



# FY19 SFAC Questionnaire

Speech & Debate

10/12/2017

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# 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, 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.

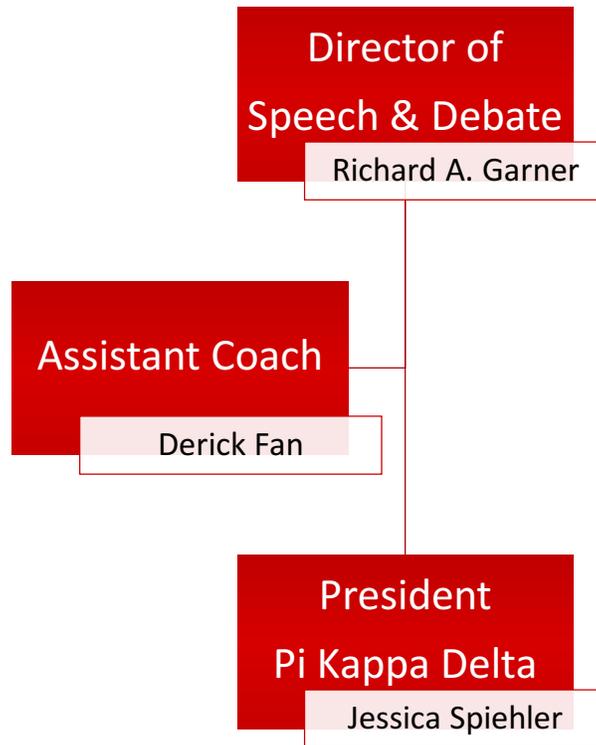
The Speech & Debate program is open to any student, regardless of prior experience. Every year, a large number of our students are either new to debate or to the university. UH students of all majors can and do participate in the program and represent UH in intercollegiate competition. Access to the 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. 2016-17 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 (UH)* while providing students a service-learning based opportunity for Strategic Initiative Outcomes.

### 2016-17 Strategic Initiatives

#### Competitive Excellence

- › **Competitive Success**  
Qualify to the National Debate Tournament (NDT)
- › **Expand Competitive Opportunities**  
400 substantial 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

The program remained nationally competitive during the 2016-2017 season, despite seeing several seniors end their competitive career in 2014-2015 at the end of the team's first recruiting cycle. The program was ranked 57th nationally by the NDT once again in 2017 (also again: 52nd in Varsity), comparable to its 53rd ranking from 2015. UH's young team achieved several results, including Novice quarterfinalist at the Georgia State season opener, 2nd place in Junior Varsity at the UCO Joe C. Jackson Tournament, and the 4th seeded team in Junior Varsity at the American Debate Association National Championship in the spring.

### *Expand Competitive Opportunities*

Our goal of expanding competitive tournament opportunities for UH students experienced similar outcomes to FY 15 given continuing resource constraints (see question 5). In FY14, the program did have 1,000 competitive Speech & Debate instances.<sup>1</sup> The difference in FY16/FY17 is explained by the reduction in financial support for travel to tournaments (from \$110,000 in FY14 to \$55,000 in FY15 to \$40,000 in FY16/FY17).

### *Recruitment*

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 2022 and beyond.

### Campus Engagement

#### *Leadership & Service Learning*

The Director laid the groundwork for a long term, sustainable partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League by service on the Honors College's Service Learning Committee and creating a blueprint with HUDL administration for a service learning-based mentorship program. This fall, the first students will begin their mentorships with HUDL students in Houston Independent School District students from underserved communities, including with schools displaced by Hurricane Harvey. Service learning provides students with a co-curricular opportunity to apply their classroom education to real world situations.

#### *Public Debate*

Last year, UH Speech & Debate held one of its largest public debates ever, with over hundred students and faculty attending a debate in which four of the student presented and defended the positions on climate change of the four major candidates, Clinton, Johnson, Stein, and Trump, immediately leading up the election. In addition to partnering again this year with the Honors College to host the debate, the program plans to do a public debate with Rice University, reviving a long standing tradition.

