



FY20 SFAC Questionnaire

Speech & Debate

10/11/2018

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.

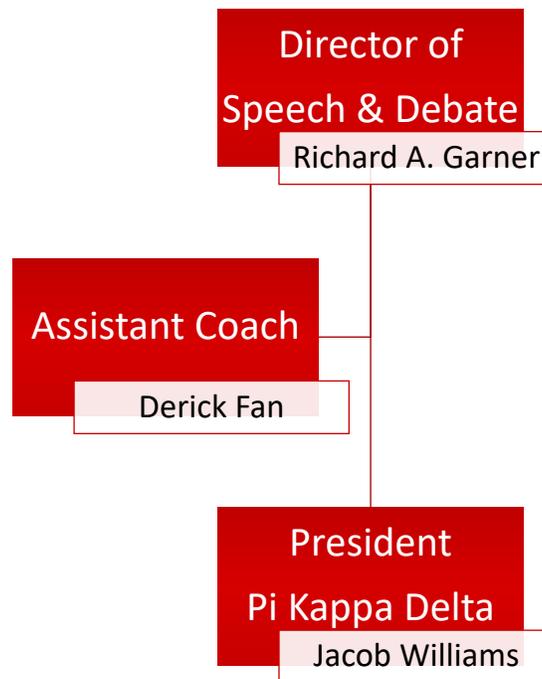
The Speech & Debate program is open to any student, regardless of prior experience. Every year, a large number of our students are either new to debate or to the university. UH students of all majors can and do participate in the program and represent UH in intercollegiate competition. Access to the 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. 2017-18 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, 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 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.

2017-18 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 2017-2018 season, despite a team almost entirely composed of first- or second-year UH students. The program was ranked 51st nationally by the NDT in 2018, a slot above the previous year. UH's young team achieved several results, including an octofinalist award at the University of Nevada Las Vegas tournament.

Expand Competitive Opportunities

Our goal of expanding competitive tournament opportunities for UH students experienced similar outcomes to 16-17, given continuing resource constraints (see question 5). In FY14, the program did have 1,000 competitive Speech & Debate instances.¹ The difference in future years is primarily explained by the reduction in financial support for travel to tournaments (from \$110,000 in FY14 to \$40,000 in FY16-FY18). Due to high graduation from the year before there was a noticeable decrease in overall participation, though that is almost certainly temporary (see question 4).

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 2023 and beyond.

Campus Engagement

Leadership & Service Learning

The past year saw the establishment, long in the works, of a sustainable partnership with the Houston Urban Debate League. The fall and, primarily, spring saw the first students begin their mentorships 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

Because of logistical difficulties, the team's public debates series went on hiatus last year. However, for next year an event has already been scheduled for a debate on the constitutions and executive power in America. We anticipate that we will once again host an event with more than a hundred students, and that a long-standing tradition of public debates with Rice University will be revived.

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 federal education reform, to abolishing plea bargains, to Catalanian independence.



¹ 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.

Houston Urban Debate League

In addition to the service-learning mentorship program outlined above, a new initiative brought hundreds of students from the HUDL expansion to Harris County schools and prospective Cougars to campus for a day of debate seminars taught by our debaters and coaches.

4. Assessment & Evaluation

Summary

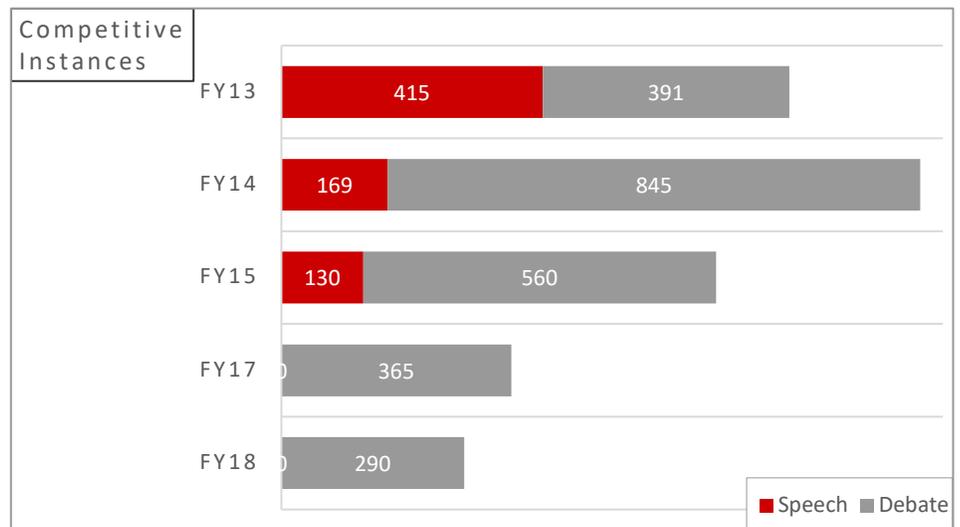
Speech & Debate is one of the most prominent high-impact activities on campus. It offers training in reason, research, and rhetoric that is student driven, and it does so in a manner that increases the visibility of the university nationally and serves hundreds of students in Houston locally. One of 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 competed at eight three-day tournaments for a total of 145 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., 36) dramatically underestimates the total

engagement time that each of those tournaments represent (i.e., 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 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, it actively engages us in competition with and garners recognition from our Tier 1 research university peers in the region.



