New Year, New Season, New Projects

From competition to outreach, JRPDS is embarking on new adventures

Our 2022-2023 Season is Underway!

To kick off the 2022-2023 season, The John R. Park Debate Society traveled to Twin Falls, Idaho on September 23-24 to participate in the Fran Tanner Invitational at the College of Southern Idaho. At the tournament, the team faced competition from over 10 colleges and universities, including the Boise State University, Idaho State University, and in-state rivals: Weber State University and Utah State University. The Debate Society finished the tournament with 10 final round placings in individual events, a closeout (top two teams) in National Parliamentary Debate Association debate, multiple top speaker awards, 5 first place rankings, and 2nd in overall sweepstakes.

Refugee Community Debate League

In partnership with the Department of Communication and the Utah Department of Workforce Services, the JRPDS is piloting a refugee community debate league. The team is currently working with high school students of refugee background to teach the basics of argumentation and forensics. The course meets weekly and will end with a debate tournament hosted on the University of Utah campus in December. Winners of the tournament will receive a scholarship to attend the University of Utah and compete with debate society. This program is an effort to expand the team’s community outreach in a way that we have not done before.
The Bonanza is Back!

Community outreach and working with high schoolers is a big component of what makes the JRPDS unique, and after a nearly three year hiatus from in person community outreach due to the coronavirus pandemic, the JRPDS is officially back in person with one of the largest high school forensics tournaments in the western United States. This October, the team hosted nearly 700 student competitors, coaches, judges, and parents on campus for the 13th annual Beehive Bonanza Tournament on October 7th and 8th. The Bonanza proudly opens the competitive season for many high schools and provides training for judges that will help them throughout the year, clinics for novice competitors to learn the ins and outs of debate, and an opportunity for university faculty and students to get involved through judging forensics events. Part of what makes the Bonanza special is that it is very frequently the first experience in forensics for many competitors, including many of today’s JRPDS team members.

Introducing Dr. Jeannie Hunt

In addition to a new season and new projects, JRPDS is welcoming a new director. Dr. Jeannie Hunt began her role as Director of Forensics in June and brings more than 20 years of teaching and coaching experience to the University of Utah, as well as service and leadership in several forensics and communication organizations. Most recently, Dr. Hunt was the Director of Forensics at Northwest College, in Powell, Wyoming.

Meredith Jenkins is a third-year competitor for the John R. Park Debate Society and has been an integral part of the team’s success since day one. She attended high school in Illinois and one day discovered the debate society through our website. Lucky for the JRPDS, Meredith decided to join us. Meredith currently competes in a variety of events, ranging from persuasive and extemporaneous speaking to British Parliamentary Debate. In everything she does, Meredith is successful. At her first tournament this fall, she was able to qualify all of her individual speaking events to the National Forensics Association national tournament next spring. A feat that takes most several tournaments to accomplish. In addition to her outstanding competitive performance, Meredith serves as an intern for the team and is currently assisting instruction of our new refugee community debate league. Her past internship assignments have included community outreach to high school forensics competitors and team recruitment efforts. Meredith has brought competitive success, new members, and dedication to the team. We can’t wait to see how the rest of the season turns out for Meredith as she pushes herself to try new events!

“Forensics is great because it helps you develop really valuable communication skills, and it’s fun to come up with arguments in debate. I think I’ve done well thus far because I’m always pushing myself to practice hard.” - Meredith Jenkins

The Beehive Bonanza Tournament

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