### Community Building

#### *Election Year Outreach*

Supplementing our normal community building slate, the team also engaged in several election year outreach activities. Several of the students appeared on KHOU to discuss the recent presidential debates, and Professor Garner went on the radio show Houston Matters to discuss the presidential election and the debates with host Craig Cohen and other guests.

#### *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, learn, and experience UH's beautiful campus. The tournament hosted over 50 schools, 300 competitors, and 100 judges, coaches, and observers, spanning seven buildings

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<sup>1</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. This metric is described in the response to question four.

and more than seventy rooms across campus. 500 competition rounds were held on topics ranging from United States foreign policy toward China, to free speech on college campuses, to increasing U.S. military spending.

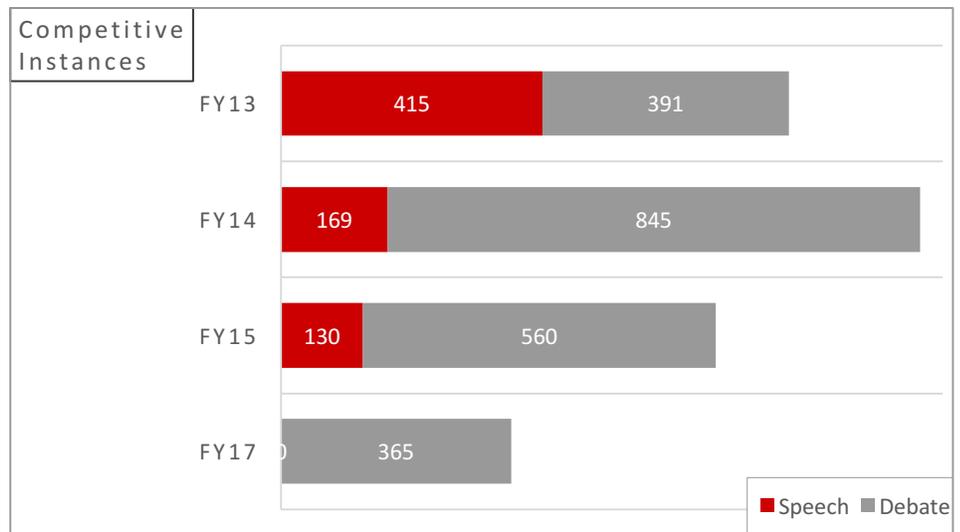
*Houston Urban Debate League*

In addition to the service learning mentorship program outlined above, a new initiative for FY18 will be adding a second tournament on campus for the HUDL, bringing hundreds of Houstonians and prospective Cougars to campus for a weekend of debate and an excellent if-you-can-see-it-you-can-be-it moment for many students who will be first-generation college students.

## 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. The program’s main assessment challenge is the perception that it has an extremely high cost per student. While we have an active plan to increase the number of students involved in the organization, we firmly believe that this perception is in error. 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. Measuring cost by student-per-tournament (36) dramatically underestimates the total engagement time that each of those tournaments represents (2956 Competitive Impact Hours). Even the more accurate “competitive instances” metric underestimates the number of hours a competitor spends on the activity per debate by more than a factor of four, even using conservative estimates (556 vs. 2956). 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 is substantial. Lastly, while not every student activity can be or should be high-investment, there must of necessity be a set of core, high-impact educational programs on campus to create a Tier 1 experience.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the highly-qualified Tier 1 student who has graduated with a high GPA, excellent test scores, and strong extracurriculars in high school speech or debate 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.



### Limitations

The primary metric for Speech & Debate used in FY16 was competitive instances. While competitive success remains a foundational goal of the program and the central motivator of student engagement, the beauty of debate is that its value is derived from participation itself. Thus, competitive instances better reflect a discrete quantity that demonstrates the immediate impact of competition on individuals (regardless of wins and losses).

