



# FY22 SFAC Questionnaire

## Speech & Debate

10/15/2020

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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
  - Legal Debate
  - Model Debate
  - Speech.
- › 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.

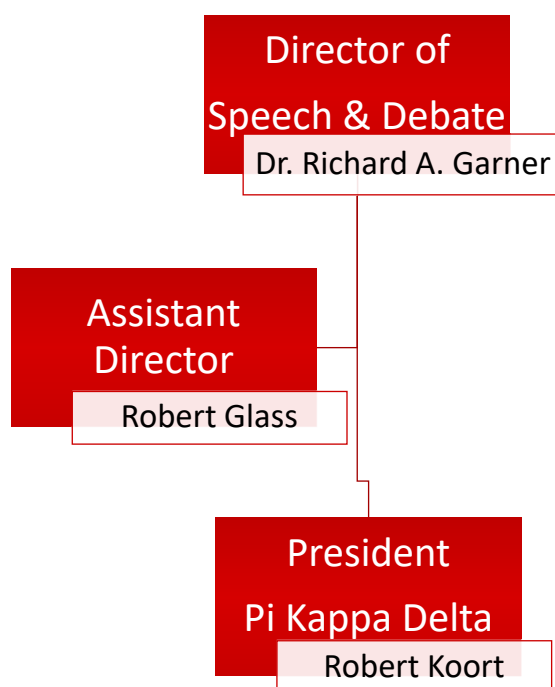
The Speech & Debate program is open to any student, regardless of prior experience. Every year, a large number of our students are either new to debate or to the university. UH students of all majors can and do participate in the program and represent UH in intercollegiate competition. Access to the 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. 2019-2020 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*.

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).

### 2019-2020 Strategic Initiatives

#### Competitive Excellence

- › **Competitive Success**  
National Competitiveness
- › **Expand Competitive Opportunities**  
800 Competitive 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*

Over the course of the 2019-2020 season, UH put more than two dozen new and experienced students into policy debate competitions across the country, from Harvard to Wake Forest to right here in Houston. This was more than any other college in Texas, and forty percent more than the next largest team fielded by UT. The Cougars took home four first-place finishes overall, three second-place finishes, and won over twenty-five top-ten awards. UH was ranked 25th overall by both the National Debate Tournament and the Cross Examination Debate Association, and 16th overall by the American Debate Association. In the ADA, we also ranked 4th overall in Junior Varsity, including a 5th place individual finish at the national tournament; in CEDA, we also ranked 3rd overall in our region, the South Central. At the National Junior Division Debate Tournament the took third in the junior division and second in novice (the other two capstone national tournaments, the NDT and CEDA Nationals, were both cancelled due to COVID).

#### *Expand Competitive Opportunities*

Our goal of expanding competitive tournament opportunities for UH students was successful once again last year (see question 5 on the structural factors driving this growth). We surpassed our baseline goal of 800 Competitive Instances and almost doubled our Competitive Impact from the 2017-2018 year (see Question 4 for explanations of our metrics). While still below the 2000 competitive instances of FY14<sup>1</sup>, this represents substantial progress at our current budget level (from \$110,000 in FY14 to \$40,000 in FY16-FY19).

#### *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. We continue to upgrade 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 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. 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*

While the team's annual public debate during the Grand Challenges Forum, a year-long series hosted by the Honors College, was cancelled because of the coronavirus, it was still a year full of debate team activity on campus. UH Speech & Debate also continued its leadership and service-learning activities through Professor Garner's spring semester class, Debating Space City, in addition to working with HUDL.



<sup>1</sup> 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 once again hosted its annual Cougar Classic speech and debate tournament, bringing together high schools from across the state of Texas and surrounding states 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 international arms sales, to nuclear disarmament, to Venezuelan sanctions.

### *Houston Urban Debate League*

In addition to the service-learning mentorship program outlined above, UH once again hosted hundreds of students—and prospective Cougars—from the Houston Urban Debate League on campus for a day of debates.

