



FY21 SFAC Questionnaire

Speech & Debate

10/10/2019

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:

- › Students compete in intercollegiate tournaments:
 - Policy Debate
 - Speech/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

Speech and debate are cornerstones of American democracy, activities enshrined in the United States Constitution itself. The cultivation of free speech not only enriches campus life, it is a public trust vital to the city of Houston, the state of Texas, and beyond. This trust has educated Houston mayors, federal judges, and successful professionals in law, business, finance, education, and numerous other professions. Education in reason, rhetoric, and research is the crucial element that transforms individuals from passive consumers of election-year debates into active and engaged citizens who shape the terms of the national—and global—conversation.

Speech & Debate competition is remarkably effective at harnessing 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.

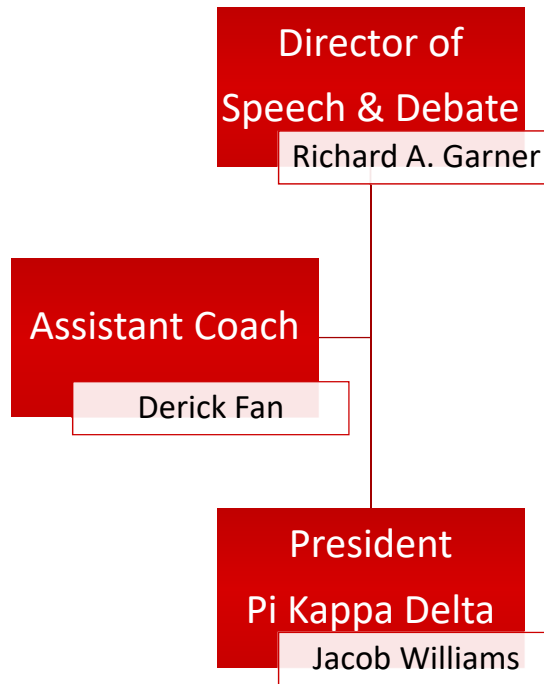
The Speech & Debate program is open to any student, regardless of prior experience. Every year, a large number of our students are either new to debate or to the university. UH students of all majors can and do participate in the program and represent UH in intercollegiate competition. Access to the program's resources for all students is a priority and as such we are constantly seeking ways to increase capacity and expand participation.

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 and the world. These public debates help to facilitate dialogue that enhances the campus and community for all students, regardless of their immediate participation in program activities.

UH MAGAZINE:
**How did your experiences at
 UH prepare you for civic
 leadership?**

SYLVESTER TURNER:
**I was on the debate team at
 UH ... I loved being in the
 Debate Program.**

2. Unit Organizational Chart



3. 2018-19 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 *Local and National Recognition*.

Student Success (UH & DSAES) is another driver of program goals. Speech & Debate's student-driven, interdisciplinary and co-curricular nature make it an ideal opportunity for students to **develop** leadership qualities, critical thinking, and communication skills, 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 *diverse experiences*.

Speech & Debate's work with the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) develops a *strategic partnership with K-12 schools* (DSAES) while providing students a service-learning based opportunity.

2018-19 Strategic Initiatives

Competitive Excellence

- › **Competitive Success**
Qualify to the National Debate Tournament (NDT)
- › **Expand Competitive Opportunities**
800 competitive Speech & Debate instances.
- › **Recruitment**
Engage Texas high school community through summer workshops, coaching, judging, and networking.

Campus Engagement

- › **Leadership & Service Learning**
Co-curricular programming and support for debate and speech will expand civic engagement and advocacy resources for University of Houston students.
- › **Public Debate**
Partner with the Honors College Grand Challenges Forum to bring debate to hundreds of UH students.

Community Building

- › **Support the Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL)**
Create community-engaged learning opportunities for UH students with HUDL through mentoring and service learning.