<sup>2</sup> 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>>

## 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. Due to budgetary constraints, we revised down the goal to 400 competitive instances while switching to Competitive Impact, which will be the sole measurement for FY19. Competitive Impact for this year will become our new baseline for our current budget.

### Competitive Impact (CIX) vs. Competitive Instances (CI)

Competitive Instances, as noted in previous SFAC questionnaires, this remains an imperfect measure. Toward this end, the program is developing a new assessment measure we are provisionally calling **competitive impact**. The principal deficiency of the competitive instances rubric is that it represents a small fraction of the amount of time and energy that goes into each “instance.” This not only underestimates the engagement level of Speech & Debate members, it artificially inflates the cost per student of the program by several orders of magnitude.

The following chart (“Competitive Impact (CIX)”) reflects this new measure taken from FY17 data, namely, policy debate competitive instances for 20 students in FY 17, 368 total. Competitive Impact includes an estimate of total research and practice per student, and represents a total of **3136 impact hours**. With practice time and research time each estimated at *[Debaters (20) per week (2) per academic year(30)]*, this represents an *extremely conservative* estimate. Many debaters perform that much research (60 hours) during our pre-season preparation sessions, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

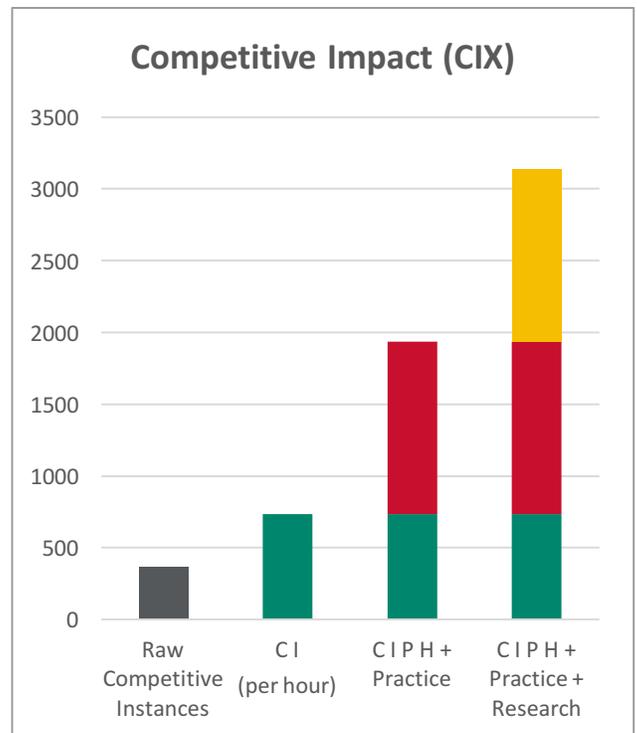
This also does not include public engagement and debate, mentorship/coaching activities, judging at local high school tournaments, social gatherings, or travel time. The total CIX also does not include estimates for Speech or Mock Trial (see below and question five for details on this gap).

### Competitive Impact (CIX) Metric Development

After evaluating the metric for last year, the program determined that it will have to rely on the previous year’s conservative estimates of research and practice hours for the near future. To create more refined criteria requires staffing time that is currently unavailable due to staff turnover and budgetary constraints. When resources permit, the most likely scenario for a pilot study will involve student time-tracking via an off the shelf phone application to create a more accurate assessment of time spent outside of competitive contest rounds on argument research and public speaking practice. The consultation and collaboration with UH faculty mentioned in our prior questionnaire began last year as part of the Honors College Service Learning Committee, which is working on developing broader metrics for high-impact and co-curricular activities for the college as a whole.

### Campus Engagement & Community Building

A significant limitation of current SFAC assessment of Speech & Debate, primarily via the focus on “cost per student,” is that it leaves out altogether the impact of the program on the surrounding community. DSAES holds collaboration to be one of its core values, and Speech & Debate embodies “the spirit of collaboration through mutually beneficial



<sup>3</sup> 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.

partnerships on campus and in surrounding environments.” The program serves that community 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, Tier 1-quality prospective students).

