



# FY17 SFAC Questionnaire

Speech & Debate

10/12/2015

## 1. Executive Summary

### Mission

The Speech & Debate program cultivates student success through competitive excellence, engaged scholarship and student leadership in the community.

The program accomplishes this mission by:

- › University of Houston student participation in intercollegiate tournament competition in:
  - Policy Debate
  - Individual Events
  - Mock Trial
- › Expanding the reach of Speech & Debate as a resource for all students.
- › Building on a tradition of success in Speech & Debate competition.
- › Supporting engaged scholarship and public deliberation on issues that matter to the campus community.
- › Equipping students with the necessary tools to advocate and engage in the world.

### Benefits to University of Houston Students:

Despite Speech & Debate's traditional associations with Communication, Political Science or Philosophy, UH students of all majors can and do participate in Speech & Debate programs and represent the University of Houston in intercollegiate competition (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

Any student, regardless of prior competitive experience, can compete for UH at intercollegiate Speech & Debate tournaments. For instance, in the Fall of 2014, half of new team members were novices. Access to the program's resources for all students is a priority and as such we are constantly seeking ways to increase capacity and expand participation.

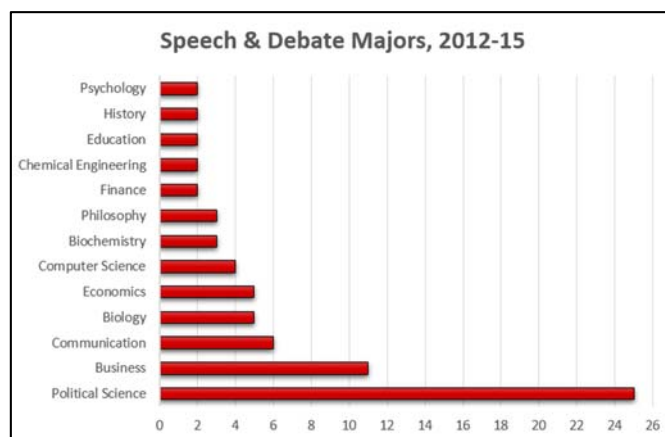


Figure 1

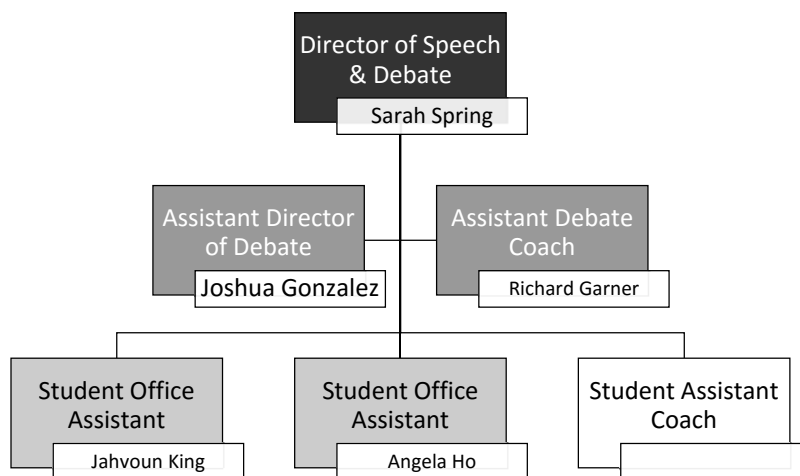
Speech & Debate competition is a remarkably effective way to harness competitive drive in the service of co-curricular student success. The co-curricular nature of Speech & Debate competition creates incentives for academic engagement outside of the classroom that supports student success. Further, competition teaches resilience and drives students to think creatively and innovate in the face of real world challenges.

Beyond the students directly involved in tournament competition, the program hosts public debates and participates in community events that seek to expand the impact of our student's engagement with issues that matter to the campus. These public debates help to facilitate dialogue that enhances the campus and community for all students, regardless of their immediate participation in program activities.

In FY16 & FY17, the program has expanded to include Mock Trial, which has previously existed separately from Speech & Debate. This change gives us the opportunity to serve a larger number of students and helps us accomplish our mission in the sense that it allows us to expand the reach of Speech & Debate as a resource for all students.