Strategic Initiative Successes

Competition

Competitive Success

The program remained nationally competitive during the 2018-2019 season, with a large rise in the national rankings. The program was ranked 41st nationally by the National Debate Tournament (NDT) in 2019, rising ten ranks from the previous year and noted as one of the “Movers” from the previous year based on that leap in competitive success. The team garnered eighteen individual speakers awards and eight team awards, including three top speakers and one first place finish.

Expand Competitive Opportunities

Our goal of expanding competitive tournament opportunities for UH students was extremely successful last year (see question 5 on some structural factors driving this growth). We surpassed our goal of 800 competitive instances and grew our competitive impact hours 165% from the 2017-2018 year (see Question 4 for explanations of our metrics). While still below the 2000 competitive instances of FY14¹, this represents substantial progress at our current budget level (from \$110,000 in FY14 to \$40,000 in FY16-FY19). We also more than doubled the number of students on the competition, and grew the overall student involvement as well.

Recruitment

Our recruitment activities continue to be organized around active involvement in our local communities, where our coaches and students serve as ambassadors for the University of Houston. Several competitors worked and judged at tournaments throughout the Houston area, as well as nationally. The Director of Debate also taught at the University of Texas National Institute in Forensics to engage with and recruit students for the class of 2024 and beyond. We have also rebooted our web presence on the Honors College website and been more active in recruitment events on campus.

Campus Engagement

Leadership & Service Learning

This year continued our recently established, sustainable partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League. The fall and spring saw the first students continue their mentorship activities with HUDL students in Houston Independent School District and the Harris County Department of Education. These programs primarily benefit students from underserved communities. Service learning provides students with a co-curricular opportunity to apply their classroom and campus education to real-world situations.

Public Debate

The team’s public debate series was resumed this past year with a debate on the constitutions and executive power in America. The event brought together more than a hundred students to reflect on some extremely pressing social conversations. A long-standing tradition of public debates with Rice University is in the process of being revived as well, with hopes that it can be resumed in the next few years if not the 2019-2020 academic year.



¹ Competitive Speech & Debate Instances are hours in an intercollegiate tournament competition round. This concept accounts for both team competition (2-person policy debate teams) and individual events. See question 4.

Community Building

The Cougar Classic

The team also hosted its annual Cougar Classic speech and debate tournament, bringing together high schools from across the state of Texas and as far away as California to compete and learn on UH's beautiful campus. The tournament hosted over 50 schools, 300 competitors, and 100 judges, coaches, and observers, spanning seven buildings and more than seventy rooms across campus. 500 competition rounds were held on topics ranging from immigration reform, the federal debt, and military aid to authoritarian regimes.

Houston Urban Debate League

In addition to the service-learning mentorship program outlined above, a new initiative brought hundreds of students from HUDL to campus several times over the last year, including seminars and several tournaments.

