAC), held March 22 in Orlando, Florida. The top 16 teams from the U.S. and Canada earned automatic qualification to the World Finals, set for November in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Additional wildcard spots have also been awarded, with more possible in the coming weeks.

Team UCSB-WA — Ezra Furtado-Tiwari ’28 (CCS computing, mathematics), Om Mahesh ’28 (CCS mathematics; College of Engineering computer science) and David Qiao ’26 (College of Engineering computer science; L&S mathematics) — was the top-ranked University of California team and the only UC team to advance directly to the World Finals from the regionals.

Widely regarded as the premier collegiate programming competition, the ICPC challenges teams to solve complex algorithmic problems under intense time constraints, reflecting real-world software development. “To advance, a team needs extreme problem-solving skills,” said event organizer and computer science professor Daniel Lokshtanov. “Imagine the hardest homework problem you’ve ever gotten — now you need to solve 10 of those in five hours.”

For Qiao, the result marks the culmination of four years competing in the Southern California regionals, where he had previously fallen just short of qualifying. “This

year, by not only making it to NAC but also qualifying for Worlds, I feel like I've completed every goal I've had for my competition career," he said. "I'm very thankful for my team and the group we practice with. It's been a joy to work through problems together."

Mahesh emphasized the scale of the achievement. "This is the highest level an ICPC team can reach," he said. "After making NAC, the past few months of our lives were centered around preparing for it. Qualifying for the World Finals was our main goal, so it was an amazing feeling to see it happen." He also pointed to the broader experience: "I really enjoyed meeting people I had only seen on leaderboards and heard about before."

As the team prepares for November, Furtado-Tiwari is focused on the challenge ahead. "I'm most excited about trying harder problems and learning new techniques and ideas," he said. "Even when I can't solve them, I enjoy exploring how they're set up and seeing what I can figure out."

The team is coached by former teammate Wesley Hung '24 (computer science), who praised their preparation. "I'm really proud of David, Ezra and Om," he said. "They've been practicing diligently for months leading up to both the regional and national competitions, and it's great to see that work pay off."

Timothy Sherwood, dean of the College of Creative Studies and a professor of computer science, highlighted the team's cross-campus collaboration. "After advancing through the regional and national competitions, the ICPC World Finals is the biggest possible stage for these creative problem solvers," he said. "I also love that all three undergraduate colleges — CCS, Engineering and L&S — are represented on one team. That really reflects the collaborative spirit that makes UC Santa Barbara unique."

One of the team's defining moments came late in the contest, when a breakthrough on a difficult interactive problem secured their place at the cutoff for World Finals qualification.

The team will compete in the ICPC World Finals this November, representing UC Santa Barbara on the global stage.

Tags
Awards

Media Contact
Debra Herrick
Associate Editorial Director
(805) 893-2191
debraherrick@ucsb.edu

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.