

UCF hosts science contest for middle, high schoolers

By [Leisy Vidal](#)

Senior Staff Writer

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The Science Olympiad National Tournament is known for 28 years of science and technology tournaments around the country. But this year, it's coming to UCF — along with a fighter jet.

UCF will be hosting more than 7,000 participants from all 50 states during the tournament next weekend.

More than 120 middle and high school teams will be competing in 46 lab-based, research-based or prebuilt events. The events revolve around branches of science including: physics, chemistry, earth space science, biology and engineering.

"I think I speak for everyone here at Olympiad to say we wish there wasn't a deficit in people going into science majors and careers," said Jenny Kopach, vice president of marketing for the National Science Olympiad. "But we really feel Olympiad is helping to close that gap. The best we can do is motivate students to continue on to be scientifically curious their entire life."

Competitions include events that concern flight endurance, precision catapulting, gravity vehicles and even Rube Goldberg devices.

"You have to know your devices and how to make them work. We're known for exciting and engaging events," Kopach said.

Each gold-medal winner of those events will be chosen to receive up to a \$30,000 UCF scholarship. Other prizes also include paid trips to conferences around the country, \$1,000 scholarships from Lockheed Martin and Texas Instrument prize packages.

There will also be an F-16 Air Force fighter jet on campus, as well as flight simulators. The U.S.



Photo Courtesy of David Nevala

Students compete in Mission Possible at the 2011 Science Olympiad National Tournament. UCF is set to host the 2012 Science Olympiad Nation Tournament May 18-19 in the Student Union.

Army ROTC Aviation Adventure Semi and the U.S. Air Force Command Center Alpha are providing the exhibits. All interactive technology exhibits will be open and free to the public.

“Our co-founder was a former lieutenant in the U.S. Army,” Kopach said. “I think it’s cool the Army and Air Force are two of our major sponsors.”

The tournament is mainly funded through membership dues and donations from the military and companies that promote technological advancements.

“That’s one of the main reasons sponsors are interested in Olympiad,” Kopach said. “They’re hoping to smooth the way for more students, especially females and minorities. Our sponsors are very interested in Olympiad students because they’re motivated and curious.”

Students will also hear from speakers well known in the science field. Speakers will include George Diller, NASA public affairs and information specialist; Dr. Jan Garavaglia, chief medical examiner for Orange County; and Bob Cabana, Kennedy Space Center’s director.

“Now, more than ever, we need a highly-skilled, technologically-literate workforce to help us solve some of the world’s most challenging problems,” said Gerard Putz, president and co-founder of the Science Olympiad.

“I’d like to think that by participating in Science Olympiad, students in middle and high school glimpse what a future in the sciences could look like and are more motivated to keep learning, discovering and exploring throughout college and well into their careers.”

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