4. Assessment & Evaluation

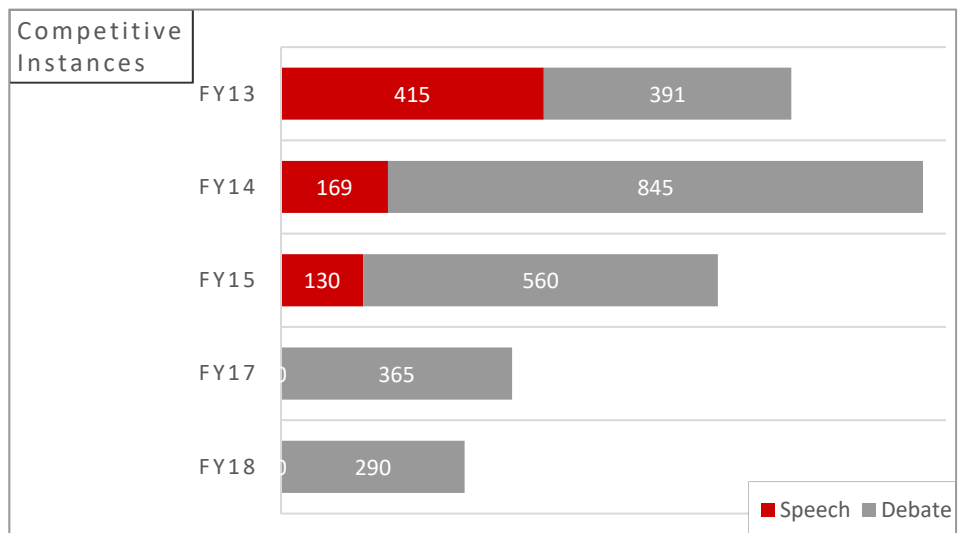
Summary

Speech & Debate is one of the most prominent high-impact activities on campus. It offers training in reason, research, and rhetoric that is student driven, and it does so in a manner that increases the visibility of the university nationally and serves hundreds of students in Houston locally. One of the misconceptions about the program is that it has a high cost per student. First, the program remains actively engaged in recruiting students and strives to offer events that engage larger audiences on campus and in the surrounding community (public debates, HUDL outreach, etc.). Second, most metrics are poor judges of both the quantity and quality of student participation in the program. Unlike many activities, team members are not just one-off participants, but engage in competitive and outreach events over and over again. Moreover, at each event they attend, it is not just an hour's passive engagement, but multiple full days of active learning and teaching. In competition alone, last year's students presented at eleven three-day tournaments for a total of 279 competition rounds participated in and dozens more observed and/or judged.

Like any nationally competitive team at any university, travel is and will remain expensive. However, a raw cost-per-student to travel metric is in no way representative of the true impact on students (see metrics on next page). Measuring cost by student-per-tournament (i.e., 90) dramatically underestimates the total

engagement time that each of those tournaments represent (i.e., 3972 Competitive Impact Hours). Even the more accurate "competitive instances" metric underestimates the number of hours a competitor spends on the activity per debate by almost a factor of four, even using conservative estimates (522 vs. 3972). In other words, contrary to appearances, Speech & Debate has an extremely high tooth-to-tail ratio when it comes to cost; each debate round might entail significant costs, but the total engagement of each debater over the course of the academic year goes far beyond the hours spent in rounds.

Lastly, championing exceptional opportunities and services to support all UH students (DSAES) requires a mix of different activities. While not every student activity should focus on providing a high-intensity competitive experience to students,



a nationally competitive public research university should provide options for high-impact educational programs.² Indeed, the highly-qualified Tier 1 student is choosing between the University of Houston and more established programs at the University of Texas, Baylor, Oklahoma, or Kansas. With appropriate support, we have proven that we *can* compete with those institutions, and win. More importantly, university support actively engages us in competition with and garners recognition from our Tier 1 research university peers in the region.

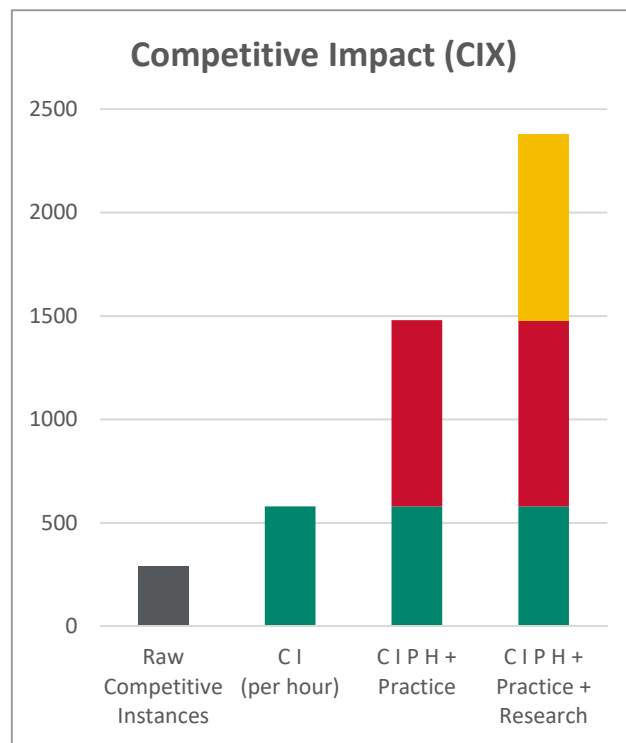
The **COMPETITIVE IMPACT** of Speech & Debate

