



FY24 SFAC Questionnaire

Speech & Debate

10/30/2023

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:

- › Competing in intercollegiate tournaments in the following events:
 - Policy Debate
 - Legal Debate
 - Speech
 - Model Debate (Model UN, Model Arab League, Model G20, and Model World Health Organization.)
- › 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.

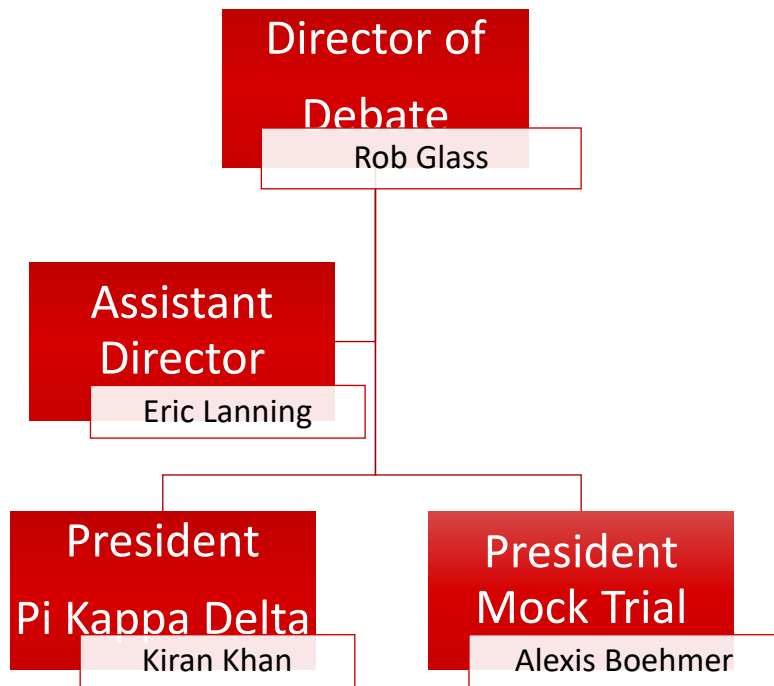
The Speech & Debate program is open to any student, regardless of prior experience. Every year, a large number of our students are either new to debate or to the university. UH students of all majors can and do participate in the program and represent UH in intercollegiate competition. Access to the 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