## 4. Assessment & Evaluation

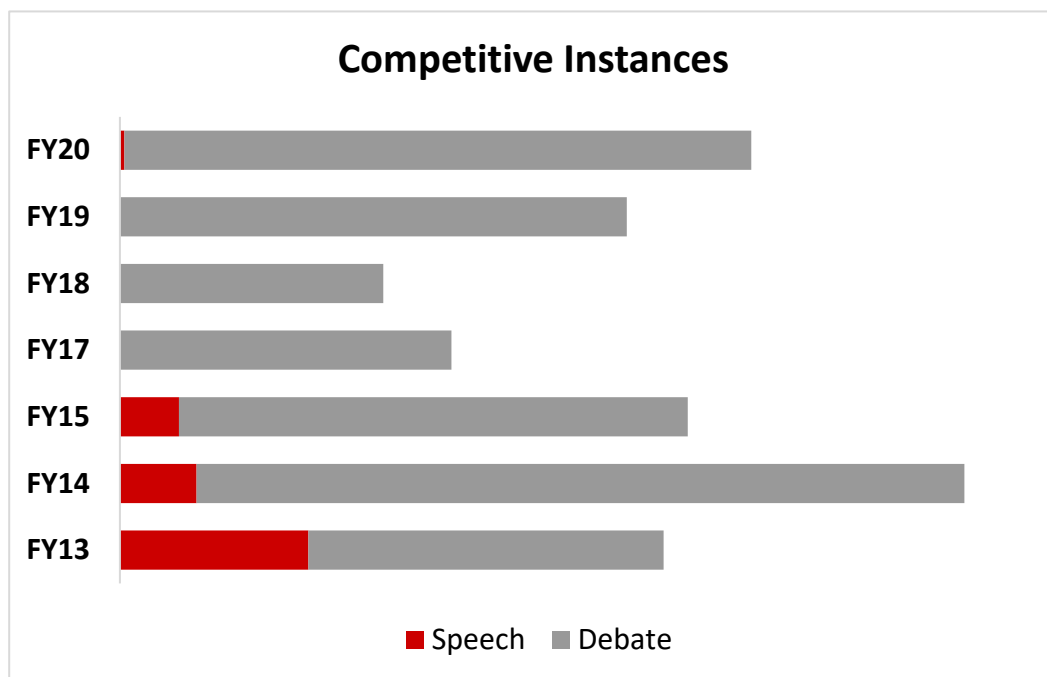
### Summary

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 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 eleven three-day tournaments for a total of 345 competition rounds, with 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. This year, our Competitive Impact grew once again to 4620 hours.

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., 116) dramatically underestimates the total engagement time that each of those tournaments represent, namely, 4620 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 (690 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

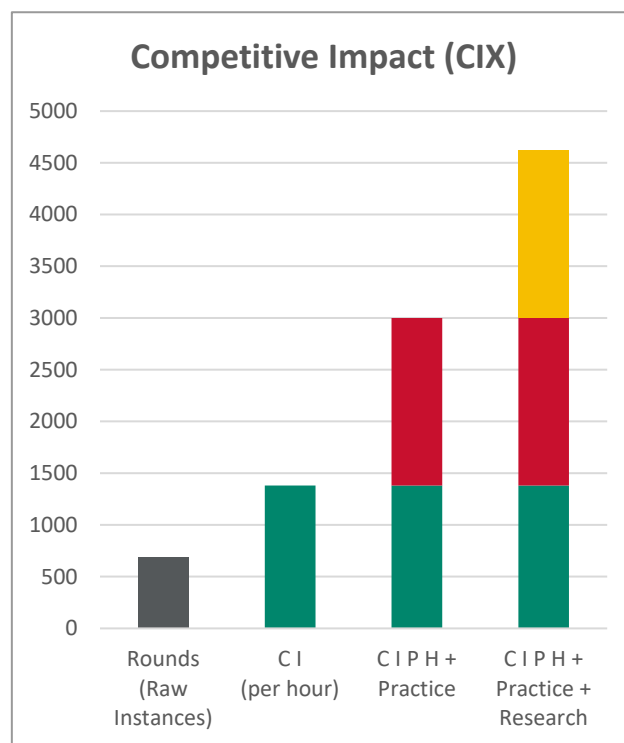
While competitive instances allow us to more accurately measure competition across a number of different events, the beauty of debate is that its value is derived from participation itself. While competitive success remains a foundational goal of the program and the central motivator of student engagement, 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 FY20 data, namely, competitive instances for 27 students who participated in two types of policy debate last year. That total includes 345 competition rounds, which translates to **4620 Competitive Impact Hours** for the 2019-2020 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. 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.”<sup>3</sup>

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



<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>>

<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.

