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UCT Math Circle quartet make South Africa proud at the International Mathematical Olympiad

Western Cape young mathematicians and the University of Cape Town's Mathematics Competition participants Sean Wentzel (Westerford High School), Kira Dusterwald (Springfield Convent Senior School), Ashraf Moolla (Rondebosch Boys High School) and Robert Spencer (Westerford High School) were South Africa's best performers when they participated in the 52nd annual International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO) held in the Netherlands last month.

Sean Wentzel, the top participant in the 2011 UCT Mathematics Competition, walked away with a Silver medal at the IMO, while Ashraf Moolla and Kira Dusterwald were each awarded Bronze medals. Robert Spencer received an Honourable Mention.

All are members of the UCT Mathematical Circle, a group that meets weekly in the UCT Department of Mathematics for problem solving and mathematics enrichment.

A team of six students represented South Africa at the IMO, and achieved an overall position of 41st out of 101 countries.

"This is the best performance by a South African team since 2004," said Emeritus Professor John Webb, organiser of the UCT Maths competition. "The team ranked above more than a dozen European countries, and was the top African team."

Webb continues: "Over the years of South African participation in the IMO, more than half of South Africa's IMO team members have come from the Western Cape, and have won more than half of the country's IMO medals. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that the Western Cape comprises only 10% of the total population of the country, and highlights the effectiveness of the UCT Mathematics Competition and Mathematics Circle in identifying and developing mathematical talent."

The International Mathematical Olympiad is the oldest and biggest of the International Science Olympiads for high schools and is held in a different country each year. The first IMO was held in 1959 in Romania, with 7 countries participating. It has gradually expanded to over 100 countries from 5 continents.

The IMO will be held in South Africa in 2014.

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