All-female team ties for first at National Engineering Management contest

Eurekalert!

A team of undergraduate students from the University of Arizona student chapter of the American Society for Engineering Management traveled across country to the annual meeting of industry professionals in Virginia Beach, Va., and captured first place in the national engineering student competition.

The team of three UA women -- engineering management majors Heidi Huettner and Chi Chan, and engineering major Grace Lo -- tied for first with a four-person team from the U.S. Military Academy - West Point.

The UA team made up for being down a team member with enthusiasm and preparation.

"They rigorously prepared in advance for the case study event, because use of materials during the actual competition is extremely limited," said Jennifer Horner, UA Systems and Industrial Engineering project manager and the UA ASEM student chapter advisor. Internet use was not allowed. Teams had to rely on their own engineering skills.

"It really was a true test of what we knew," said senior Heidi Huettner. "I was able to utilize skills learned in the engineering management and systems engineering classes I've taken."

Huettner said that once the teams were given the problem statement (this year it was an analysis of a specific company's management style) they had six hours of uninterrupted work time to solve the problem. "Uninterrupted work time" meant no lunch break -- teams were brought box lunches during the competition.

The UA engineering team then added a creative element: Instead of the usual presentation directed at the audience, the team presented its engineering solution as a mock consultation session, with the three team members interacting to solve the problem. The judges liked the creative approach.

"Many people told us afterward that they enjoyed our different approach," Huettner said. "It was the first time I felt involved in the big picture of engineering management."

Grace Lo also felt it was a good exercise in real-world engineering management.

"My favorite part of the experience was seeing everything come together," Lo said. "Our case study tied in the concepts of the keynote speaker's company, as well."

The ASEM Engineering Management Undergraduate Student Case Competition is held each year during the society's annual conference. Teams identify problems within an engineering management scenario set by organizers, formulate solutions, and choose a resolution to defend to a panel of judges.

"These three students have set the bar quite high for our UA ASEM student teams in the future," Horner said. "The team had an excellent showing in this year's competition. The UA College of Engineering as well as the Engineering Management Program are very proud of their accomplishments."

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