<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the following majors were represented by 1 student involved in Speech & Debate between 2012-15: Accounting, Anthropology, Biomedical Engineering, Chemistry, Computer Engineering, Computer Information Systems, Geology, Health, Hotel & Restaurant Management, Kinesiology Sports Administration, Liberal Studies, Math, Mathematical Biology, Petroleum Engineering, Undecided.

## 2. Unit Organizational Chart



## 3. 2014-15 Strategic Initiatives

### Relationship to DSAES & University of Houston Strategic Initiatives & Goals

Speech & Debate Strategic initiatives are developed with the broader University and DSAES Initiatives in mind. We prioritize competitive excellence not only because of its educational benefits but also in the services of the University's Goals of *Institutional Excellence* and *National Competitiveness*.

*Student Success* (UH & DSAES) is another driver of program goals. Speech & Debate's student-driven, inter-disciplinary and co-curricular nature make it an ideal opportunity for students to develop leadership, while also engaging in rigorous academic pursuits. Additionally, the political, philosophical and social topics addressed by Speech & Debate students through competition demand multi-cultural awareness and can help to foster a *Global Learning Community*.

Speech & Debate's partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) develops a *PK-16 Partnership & Community Advancement* while providing students an opportunity "for self-discovery and application of academic disciplines."<sup>2</sup>

### 2014-15 Strategic Initiatives

#### Competitive Excellence

- › **Competitive Success**  
Qualify to the National Debate Tournament (NDT) and the American Forensics Association National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET).
- › **Expand Competitive Opportunities**  
1000 substantial competitive Speech & Debate instances.

#### Academic Excellence

- › **Academic Support**  
Co-curricular programming and support for debate and speech will expand civic engagement and advocacy resources for University of Houston Students.

#### Community Engagement

- › **Community Speech & Debate partnerships**  
Support Speech & Debate as an educational resource for students in the Houston community, particularly those at-risk.
- › **Support the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL)**  
Create community-engaged learning opportunities for UH students with HUDL.

<sup>2</sup> DSAES, "Strategic Plan: 2013-2017. Supporting Student Success" [http://www.uh.edu/dsaes/about/strategic\\_plan.html](http://www.uh.edu/dsaes/about/strategic_plan.html)

## Strategic Initiative Outcomes: 2014-15

### Competitive Excellence

#### *Competitive Success*

In 2014-15, the program had notable success in a few areas. In Individual Events, for instance, UH students successfully qualified for the **American Forensics Association – National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET)** Championship Tournament for the first time in 5 years. In addition, a UH student represented the State of Texas at the **Interstate Oratorical** Association Contest, the oldest public speaking competition in America.

In Debate, UH won the 2014 **Mvubu Debates**, defeating Harvard in the final round. This unique tournament, hosted at George Washington University, partnered with the Embassy of South Africa to consider the legacy and efficacy of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in addressing systemic injustice.

Additionally, UH Speech & Debate students Joshua Freed and Tanweer Rajwani were runners-up in the **Lafayette Debates**, hosted by the French Embassy in Washington, D.C. As a result of their successful finish in the top-four teams (along with the University of Michigan, US Military Academy at Westpoint and the University of Toronto), both students participated in a study tour of France this past summer.



*Eric Lanning and Tanweer Rajwani with Mvubu Trophy, October 2014*

We did not qualify to the 2015 National Debate Tournament (NDT). Success at the NDT is our highest goal and we will work to convert this near miss into future success.