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 brand-new course to take advantage of student interest in last year's debate topic, international space cooperation, entitled Debating Space City. 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 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. FY19 saw the predicted rise in direct student participation discussed in our questionnaire from two years ago. Additionally, approximately one hundred students were present at our debate on the constitution and executive power at the Grand Challenges Forum from the year before last.

| Year  | Students |
|-------|----------|
| FY13  | 33       |
| FY14  | 60       |
| FY15  | 80       |
| FY16  | 80       |
| FY17  | 50       |
| FY18  | 29       |
| FY 19 | 43       |
| FY20  | 53       |

### **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 & HISD students at our HUDL seminars and debate tournaments.

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

### *Leadership Changes*

FY20 saw our new Assistant Director position, filled after a three-year absence in FY19, continuing to make an impact. Rob Glass, after working remotely from New York City as an assistant coach his first year, has become a staple of our community here in Houston already, with large strides made in student engagement, especially with new students.

### *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.

FY20 once again shows what the team can do when it has more adequate resources. The short version: **50% more funding allows us to do generate 80-100% more opportunities for our students.** FY19 showed this when a spike in interest led the team to dip into its reserves from hosting the Cougar Classic; FY20's one-time allocation saw an even greater return. 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.

### *COVID Constraints for FY21*

The coronavirus pandemic lead to the cancellation of the final two tournaments of the 2019-2020 season and lead to a cancellation of the FY21 One-Time Allocation to the program. While cancellation of these allocations lead to a 15% cut for SFAC overall, they represented a 33% reduction for Speech & Debate. However, since all debating this season will be done virtually, we anticipate a relatively small reduction in our numbers for this year from budgetary constraints. We hope to return to an increased budget level next year so we can solidify the strong gains of the last two years. At current levels, our roster of 40-50 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 reinstate the one-time funding allocation at previous levels.

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

## **7. 2020-2021 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, especially considering the budgetary and social constraints of COVID-19.

### **Action Steps**

1. Sustain 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. Unfortunately, the coronavirus pandemic has lead to the cancellation of many of the campus activities, such as public debates, that are normal for the program. However, the team has been hosting several events tied to the presidential election cycle, and two of our students were interviewed by local news anchor Gina Gaston for commentary on the first presidential debate. We are also hopeful that an virtual public debate will be possible in the spring. All in all, we plan on innovating as we can this year while planning to resume our normal slate of events next year.

Finally, in a unique environment when students are more disconnected from campus than ever before, we have made a primary goal of the Speech & Debate program this year student engagement outside of competition. While competition remains the engine that drives our community, the directors decided that the pursuit of **holistic well-being** (DSAES) was more important than ever and we have emphasized the social side of being on the team accordingly.



### Action Steps

1. Engage the broader university committee by supporting engaging intellectual issues through public debates.
2. Continue our service-learning component to the program, the Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative.
3. Continue to create co-curricular programs that develop civic engagement, leadership and advocacy resources for UH students.
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 since FY13 (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 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. This has culminated in the creation of a framework for a giving campaign through university advancement; work is almost complete, but COVID-19 has delayed the roll out. 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.



***\*Dr. Bill English with debate 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, though COVID-19 will delay this initiative as well, having severely disrupted the market for summer camp activities in 2020.

### *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. Several student-run programs—Speech, Mock Trial, and Moot Court—are slated to be incorporated under the aegis of Speech & Debate, following the call by DSAES to consolidate overlapping programs. This process began in FY12 with the merger of the Policy Debate Program and the Forensics Program. 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 SFAC funds. This represents the sum of known activities on campus. Our long-term vision is full institutional support for all of these programs.