Because speech and debate events can vary in number of rounds, length of rounds, and number of participants in each round, our program uses the **Competitive Instance** as our basic unit of accounting. Simply put, a competitive instance (CI) is the number of participants in an event per hour. So, if someone competes in a speech event that last 30 minutes, that would be half of a CI; for a policy debate round, with two competitors debating for two hours, that would be four competitive instances, one for each student for each hour.

While competitive instances allow us to more accurately measure competition across a number of different events, the beauty of debate is that its value is derived from participation itself. While competitive success remains a foundational goal of the program and the central motivator of student engagement, debate has an impact on students beyond the mere number of rounds and regardless of wins and losses. Our **Competitive Impact** metric goes beyond competitive instances to more closely reflect the time and energy that goes into each “instance.” Competitive Impact (CIX) begins to include the extensive participation that students put months before they ever get to an intercollegiate tournament. In particular, Competitive Impact includes an estimate of two additional components: research and practice.

The following chart (“Competitive Impact (CIX)”) reflects this measure for the FY19 data, namely, competitive instances for 35 students who participated in two types of policy debate last year. That total includes 279 competition rounds, which translates to **3972 Competitive Impact Hours** for the 2018-2019 speech and debate season. For the policy debate calculation, practice time and research time for policy debate are each estimated at [*Debaters (23) per week (2) per academic year(30)*]. This represents an extremely *conservative* estimate.³ Many debaters perform that much research (60 hours) during our pre-season preparation, and have performed that much practice (60 hours) before going to our second tournament. Indeed, one scholar has estimated that “the level of rigor and intensity of debate research and preparation over the course of a year” is comparable “to the work involved in completion of masters’ thesis.”⁴

This also does not include public debates, mentorship/coaching activities, judging at local high school tournaments, team meetings, social gatherings, or travel time. In short, with almost four thousand hours, the competitive impact of speech and debate on these students was enormous.



² On the importance of high-impact activities on higher education, see the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ position paper by George D. Kuh, “High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter,” AAC&U, 2008. <<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>>

³ And some of our total debates are calculated differently, for instances the Competitive Impact calculation for the Houston Scholars debates outlined in the next section were calculated at [*Debaters (12) times 4 hours of research and 4 hours of practice*], again, a conservative estimate—these students competed in one tournament in a slightly different format, and did that much research through in-class sessions with Dr. Garner.

⁴ Gordon R. Mitchell, “Pedagogical Possibilities for Argumentative Agency in Academic Debate,” *Argumentation & Advocacy* 35.2 (1998): 41-61. Mitchell is Associate Professor; Assistant Dean, University Honors College; and Associate Professor of Clinical and Translational Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

Campus Engagement & Community Building

A significant limitation of “cost per student” assessment of Speech & Debate is that it leaves out altogether the impact of the program on the surrounding community. Both the university and DSAES holds connections across campus and into the community to be one of its core values. The program serves that community on and off campus through two major initiatives, the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative and the Cougar Classic Speech & Debate tournament.

Cougar Classic

Our tournament is a cornerstone of the high school speech and debate community in greater Houston. It is the premier tournament in the city, attracts hundreds of students to our campus, and draws not only students from all over the state but from surrounding states as well. This provides both intrinsic benefits (the education and training of the competitors) and extrinsic ones (a major PR event for the university with a group of engaged, high-quality prospective students).

Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative

The HDMC is our partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League, the Speech & Debate program’s Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative (HDMC) serves hundreds of HISD students through both individual mentorship, tournament judging, and summer workshops. This work is a direct service to our local communities that leverages our institutional expertise to create new educational opportunities for middle and high school students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This program was constructed with HUDL partners several years ago, and has begun for this fall as well.

Student Participation

These numbers represent the number of students affiliated in some capacity with the program. Some of these students represent the competitive “traveling team,” while other are engaged in learning the basics of debate or involved in our campus engagement or community building programs. At the moment, the number one barrier to increasing participation is funding. FY20 saw the predicted rise in direct student participation discussed in last year’s questionnaire. Additionally, approximately one hundred students were present at our debate on the constitution and executive power at last year’s Grand Challenges Forum.

Year	Students
FY13	33
FY14	60
FY15	80
FY16	80
FY17	50
FY18	29
FY 19	43

Community Participation

The substantial community participation the program engendered last year has been mentioned earlier, and is listed below.

- **500** high school competitors, judges and coaches at the Cougar Classic tournament.
- **300+** Harris County & HISD students at our HUDL seminars and debate tournaments.
- **100+** HISD students at the HUDL Summer Institute.

5. Budget & Organizational Changes

Leadership Changes

The program finally filled the Assistant Coach position in FY19 after the departure of Josh Gonzalez three years ago. After working remotely from New York City last year, Rob Glass has accepted a position as the program’s Assistant Director and joined the campus community in Houston for FY20.

Budget Challenges

FY16-FY19 represented a “new normal” funding baseline for the UH Speech & Debate program, which resulted from the unification of the Policy Debate Program and the Forensics Program under former Director Sarah Spring in FY13. Reduced funding from FY13-15 severely limited program options and created needs which, when combined with continued constraints on financial resources for FY19, had presented numerous challenges. These pressures limited our ability to sustain program goals and expand access to more UH students, including a full travel schedule.

FY19 offers an excellent example of what the team can do when it has extra resources, some of which were granted in a FY20 one-time allocation. Due to having an assistant coach for the program and large growth in student interest, actual outlays for FY19 were closer to \$60,000, funded primarily through funds generated by the team from the Cougar Classic over the last six years. The team's results demonstrate not only that extra funding translates into greater student access, it also demonstrates the economies of scale the team can create: with 50% more budget we were able to almost double the competitive impact of the team. With the one-time allocation for FY20 the team has begun to incorporate several events that had no funding, including Speech and Legal Debate. But, even if these programs take several years to fully establish, the additional funding will be able to facilitate access to debate competition.

At current levels, our roster of 43 students are coached and administratively supported by one part-time position (the director is also University faculty with teaching and service commitments in the Honors College) and one full-time position. In our supplementary request, we have indicated the need to make the one-time funding allocation permanent.

[6. Not Applicable]

7. 2019-2020 Strategic Initiatives

Competitive Success

The Speech & Debate program will seek to achieve competitive success at 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 other nationally competitive public research universities. The team's goals next year are primarily to maintain competition levels from the previous year and to cultivate and recruit new talent.

Action Steps

1. Sustain and grow overall program participation levels.
2. Sustain and develop high-quality competitive opportunities for students.
3. Attempt to establish a self-sustaining program model for Speech competition and Legal Debate within current resources constraints.

Campus Engagement

In addition to our ongoing co-curricular programs that link academic and student programs, the program will reemphasize its commitment to campus engagement across the university as well as within its institutional home, The Honors College. Already this semester, the team has scheduled a public debate for the spring semester on institutional space cooperation and begun to plan a renewal of our public debate rivalry with Rice University. Moreover, as the presidential election cycle begins, the program will emphasize community activities engaged with political debates.