### *Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative*

The new name for 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 last year, and has begun for this fall. HUDL does its own internal assessments, which should become available to measure the impact of the mentorship program after it has been firmly established.

### **Student Participation**

These numbers represent the amount 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. As noted above, we are developing metrics to more accurately quantify engagement for students who have not yet advanced to the traveling team or who primarily participate in our campus and community outreach. At the moment, the number one barrier to increasing participation is funding.

Year	Students
FY13	33
FY14	60
FY15	80
FY16	80
FY17	50

### **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.
- **100** HISD students at the HUDL Summer Institute.

## **5. Budget & Organizational Changes**

### *Leadership Changes*

The program has underwent a significant administrative change last year. Professor Richard A. Garner served his first year as Director of Speech & Debate after former director Sarah Spring stepped down. For FY18, former Assistant Director Joshua Gonzalez has also moved on from the university. Unfortunately, Mr. Gonzalez departure occurred too late in the summer to fill his position permanently this year. The Honors College is actively seeking to hire an Assistant Director of Debate/Visiting Assistant Professor in the Honors College, in particular a candidate with a PhD who can facilitate the co-curricular program in the department. As such, the hire is taking place on the full-year academic hiring schedule, necessitating interim coaching on an ad hoc basis. Toward this end, the program has hired UH and program alum Derick Fan for the coming year, and plans to add more part time coaching for the team as needed.

### *Budget Challenges*

As described in our FY15-FY18 requests, the combined Speech and Debate Program at UH possesses a significantly larger number of members than they did when the two separate programs were combined. While the consolidation of the two programs has helped to eliminate some redundancies and realize savings in some areas, much of this has been made moot by recent budget allocations. The team’s growth has created needs which, when combined with continued

constraints on financial resources for FY18, have presented numerous 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 FY18 request, we were forced to curtail travel yet again. As can be seen from the charts above, without the reinstatement of former budgetary levels from past years, the speech component of the program was unable to field a traveling team. Plans are being put in place to support that component through student-led, student-funded model, but the outcome of that initiative remains to be seen.

At current levels, our roster of 50 students is coached and administratively supported by two part-time positions (all of the team's coaches are also University faculty with teaching and service commitments in the Honors College). In our supplementary request, we have indicated the need for additional travel money and a student-worker position.

### *Mock Trial*

While the Mock Trial team is still involved with Speech & Debate, we have decided to forego their inclusion in our request since SFAC has precluded Speech & Debate funds from being used for that program.

## **[6. Not Applicable]**

## **7. 2018-2019 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 Top-Tier 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 with 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 National Health Insurance and begun to plan a renewal of our public debate rivalry with Rice University.

#### **Action Steps**

1. Engage the broader university committee by supporting engaging intellectual issues through public debates
2. Establish 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. Fall 2017 included a new course in the Leadership Studies Minor on Leadership & Mass Psychology.
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 be adding a HUDL tournament hosed on the UH campus to our endeavors, 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. UH-Wide 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 is gradually adjusting 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 one or more 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.

## 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 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.

### New Initiatives

The team will focus on two new funding sources in the near to medium term. First, investigating potential revenue streams from the Cougar Classic is a priority of the new administration. Last year, the tournament raised approximately \$5000 for the team. While we hope this new trend is sustainable, and even contains room for growth, the results of a single year make it too soon to rely on this welcome growth in our revenue stream.



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

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Second, the team is investigating creating 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. This project will become a central focus once the new Assistant Director has been hired.

### *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 relies on fund raising and membership dues. While good as stopgap measures, the substantial burdens on time and energy such a funding model requires raises questions about accessibility of the program to students of diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The diversity goals of both the 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. We feel it is our duty to make debate available to all; to do so requires institutional support.

## **10. Overlapping Services**

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