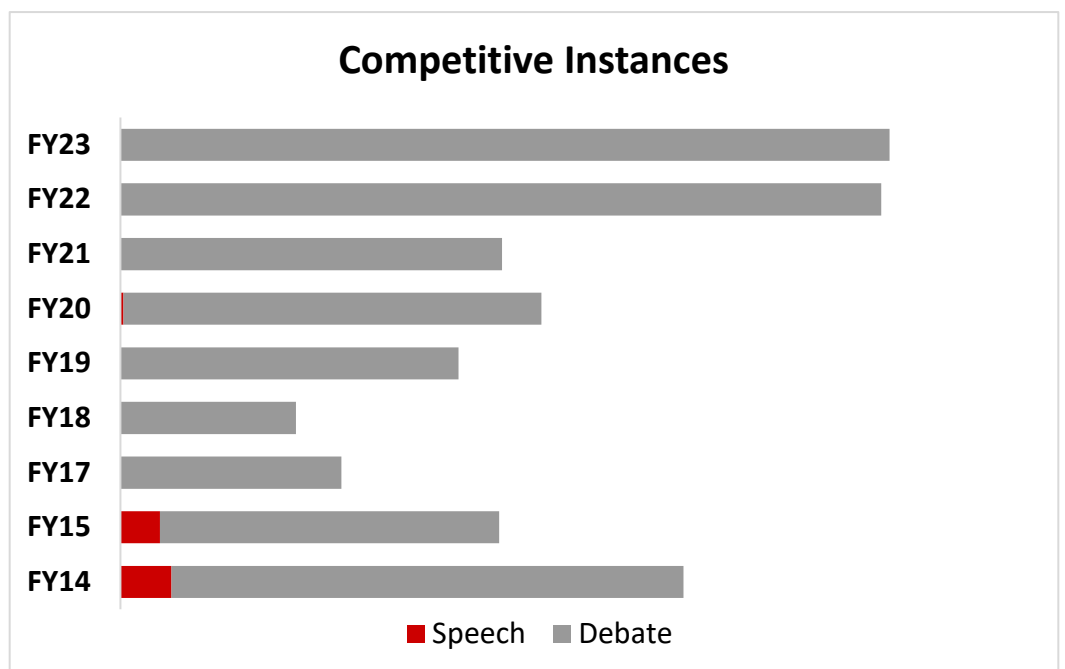


3. 2022-2023 Strategic Initiative Success

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 national visibility of the university nationally while also serving hundreds of local Houston students. Moreover, competitors are not just one-off participants. At each event they attend, it is not just an hour or afternoon's passive engagement, but multiple full days of active learning and teaching. In competitions alone, last year's students competed at fourteen three-day tournaments for a total of 635 competition rounds, with many dozens more observed and/or judged. It is notoriously difficult to develop accurate metrics for high impact, high engagement activities that do not severely underestimate the quantity and quality of student participation. Toward that end, we have developed our **Competitive Impact** metric to show the robust return from our activity. Our competitive impact this year was able to not just sustain our 50% increase from FY21 into FY22 but able to offer a small but noticeable increase on that.

Like any nationally competitive team at any university, travel is

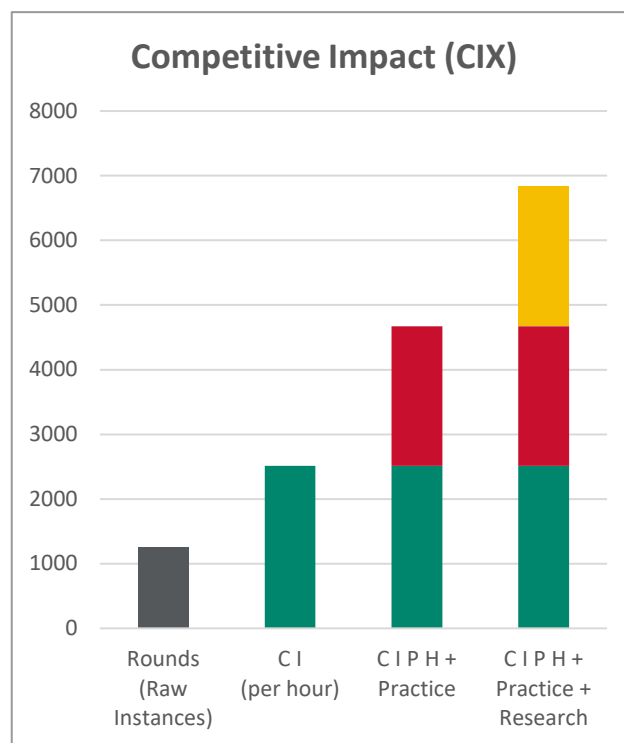


and will remain relatively expensive. However, a raw cost-per-student to travel metric is in no way representative of the true impact on students. Measuring cost by student-per-tournament (i.e., 96) dramatically underestimates the total engagement time that each of those tournaments represent, namely, 4260 Competitive Impact Hours. Even the more accurate “competitive instances” metric the team previously used—which measures competition rounds per hour per debater—underestimates the number of hours a competitor spends on the activity per debate by almost a factor of six, even using conservative estimates (630 vs. 4260). In other words, contrary to appearances, Speech & Debate has an extremely high tooth-to-tail ratio when it comes to cost. The total engagement of each debater over the course of the academic year goes far beyond the hours spent in rounds.

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.¹ 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 not just in the region, but nationally.

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 in 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 FY23 data, namely, competitive instances for 52 students who participated in two types of policy debate last year. That total includes 635 competition rounds, which translates to **6,908 Competitive Impact Hours** for the 2022-2023 speech and debate season. For the policy debate calculation, practice time and research time for policy debate are *each* estimated at *[Debaters (36) 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, and have performed that much practice (60 hours) before going to our second tournament. Indeed, one scholar

¹ 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>>

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 a masters' thesis.”²

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 more than four thousand hours, the competitive impact of speech and debate on UH students was enormous.

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. Professor Garner also designed a new course series to take advantage of student interest in each year’s debate topic. This co-curricular course offered student an opportunity to take their classroom research and apply it in a competitive setting.

