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UCT students win international cybersecurity competition

Four University of Cape Town (UCT) Information Systems (IS) honours students won the Cyber 9/12 Strategy Challenge – an international cybersecurity policy competition. The event was hosted by the Atlantic Council and UCT's Cybersecurity Capacity Centre for Southern Africa (C3SA) in Monkey Valley Resort, Noordhoek, Cape Town.

The students are Mufaro Nyangari, Papama Mtambeka, Cameron-Grant Royine, and Mogammad Ilyaas Brinkhuis. The UCT team also developed the best cybersecurity policy brief to address ransomware attacks.

UCT students went through four rounds which started with 40 universities across the continent and ended with only 10 teams that participated in the final round. Teams were given a fictional escalating ransomware attack that occurred in the African Credit Union, and which needed a cybersecurity policy strategy. The teams had to submit policy briefs and decision documents and then had to defend their strategies through a presentation for the panel of judges composed of cybersecurity experts from the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, Cyber4Dev, and the Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre.

"The competition was an experience of a lifetime. For me, just the exposure and the opportunity to learn about cybersecurity from global leaders was immeasurable," said Brinkhuis.

When reflecting on their experience at the competition, Royine said: "Taking part in the Cyber 9/12 Challenge was a very insightful experience. I enjoyed the strategic planning sessions with my team. At 02:00, when we came up with the most out-of-the-box solutions to combating international cybercrime and presented these ideas to a panel of judges later that day. It was also great networking with like-minded students from different universities across the continent."

The competition, according to the UCT team, was more of an awareness initiative into the wealth of opportunities that lie in a cybersecurity career. They also stressed the need for the university to have more cybersecurity programmes at the degree level.

Mtambeka said: "The competition was a great eye-opener for cybersecurity challenges. Questions from the judges provided lessons about some of our blind spots when it comes to approaches to solving data breaches and losses. Also, we learnt that when dealing with ransomware or any cyberattack, time is of the essence."

Adding to this, Professor Wallace Chigona, the director of C3SA, said: "We owe our success to collaborative efforts from the Atlantic Council, Cyber4Dev and ABSA that came through with competition sponsorship. For C3SA, cybersecurity competitions are part of capacity building. As we battle with sophisticated cybercrimes in the continent, the time has come to strengthen our capacity to counter the attacks. We use competitions to immerse students into the real world of cybersecurity and its wicked consequences on society's digital life. Although imaginary, our scenarios were created from attacks that have been carried out in African organisations."

Story by Tendani Chimboza, UCT News.



UCT team members from left: Mufaro Nyangari, Papama Mtambeka, Cameron-Grant Royine, and Mogammad Ilyaas Brinkhuis. Photo Supplied.

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