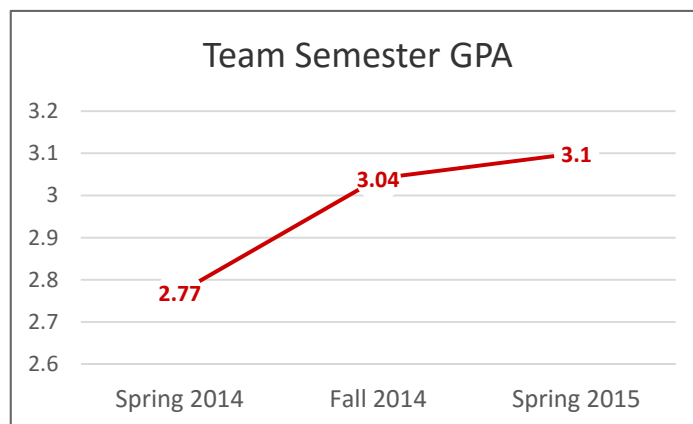
#### *Expand Competitive Opportunities*

Our goal of expanding competitive tournament opportunities for UH students was too ambitious for FY15, particularly given resource constraints (cf. question 5). In FY14, the program did have 1,000 competitive Speech & Debate instances.<sup>3</sup> The difference in FY15 is explained by the reduction in financial support for travel to tournaments (from \$110,000 in FY14 to \$55,000 in FY15). As a result of these constraints, we will scale back our ambition with regard to the overall quantity of competitive instances and but will work to efficiently create opportunities for UH students to have competitive success.

### Academic Excellence

#### *Academic Support*

In 2014-15, the faculty and staff continued their support of undergraduate academic success both in and beyond the classroom. In addition to offering courses in the Leadership Studies Minor (HON 4397, Argumentation & Debate and COMM 1332, Introduction to Public Speaking), the program supported student academic success by facilitating both formal and informal mentoring and advising for team members. These efforts do seem to be improving the average semester GPA for team members (See figure 2).<sup>4</sup> The cumulative GPA for team members (as of Spring 15) is 3.017.



*Figure 2*

<sup>3</sup> Competitive Speech & Debate instances are intercollegiate tournament competition rounds. This concept accounts for both team competition (2-person policy debate teams) and individual events.

<sup>4</sup> This trend is a positive indicator, but is likely not statistically significant.



## Community Engagement

### Support the Houston Urban Debate League

UH Speech & Debate support of the HUDL expanded in FY15. In addition to hosting the HUDL Fall Seminar (bringing in excess of 300 students to campus), UH was host to a week-long residential institute this summer, with approx. 100 HISD students learning and living in Cougar Village.

### Community Events

In FY15, in collaboration with local high school teachers and coaches, the Speech & Debate Program hosted a large high school Speech & Debate tournament, the **Cougar Classic**. The tournament is one of only 6 tournaments in Texas to be a qualifying bid to the *Tournament of Champions* and is also a qualifier for the Texas Forensics Association State tournament. In its first year, the tournament hosted more than 500 students and coaches from 61 schools representing 6 states on campus. The event is a resource for the regional Speech & Debate community by providing high-level competition in addition to providing HUDL students (by waiving entry fees) with the opportunity to test their skills against “elite” competition. Community response to the hospitality of UH students and staff in hosting the tournament has been overwhelmingly positive, facilitating recruitment to the University and to the program.

## 4. Assessment & Evaluation

### Limitations

Assessment for Speech & Debate programs can seem simple: Was it a win or a loss? The problem, of course, is that simple binary outcomes like these do not tell us much about the complexity of any given debate and more importantly do not give any instruction on how to learn from the experience or improve outcomes in the future. One peculiarity about intercollegiate Speech & Debate is that the competition is assessed (judged) by coaches from opposing schools who are also competing in the tournament – for instance, a round between UH and Baylor might be judged by a coach from SMU. This practice means that creating meaningful tools will require going beyond internal institutional assessment in order to evaluate student performance. Both Sarah Spring (Director) and Joshua Gonzalez (Assistant Director) are presenting on a panel at the 2015 National Communication Association convention in November on the need for better assessment as a community of educators, but there are not easy answers at this point.

In the absence of more robust methods, we have been relying on the quantity of “competitive debate instances” or number of students attending meetings or participating in events. But this rudimentary data is limited and does not account for the value of Speech & Debate for academic performance and student success. In short, the educational impact of Speech & Debate is not fully captured in our current data. We are working to improve this shortcoming.

### Competitive Speech & Debate Instances

Competitive Speech & Debate instances are intercollegiate tournament rounds. This concept accounts for both team competition (2-person policy debate teams) and individual events. As noted in question 2 (above), in FY15 we did not meet the projected 1000 instances. This decrease leads us to question the value of this data, because it suggests that the only means of improving is by increasing the amount of rounds, which may not actually meet program goals.