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 been adapted to changing conditions each year (such as COVID-19).

Year	Students
FY13	33
FY14	60
FY15	80
FY16	80
FY17	50
FY18	29
FY 19	43
FY20	53
FY21	41
FY22	58
FY23	82

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.

Expanded Services - Legal Debate: Mock Trial

Last year the Speech & Debate program brought the student-run Mock Trial team its umbrella, this program has seen its numbers dramatically increase over the last year along with its travel schedule. A program with single digit participation in terms of students has now grown to two dozen students, and is currently having to turn students away from being able to participate due to size and competition restrictions. Additionally, it has seen active success as tournaments, with students winning multiple awards over the last year.

² 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.

Competitive Success

The Speech & Debate program continued its recent tradition of competitive success by continuing to excel. Along with the aforementioned success of the Mock Trial team the Policy Debate program won five tournaments over the course of the year and won the Novice and Junior Varsity national championships for the second year in a row. Importantly, this accomplishment emphasizes not just a focus on competitive success but also a focus on accessibility and growth as both are aimed at students who have limited prior experience at debate; novices being in their first year of debate ever and Junior-Varsity debate limited to those in their second year of debate who started at the college level or those who have limited debate at the High School level.

Local and National Recognition

In April 2023 the Policy Debate Team hosted the Cross Examination Debate Association's national championship tournament. To use a sports analogy, this is roughly equivalent to the NCAA Basketball tournament, aimed at capping the year to crown the final champion for the activity before preparation begins for the next year. This tournament brought just under 300 attendees representing 36 schools from across the country to the University of Houston campus to compete for the crown.

Along with bringing students to campus it also saw attention from outside sources with Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee coming in as the keynote speaker, awarding every debater in attendance a Congressional Commendation and then Assistant Director of Debate Rob Glass a notice of Congressional Recognition for the work UH Speech & Debate has done to support national debate.



The Hon. Sheila Jackson Lee awarding UH debater Nine Abad with a congressional commendation and Rob Glass with a Congressional Recognition, and a partial shot of the awards ceremony of the CEDA 2023 National Championship.

Along with this the program was also recognized for its commitment to supporting the City of Houston by Mayor Sylvester Turner (a UH debate alum) who recognized April 10th, 2023 as University of Houston debate day.

Supporting Community Debate

Speech & Debate continued its long history of community building by helping to sponsor local debate events at low or no-cost, this included the High School Cougar Classic tournament, and the HUDL fall season opener which both gave hundreds of high schoolers the chance to compete against peers on the UH campus. Along with this UH supported debate through a diverse number of teaching programs including the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative and the Pharmacy Debate series where Speech & Debate staff members and students taught various outside groups the basics of debate and how to use them in a variety of fields.

Further to this the Speech & Debate program, in conjunction with the Honors College, supported the Houston Urban Debate League in its annual summer camp. This camp, funded by the Houston Urban Debate League as a non-profit

institution, gives underserved High School students from around the Houston area the chance to attend a no-cost debate camp with high quality instruction on the UH campus, showcasing the campus and its academic qualities for the students that are most likely to attend the University for their undergraduate education. This year the camp had 104 students attending, receiving instruction from both outside coaches and UH Debate students at no cost to either the students or the University. While in previous years this camp received logistical support from the Speech & Debate program this year it was run entirely by the program with current Director of Debate Rob Glass serving as the Camp Director. The success of this year has led to a possibility of expansion of this program in coming years, which is discussed in section 9 of this questionnaire.



Students, Staff Members, and members of the Board of Directors of the Houston Urban Debate League at the summer camp.

4. 2024 – 2025 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 *local and national recognition* and *national competitiveness* (UH).

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*.

2024-2025 Strategic Initiatives

Competitive Excellence

- › **Competitive Success**
National Competitiveness
- › **Retain team size**
Maintain high size of student engagement
- › **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)**
Support community engaged learning for underserved High Schools
- › **Bring TFA State Championship to Campus**
Bring the 2025

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 that drives *community advancement* (UH).