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>>

Limitations

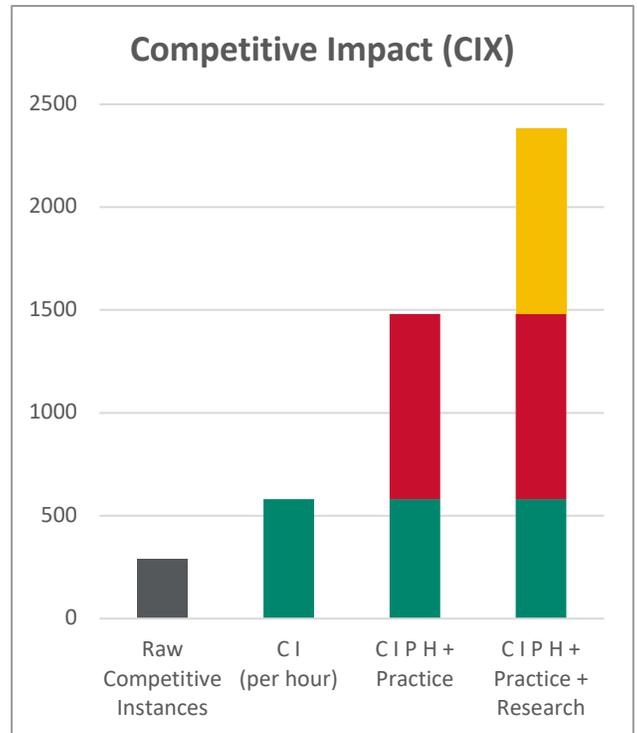
The primary metric for Speech & Debate used in FY16 was competitive instances. While competitive success remains a foundational goal of the program and the central motivator of student engagement, the beauty of debate is that its value is derived from participation itself. Thus, competitive instances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

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 was the sole measurement starting last year in FY19. Competitive Impact for this year will become the new baseline for our current budget.

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

Our programs current assessment measure is called **competitive impact**. The principal deficiency of the former competitive instances rubric was that it represented 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 FY18 data, namely, policy debate competitive instances for 15 students in FY 18, 290 total. Competitive Impact includes an estimate of total research and practice per student, and represents a total of **2380 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.”³

This also does not include public debates, mentorship/coaching activities, judging at local high school tournaments, team meetings, social gatherings, or travel time. The total **CIX** also does not include estimates for other events besides policy debate (see below for details on this gap).

Competitive Impact (CIX) Metric Development

After evaluating the metric for last year, the program determined once again that it will have to rely on the previous year’s estimates of research and practice hours for the near future. To create more refined criteria requires staffing time and budget that is currently unavailable. 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 two years ago as part of the Honors College Service Learning Committee, which began a development process for broader metrics for high-impact and co-curricular activities for the college and university as a whole.

³ 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. DSAES holds collaboration to be one of its core values, and Speech & Debate embodies “the spirit of collaboration through mutually beneficial 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, 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 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.

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

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. At the moment, the number one barrier to increasing participation is funding. FY 18 also represents an artificially low participation rate for a number of reasons; the start of FY 19 has already seen number more comparable to FY16-17.

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+** Harris County students at the HUDL Spring Seminar.
- **100+** HISD students at the HUDL Summer Institute.

5. Budget & Organizational Changes

Leadership Changes

The program remains down an Assistant Coach after the departure of Josh Gonzalez two years ago. In the interim, the position has been filled by alumnum Derick Fan and other community members on an ad hoc basis. The Honors College is actively seeking to hire an Assistant Coach position in the Honors College, in particular a candidate who can facilitate the co-curricular program in the department.

Budget Challenges

As described in our FY15-FY19 requests, the combined Speech and Debate Program at UH contained a significantly larger number of members than they did when the two separate programs were combined. While the consolidation of the two programs 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 FY19, have presented numerous challenges. These pressures will limit our ability to sustain program goals and expand access to more UH students, including a full travel schedule. 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 a student-led, student-funded model, but the outcome of that initiative still remains to be seen.

At current levels, our roster of 30 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 coaching position.

[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 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 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 the constitution and executive power 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. 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 2018 will include a new course in the Leadership Studies Minor on Radical Leadership in the 19th Century.
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 hosted 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 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.

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.

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. This project will become a central focus once the new Assistant Coach has been hired.



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

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. We feel it is our duty to make debate 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. Although SFAC declined our proposal a few years ago to include them in our funding stream, Mock Trial still remains involved in the program as does a potential new competition, Moot Court. The Honors College also hosts several Model Debate programs (Model G20, Arab League, and UN) under the broader umbrella of Speech & Debate. While this represents the sum of known activities on campus, SFAC funding remains solely dedicated to speech competitions and policy debate. The Legal Debate activities (Mock Trial, Moot Court) and Model Debate activities are either student led or funded separately by the Honors College. We have once again foregone including a separate funding proposal in light of SFAC's decision to exclude funds from being used for those programs in previous budget cycles. Our long-term vision is full institutional support for all of these programs.