Action Steps

1. Engage the broader university committee by supporting engaging intellectual issues through public debates
2. Continue our new service-learning component to the program, the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative, an initiative which also received support from the Honors College Service Learning Taskforce.
3. Continue to create co-curricular programs that develop civic engagement, leadership and advocacy resources for UH students. Spring 2020 will include a new course in the Leadership Studies Minor on Debating Space Policy.
4. Sustain robust advising and academic support for team members in collaboration with Honors College and University faculty.

Community Building

Speech & Debate will continue to cultivate community engagement through building robust partnerships with community partners. Our primary programs will continue to be the Cougar Classic and the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative. The former provides a core service to Houston civil society by providing a flagship competitive opportunity in the city of Houston, while the latter reaffirms our commitment to service in and collaboration with the communities surrounding UH. We will also continue to host HUDL tournaments on the UH campus, as outlined above.

Action Steps

1. Reaffirm our commitment to the HUDL by reorganizing previous initiatives under the umbrella of the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative, including mentoring activities, teaching workshops, and summer camps.
2. Continue to support the HUDL and expand collaboration in supporting their capacity as a non-profit educational institution to support debate in Houston.
3. Support local debate education by continuing to host the Cougar Classic, and reaffirming the commitment to providing the premier competitive tournament in the Houston area.
4. Expand educational opportunities through a HUDL tournament on campus.

8. Budget Constraints

Considering reductions to the Speech & Debate budget in recent years (over 75%), further reductions would be devastating to the program. Major programmatic sacrifices and curtailed competition opportunities are already a severe issue. While the program has gradually adjusted to this new baseline, further cuts would require wholesale revisions of existing budget planning and a rethinking of the program from the ground up. Considering the above, the most likely outcome would simply be to truncate the competition season (the equivalent of canceling multiple football games). Unfortunately, a 5% budgetary cut at this stage would likely result in a much higher cut in program activities, 10%-20% at least, as debate travel relies on economies of scale to create opportunities. Moreover, this would make it extremely difficult to compete with our peer institutions, both at tournaments and in recruiting new members. Slightly increasing our budget is actually the most efficient way to increase the reach and impact of the program and thus to make the most efficient use of SFAC funds. Without renewal of our one-time funding allocation and with a 5% cut, we would expect participation levels closer to FY18.

9. 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, and operational expenses that do not directly support student activities are primarily funded through Academic Affairs and the Honors College.

Current Initiatives

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 alumnus 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. The Cougar Classic continues to raise several thousand dollars for the team. We believe that this is sustainable and are looking at opportunities to grow events at the tournament to bring in more revenue. Still, the tournament remains a recently established endeavor and it remains too soon to rely on its welcome growth.



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

New Initiatives

The team continues to investigate the creation of a summer camp for middle and high school students. While there does look to be some market for a local summer camp, competition from universities in Austin, Dallas, and Denton still make this tentative. With a new assistant director, planning and community outreach will begin for this program for FY20.

A Note on Diversity & Fundraising

While Speech & Debate believes that there is a prominent and necessary place for external fund-raising, we have serious reservations about relying on a funding model that depends on fundraising and membership dues. While workable as stopgap measures, the substantial burdens on time and energy such a funding model requires raises questions about **student access** (UH) to the program for students of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The **diversity and inclusion** goals of both UH and DSAES are actively hindered by overreliance on such a model because they create a direct tradeoff which many students do not have the privilege to make. In short, if the cost of participation is shifted to students, only the wealthiest will be able to participate in the program. We feel it is our duty to make debate, a cornerstone of our democracy, available to all; to do so requires institutional support.

10. Overlapping Services

Over time, the Speech & Debate program has been integrating the various forms of speech and debate activities on campus. With our FY20 one-time allocation, Speech competitions and Legal Debate formats are being actively supported. The Honors College also hosts several Model Debate programs (Model G20, Arab League, and UN) under the broader umbrella of Speech & Debate, though they do not utilize any of the SFAC funds. This represents the sum of known activities on campus. Our long-term vision is full institutional support for all of these programs.