Strategic Initiative Goals

Competition

Competitive Success

Seeks to maintain and expand its program in the next fiscal year. Last year the UH policy debate program was **the largest** program of its kind in the country, helping over three dozen debaters to compete at tournaments across the country. At the end of the year UH was ranked the **7th most competitive program overall** in the country, winning five tournaments including the ADA Junior Varsity national championships (reserved for debaters with limited experience in debate before the competitive season), where it 'closed out' finals with two teams meeting in the final championship, and the end of year Novice national championship. The Cougars were also ranked the most competitive program in Novice and Junior Varsity by the American Debate Association and the Cross Examination Debate Association. This has become a repeated pattern of success which the debate program seeks to expand going forward through a continued and robust focus on competitive success.

Competitive Opportunities

We more than surpassed our goal of maintaining competitive tournament opportunities for UH students in the last year last year. The Speech & Debate program seeks to maintain and expand these opportunities going forward, but inflation and the nature of program expansion (see the next section) makes this impossible without expanded fiscal support.

Expanded formats

When the Speech & Debate program was founded in FY14 as a combination of the UH Forensics Program and the UH Policy Debate team the goal was to create a singular home for all competitive speech & debate events at the University of Houston for undergraduates to compete in. Overtime this goal has been achieved by consolidating programs successively into the Speech & Debate program, giving Mock Trial, Moot Court, Speech, and Policy Debate each a single consolidated support structure for travel with all costs covered by the university and a single, efficient, effective logistical process coupled with a coaching infrastructure supporting competitive success. In August 2023 this process was finalized with the consolidation of the Model Debate program into the Speech & Debate team. This includes four programs offering students the chance at national and international competition and collaboration: Model UN, Model G20, Model Arab League, and Model World Health Organization. Speech & Debate is committed to offering these students the highest possible level of support possible.

Campus Engagement

Leadership & Service Learning

This year continued our partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League. The fall and spring saw students continue their mentorship activities with HUDL students in Houston Independent School District and the Harris County Department of Education. Speech & Debate seeks to continue this initiative and support especially in the context of the broader University goal of Service Learning..



Community Building – TFA State

The Speech & Debate Program has been working with the office of the Provost and the Honors College to finalize a bid to host the 2025 Texas Forensics Association State Championship tournament. This is the capstone tournament for Texas High School Debate and serves as the ultimate goal for the most successful of High School competitors in the field of Speech & Debate from across the state. The TFA presidents have expressed their strong desire to bring the tournament to the UH Campus with benefits for all parties. The University of Houston will get to be the first college experience for some of the most successful students from across the State, and will have a unique opportunity to recruit them to attend the University. On top of this, the students of the UH program will have the ability to help run one of the largest Speech & Debate tournaments in the country, getting hands on experience with event planning and organization of an event at the largest level.

5. Evaluating success

Please see section 3 for a rundown of our own internal metrics for tracking participation.

Given the non-profit nature of the program, we do not currently have any revenue sources.

6. Fund 3 support

Not applicable.

7. Possible budget reductions

Considering reductions to the Speech & Debate budget since FY13 (over 75% at a \$60,000 funding level), the recent expansion to include Model Debate, and the level of competitive success being sought by UH students 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 either to truncate the competition season (the equivalent of canceling multiple football games) or to axe an entire division of the program. Unfortunately, a 5% budgetary cut below or base 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 through large hotel bookings and group ticketed airline travel to create opportunities. Moreover, this would make it extremely difficult to compete with our peer institutions, both at tournaments and in recruiting new members. Increasing our budget not just the most efficient way to increase the reach and impact of the program and thus to make the most efficient use of SFAC funds, but with current recruitment and participation numbers is the *only* way to maintain anywhere near the same level of access and support that we were able to offer in the previous fiscal year. Without such an increase, we would expect participation levels closer to FY18.

8. Organizational Changes

Staffing Changes

Since the last Budget Request for FY2024 the former Director of Debate Dr. Richard Garner has transitioned to a more academic role inside the Honors College. Assistant Director Rob Glass has been promoted to fill his very large shoes. Initially this meant that all active coaching and administrative duties would be handled by Rob Glass with Dr. Garner fulfilling an advisory role. However, restaffing in the honors college allowed for a partial freeing up of budget space to enable the creation of a temporary employee to fulfill the role of Assistant Director of Debate. This has gone to Eric Lanning, a former UH Debater (Class of 2014) who had previously won the National Debate Tournament in 2010 with Michigan State. While this has supplemented the program it is not back to the prior position of support because Eric Lanning currently lives in Austin, TX and is only able to be in Houston two days a week. The Honors College is currently in the final stages of trying to create a permanently staffed position for the Assistant Director of Debate, but this has not yet been formalized.