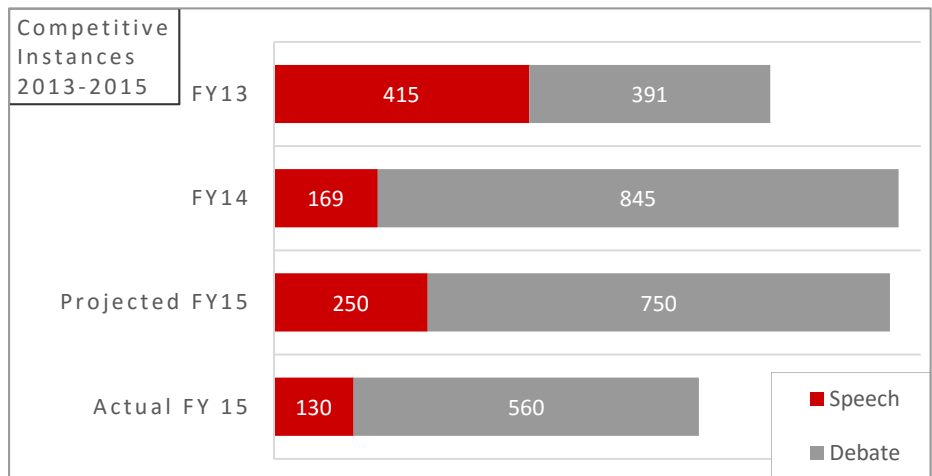


Figure 3

## Participation – Students

Year	Total Students	Active Competitors
FY13	33	22
FY14	60	28
FY15	80	32
FY16	90	

Figure 4 opportunities.

Figure 4 represents the total numbers students who were affiliated in some capacity with the program and the number of active competitors over the program's history.<sup>5</sup> While competition is a substantial element of the program's student activities, many students have different levels of competitive involvement, based on their availability each semester. Students who might not be able to travel participate in the program in many ways, for instance by attending team meetings, contributing to argument development or by volunteering with our many community engagement

## Persons Served – Community Events & Outreach

- **505** high school competitors, judges and coaches at the Cougar Classic tournament.
- **100** HISD students at the HUDL Summer Institute.
- More than **300** HISD students in attendance at the Fall HUDL seminar held on campus.

## 5. Budget & Organizational Changes

As described in our FY15 and FY16 requests, the combined Speech and Debate Program at UH possesses a significantly larger number of members than the did when the two separate programs combined. While the combination of the two programs has helped to eliminate some redundancies and realize savings in some areas, the team growth has created needs which, when combined with shortfalls in financial resources for FY16, have presented some challenges. These pressures will limit our ability to sustain program goals and expand access to more UH students. For example, in the absence of the one-time FY16 request, we will be forced to cut student workers and reduce travel by more than 50%.

At current levels, our roster of 80 students is coached and administratively supported by three part-time positions (as all of the teams coaches are also University faculty). Both FY15 and FY16 requests were made in the hope of allowing the Program to hire a staff-level Speech Coach, but given the committee's reluctance to do so, we have not included this item in our FY17 request. This choices means that the Speech side of the program will remain limited without trained support and assistance.

Another change this year is the incorporation of the Mock Trial program. The Mock Trial program has existed separately from the Speech & Debate program for six years. This fall, the Mock Trial program approached the Speech & Debate program and suggested a partnership. Though we compete in different activities and attract different students, we have similar missions and logistical processes. Participants of the program learn many U.S. Federal Courtroom procedures and develop key mental and oratorical skills. The primary function of the program is to compete in tournaments against other universities using a detailed legal case. The Mock Trial program's roster currently consists of 30 students (4 of whom are non-competing).

<sup>5</sup> These numbers only include Policy Debate and Individual Events, but not Mock Trial.

