

FY25 SFAC Base Augmentation

Speech & Debate

10/15/2023

Rationale

Speech & Debate has grown beyond the ability to be sustained by its current budget. In both FY22 and FY23 the program was the largest program of its kind in the country, with only two other peer programs coming close to its size. As of the start of FY24 the program has hit a capacity wall, with both the Policy Debate team and the Mock Trial program having to turn students away and shortening their recruitment cycles. Maintaining this size of program from the current base allocation will present insurmountable hurdles when it comes to future years as tournaments stop offering online participation as coping mechanisms for COVID-19, forcing a return to in-person travel and the myriad costs associated therein.

Additionally, the inclusion of the Model Debate program places a Herculean strain on the program. While this will drastically increase the size of the program and also increase the opportunities available to UH students running this program will require increased travel and coaching support, this is especially true if the program wants to be run at the highest possible level as Model Debate involves travel to multiple foreign destinations as part of its regular season travel.

Conversely, increasing the base allocation will allow the team to continue its path of growth which will enable it to unlock economies of scale to reduce per capita costs for travel. As it stands the team is on the cusp of being able to economically charter coach buses and to reserve large scale hotel room blocks when traveling. However, with a flat budget line or, worse, a decreased budget the team will need to reduce participation numbers and as a result, for the detriment of all involved.

While we recognize that the request for the increased budget here is sizeable, this locks in a pathway of competitive growth without restraints in student participation in any form of debate at the University of Houston. It also ensures that the Speech & Debate program can effectively offer to support high quality events like its 2023 hosting of the Cross Examination Debate Association's national championship and the potential 2025 hosting of the Texas Forensics Association State Tournament.

| Expense | Amount | Comment |
|--------------------------|------------------|---|
| Coaching – Mock Trial | \$10,000 | Graduate Assistantship for Legal Debate |
| Travel – Mock Trial | \$40,000 | Support for an expanded Legal Debate travel schedule |
| Coaching – Policy Debate | \$30,000 | Coaching support for a full-spectrum Policy Debate Program |
| Travel – Policy Debate | \$90,000 | Sufficient funding for a complete travel season for the Policy Debate Program at all levels of debate |
| Travel—Model Debate | \$40,000 | Travel support for the Model Debate Program to have an effective travel season |
| Event Hosting Budget | \$25,000 | Budgetary support to supplement hosting national level tournaments |
| Administrative Fee | \$15,000 | |
| Total | \$250,000 | |

Coaching – Mock Trial

This position would be deployed either to help the expanding Mock Trial program. Either role would be tasked with supporting the Cougar Classic and Houston Debate Mentorship Collaborative. The preferred use would be toward a Graduate Assistantship in conjunction with either the UH Law School, taking advantage of local talent while also allowing the funding to do double-duty for university students. Filling staffing positions, especially on a part-time or graduate-assistantship basis is one of the most challenging administrative problems for the program. Filling the position without certainty about future funding has been difficult, and it may require a permanent base-augmentation to facilitate this goal.

Coaching – Policy Debate

Policy Debate is an intensely demanding activity that requires active coaching and education. UH Debate currently has a roster of three part-time assistant coaches in addition to its Director and Assistant Director, but all are paid well below market standard despite the work being rigorous and intense. Increasing this support would allow for the program to stabilize its coaching relationships and hire additional coaches, which is a sine qua non for its ability to continue to operate at the level of competition and participation that it currently does.

Travel Expenses

Travel budgeting depends on a number of variables that change depending on the level of competition, distance, and many other factors. On average, costs are lower for smaller regional tournaments and larger nationally competitive tournaments tend to be further away. The majority of this money would go toward the cost of transporting and housing additional team members who might currently be denied the opportunity for travel next year if budget allocations remain the same. This would also cover the costs of tournament registration, hiring judges to cover tournament obligations (which is quickly becoming one of the largest cost centers for a team of our size), and whatever additional tournament costs would accompany. The following chart gives an example of a standard tournament outlay:

Example Debate Tournament Expense Outlay

| Category | Days | Rate | Units | Sub Total |
|-----------------------|------|----------|--------------|-------------------|
| Lodging | 3 | \$114.00 | 8 | \$2,736.00 |
| Lodging - On Drive | 1 | \$85.00 | 8 | \$680.00 |
| Food – Students | 4 | \$15.00 | 24 | \$1,440.00 |
| Food – Coaches | | | 2 | \$120.00 |
| Fees | | \$60.00 | 24 | \$1,440.00 |
| Judging | | \$300.00 | 4 | \$1,200.00 |
| Gas | | | | \$250.00 |
| Ground Transportation | | | | \$600.00 |
| | | | Total | \$8,476.00 |

Event Hosting

The UH Speech & Debate program has been able to host multiple successful events over the past years, including a regular season Policy Debate tournament, the 2023 CEDA National Championship, and multiple High School tournaments. While each event is rewarding to the program it comes with a trade-off in terms of budget and participation. Further, attracting competitors to the UH Campus from around the country is difficult without offering a high standard of hosting in terms of food, spaces, awards, and other intangible factors. Having a supplementary part of the budget dedicated just to costs associated with hosting tournaments would not just remove the trade-offs with travel but allow for a guarantee that all events hosted by the University of Houston would operate at the highest possible standards, attracting future attendance and success.