Increased responsibilities

In August the Speech & Debate program finalized the long-term vision of its inception in FY2012 and brought the Model Debate program under its aegis. This means that all Speech & Debate activities inside the University have one home with a singular vision of formalized university support for all competitors with top-of-the-field coaching and a staff member handling all aspects of logistics.

However, this comes with its own difficulties. Between the four programs that have been brought on-board (Model UN, Model Arab League, Model G20, and Model World Health Organization) there are roughly 90 active students and an annual travelling schedule of a minimum of ten conferences for basic effectiveness, with a highly competitive and ambitious program aiming for a travel schedule of closer to twenty conferences a year. While this is a tremendous opportunity and represents a sea change for the participants from its prior organizational structure along with a commitment to drastically expand the benefits to the UH campus and community this also puts a tremendous strain on the Speech & Debate program which is seeing its already very limited resources stretched even thinner to support an almost doubling of its size and activities.

9. Alternative Funding Sources

Funding from Student Fees to support debate is the only active support for the program's student activities. This goes to, among other things, 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. Due to the open-door nature of the program in terms of student availability and its core mission as part of the Texas' legislature's guidelines on support for student activities there are not other readily available funding sources for the program inside of the University.

Camp Initiative

The Speech & Debate Team has actively supported the Houston Urban Debate League's (HUDL) non-profit summer camp over the past decade, helping them to get resources like dorming and classrooms for a program that teaches underserved students advanced debate in a collegiate setting. After this 2023 Summer Camp the Speech & Debate program has been actively engaging with the HUDL board about expanding the camp beyond its current tuition-free model to include tuition paying students from Texas and the Nation at large. This model is used by other programs (Baylor, UT, the University of Kansas) to support their programs with the possibility of generating significant revenue.

This project is currently in the final stages of exploration before a commitment is made to create the program. While the possible benefits are quite high the risks of the project are also extensive as it would require a significant increase in both work (to recruit students) and up-front monetary costs (in terms of dorm bookings, classroom reservations, and staff hiring) in order to see return. Committing to this process in the long-run may allow the Speech & Debate program to significantly defray costs from Student Activity fees but would require increased commitment in the short term.

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.

11. Revenue

Not Applicable at present.

11. Donors

The Speech & Debate program does not have an active donor base supporting it. Program leadership has begun to explore seeking donations from alumni and friends of the program, and the Honors College has provided a way for donors to easily donate using the Honors College's fundraising website. In FY24 there was a brief social media campaign seeking to give would-be donors team gear (shirts and sweatshirts) in return for donations, but this only brought in three donors all for less than \$90 donations.

The program has begun to actively explore pathways with the University Advancement office and the Honors College to solicit alumni donations as part of a broader strategy of alumni outreach and community building. However, this is hampered by a lack of resources available to be invested in this and shortages in available time from a coaching staff which is focused on student training and success.

The program has no sponsorship services, nor is there an easy way to integrate sponsorship into the program's core functions.

12. Overlapping Services

Over time, the Speech & Debate program has integrated the various forms of speech and debate activities on campus for purposes of cost savings and competitive efficiency. In FY24 the final uncovered format of debate, Model Debate (comprising of Model UN, Model G20, Model Arab League, and Model World Health Organization teams) was brought under the broader umbrella of Speech & Debate. This represents the sum of known activities on campus. Our long-term vision is full institutional support for all of these programs with expansion into other areas of speech & debate activity if feasible.

13. Marketing

Speech & Debate spends none of its funds on marketing. The programs have been able to effectively leverage free forms of connection (posters on campus, word of mouth, social media, etc.) to engage in very successful recruitment campaigns leading to each constituent program having to deal with the problem of too many instead of too few students. Beyond recruitment and retention the program does not need to engage in marketing for any other events.

14. General Operating Fund

Not applicable.