

UP Student Org Beats First World Universities

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Yes, the Filipino can.

A student organization based in UP Diliman's Department of Computer Science (DCS) bested 750 chapters worldwide – many of them from the US – by winning the recently concluded Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) 2004-2005 Student Chapter Excellence Awards.

The Association for Computing Machinery - University of the Philippines Student Chapter (UP ACM), the first and only Filipino ACM chapter, bagged two out of the five categories, Best Community Service and Best Recruitment Program. UP ACM won 500 US dollars for each award.

Founded in 1947, ACM is world's oldest and largest educational and scientific computing society. ACM's student chapters are spread worldwide over 500 colleges and universities.

The Chapter Excellence Awards are given yearly to the chapters with outstanding Activities, Website, Recruitment Program, Community Service, and School Service.

Last year's batch of winners were five North American chapters. This year saw the Philippines barging into the prestigious circle, winning not only the usual single category, but two.

The other three winners were from the University of Kansas (Activities), University of Texas at Austin (Website), and Dalhousie University (School Service).

UP ACM, founded in 2003 with DCS instructor JP Petines as its chairman, joined the Chapter Excellence contest for only the first time. It boasts of over 90 members, with DCS Professor Rommel Feria as the chapter sponsor and Ardee Aram as its present chair.

Community Service That Matters

While UP ACM was able to bag the Best Recruitment Program award through the phenomenal increase in its member population (jumping from roughly a dozen to 90 in just one semester), winning the Best Community Service award was entirely another matter.

It did not lie with quantity; it was the quality of service rendered which ultimately won the distinction.

With last year's Best Community Service award won by a US chapter donating a batch of computers to a middle school, UP ACM decided to go on another track. It believed in the power of imparting knowledge, not material objects.

In its winning essay submitted to ACM, the Filipino chapter stated:

It has oft been said that when you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but when you teach him how to fish, you feed him for life. This axiom is especially pertinent for a Third World country such as the Philippines, where some of the more expensive physical resources, i.e., computers, are luxuries. These tangible assets must give way to an intangible one – knowledge. In our country, knowledge is of the utmost value – it has no price tag, but it is priceless. It does not crash, it does not break down, and it will serve you for life. Practicality dictates that in lieu of supplying people with computers, we must educate them about these machines. And who better to educate than youth, on whom hopes of the nation are pinned?

Thus UP ACM held a computer literacy outreach program for the children of Barangay UP Diliman last April 2005 in one of the DCS' computer laboratories. Sixty children from underprivileged families attended the two-day event.