## 6. 2016-17 Strategic Initiatives

### National Competitiveness

The Speech & Debate program will seek to achieve competitive success in intercollegiate Speech & Debate tournaments. These competitive opportunities will be available for students at all levels of debate or speech experience. By building upon the strong academic foundation available to University of Houston students, the program will aim to consistently succeed at the highest competitive levels, particularly against Top-Tier Research Universities. In Policy Debate, the goal is the National Debate Tournament; in Individual Events, the goal is the American Forensics Association-National Individual Events Tournament; and in Mock Trial, the goal is the Opening Round Championship Series.

#### Action Steps

1. All three programs will succeed at the highest competitive levels, by qualifying to compete at Championship tournaments.
2. Sustain and grow overall program participation levels.
3. Sustain and develop high-quality competitive opportunities for students.

### Academic Excellence & Engaged Scholarship

The co-curricular partnership of academic and student programs will enable students to succeed in the classes and after graduation. Additionally, the program will create active student engagement across the campus by prompting students to engage in intellectual questions, debates and discussion.

#### Action Steps

1. Create co-curricular programs that develop civic engagement, leadership and advocacy resources for UH students.
2. Sustain robust advising and academic support for team members in collaboration with Honors College and University faculty.
3. Collaborate with campus and community partners to host events (presidential debate watch parties) and dialogue surrounding the 2016 Presidential Debates.
4. Engage the broader university committee by supporting engaging intellectual issues through public debates.

### Community Engagement

Build strong community support for Speech & Debate education through a variety of outreach and engaged-learning initiatives. Debate is a particularly important skill for many students, particularly those at-risk. The Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) has worked to build a growing non-profit education resource for students in HISD. Debate outreach from the University of Houston will support debate as a premier pathway to college in partnership with the HUDL.

#### Action Steps

1. Continue to support the HUDL and expand collaboration in supporting their capacity as a non-profit educational institution to support debate in Houston.
2. Support local debate education, including HUDL and beyond, by creating programming and materials for debate instruction. Engage the broader university committee by supporting engaging intellectual issues through public debates.
3. The Debate and Mock Trial programs will host intercollegiate tournaments on the UH campus, which will bring 10-20 other universities from around the country to Houston to witness the top-tier campus and resources.

### Student Success

The Speech & Debate program will provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking & reasoning abilities, adaptability under pressure, and communication skills. In addition, participants in each of the three areas of competition

are required to learn advanced concepts, that will assist participants in further educational pursuits, including law school. The personal and interpersonal skills developed are transferrable to any professional field. This learning is accomplished through experiential problem-solving

### Action Steps

1. Provide participants with more opportunities for experience-based engaged learning through increased competition instances.
2. Increase UH student engagement and retention by providing participants with a sense of involvement and responsibility.

## 7. Funding Sources

Funding from Student Fees, to the greatest extent possible, is directed towards student activities. For instance, student fees are used to fund student competition, campus programming and student workers.

Support for administration, faculty salaries, some travel expenses, and operational expenses that do not directly support student activities are primarily funded through Academic Affairs and the Honors College.

The program is continuously working on advancement to develop future financial support through corporate partnerships and private giving from alumni and friends of Speech & Debate. To this end, in August 2015, we hosted an alumni gathering in honor of Dr. Bill English (UH Debate coach from 1965-1974) that we hope will be a foundation for developing alumni support for the program. By their nature, these efforts take time and will not result in rapid changes to the financial position of the program.



*Dr. Bill English with alumni Sylvester Turner and Larry Doherty, August 2015*

In the past year, the Mock Trial program has focused on developing an active fundraising program. They have established a Director of Fundraising role on their Executive Board and are utilizing two primary and two secondary methods of raising funds. These include near weekly food sales, t-shirt sales, and donation requests. Specifically, the program has set goals of holding 13 edible product sales, 1-2 t-shirt sale drives, launching a Kickstarter page, and contacting 75 prospective donors.

However, despite these significant efforts, the Mock Trial program's fundraising is still only able to cover a small percentage of their expenses (projections for this year are \$1,500). Furthermore, the program is not eligible for AFB funding due to a provision in the AFB bylaws that prohibits funding for travel to competitions.

## 8. Overlapping Services

To our knowledge, there are no similar student activities in the University. The unification of University of Houston Forensic Society and Speech & Debate and now Mock Trial has created a home for Speech & Debate competition at UH in our program.