



HIGH SCHOOL OUTREACH REPORT 2023 - 2024

The John R. Park Debate Society is housed in the Department of Communication and has been a campus organization since 1869. We are a member of the National Forensic Association (NFA), the International Forensics Association (IFA), and National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA). This broad range of competitive affiliations positions us as a unique forensics program in the United States and Big 12. In addition to our competitive activities, the team's signature contribution is our public outreach efforts. In addition to public debates each semester, our team pursues outreach by providing support to local high schools and the local refugee community. This outreach service is aimed at expanding and supporting opportunities to participate in forensics in Utah high schools as well as facilitate connections with the university. The students and teachers with whom we work and the contact hours we provide (over 10,000 hours since 2010) help support local high schools and the community (both directly and indirectly) where students' opportunities to participate in forensics are limited or unavailable.

I. Why Outreach?

The John R. Park Debate Society has situated high school outreach as a key element of our program because we are committed to the transformational educational outcomes created through forensics participation. According to a study by the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues (urbandebate.org), a leading high school debate outreach organization, training in forensics supports a range of benefits for students. Among their findings, they conclude that students who debate in high school:

- Are 70% more likely to graduate than their non-debating peers
- Are 3 times less likely to drop out than their non-debating peers
- Are 70% more likely to reach the ACT College Ready reading benchmark
- Score 25% higher on college-level literacy tests
- Are likely to attend a four year college or university (75% of debate participants attend a four-year institution of higher education)

Similarly, other research by Dr. Gordon Mitchell, former Director of Forensics at the University of Pittsburgh, concludes that debate provides a pivotal means through which students: gain confidence in their ability to participate as active, civic-minded citizens; learn the principles of open and fair debate that are critical to a healthy democracy; and, develop the abilities to evaluate political discourse encountered in everyday life. And, the National Speech and Debate Association confirms the role of debate in training effective political leaders, noting that a majority of members of U.S. Congress are former participants in forensics.

2. High School Outreach Program Overview

Our high school outreach program includes several components aimed at providing a comprehensive set of supports for the Utah high school speech and debate community. Among the services we offer are:

A. Coaching & Judging

Each year we provide volunteer coaching and judging for local high schools and the tournaments they attend. This service is valuable to many individual schools and to the larger high school forensics community. Schools with newer forensics programs often do not have experienced teachers or forensics alumni from which to recruit judges. Schools with limited financial resources do not have the funds to pay teachers or judges. And, there are many schools that do not have coaches or judges with experience in all of the events that interest their students. Judging shortages often leave schools unable to attend tournaments or unable to allow their students to compete in a broader range of events. We are able to help address this problem in the high school forensics community by providing free, experienced, independent judges and coaches.

B. Workshops

In October 2013, the John R. Park Debate Society added to its outreach program and efforts by implementing and hosting forensics workshops for high school students on the University of Utah's main campus. These workshops were designed to offer access to forensics coaching, evidence and materials, and a supportive environment for underserved students in the local high school forensics community. Undergraduate members of the John R. Park Debate Society engage with service learning in the workshops by coaching, teaching and interacting with the high school students in group and one-on-one contexts.

C. Beehive Bonanza

The John R. Park Debate Society supports the high school forensics community by hosting an annual high school tournament, the Beehive Bonanza, every October. In 2020 the Beehive Bonanza was not held due to the Vice Presidential debate held on campus. In 2021, the Bonanza returned with its first fully virtual tournament, featuring 15 students from four schools across two states. In addition to hosting the tournament, the John R. Park Debate Society awards scholarships to the tournament's top competitors who choose to attend the U and join our program.

D. The Beehive Forensics Institute

Another element of our high school outreach efforts is the Beehive Forensics Institute. In July 2019, The John R. Park Debate Society hosted 76 high school students at the tenth annual BFI. The summer 2021 BFI was canceled due to public guidance at the time related to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The institute offers an intensive program in which award-winning college and high school coaches provide individualized training for

high school debate students. The BFI boasts: a nationally-recognized staff, a low student to faculty ratio (approx. 8:1), University of Utah college credit, a curriculum designed to offer a “signature” college experience, competitive pricing compared to other university-supported camps, a safe, urban environment, and “Olympic” amenities.

E. Utah Tournament of Excellence

The John R. Park Debate Society inaugurated a new forensics tradition by hosting the first Utah Tournament of Excellence, or UTE, in 2015. The event continued by popular demand in 2016 and has become a permanent fixture in Utah high school forensics. Hosted for high school competitors across the state, the UTE features competition between the best of the best in Utah high school competitive debate in a round robin tournament format to determine the overall state champion among Utah high school competitors. Students qualify for the Utah Tournament of Excellence by winning their event (Policy, Public Forum, or Lincoln-Douglas Debate) at their respective high school tournament. In Utah, there are six state championship forensics tournaments, one for each classification of school (IA-6A). If the state champion is unavailable, their spot in the UTE passes down to next most successful competitor in that event at the classification’s tournament. As a consequence, the UTE is the most competitive tournament in the state and is the only tournament that determines an inter-classification winner via head-to-head competition between each state champion.

F. Scholarships

The John R. Park Debate Society is also proud to support high school students in continuing their education at the University of Utah by coordinating and offering debate scholarships to qualified high school students. Since fall 2010, The John R. Park Debate Society has awarded a combined total of over \$400,000 in scholarships and financial support to Utah high school students. This support for local high school students is made possible by the generosity of the University of Utah, the College of Humanities, and the Department of Communication, as well as through support from the John R. Park Debate Society.

G. Refugee Debate League

The University of Utah’s John R. Park Debate Society in partnership with the Utah Department of Workforce Services launched the team’s first community debate league in 2022. The league is aimed at recruiting high school students from refugee backgrounds, expanding the influence of collegiate team, and community outreach. The program consists of a 10-12 week after school program that runs through the fall semester (spring as well if the DWS permits). During the program, students learn the basics of argumentation and debate in order to prepare for a culminating tournament that occurs on the University of Utah campus in December.

3. Summary of the 2023-2024 High School & Community Outreach

- A. Beehive Forensics Institute – During the summer of 2023, the John R. Park Debate Society facilitated the BFI. This was the camp’s first summer back post-covid and existed as a one-week commuter only camp to gauge interest of local high school coaches and debaters. The camp had 30 registered participants, 25% of which qualified for the NSDA National tournament after attending camp. Additionally, JRP students and staff worked with three different high school teams that had BFI alumni in pre-national workshops in June 2024.
- B. Beehive Bonanza – In October of 2023 the team hosted the Beehive Bonanza tournament which consisted of 580 participants from three states. While this number is reflective of those that register for the event with a high school, the Bonanza also brings parents and grandparents to campus to watch high school students compete and participate in the awards ceremony. Visiting campus is a primary influence on student school-of-choice decisions, so bringing both students and parents to campus is a meaningful step in student recruitment (McClure, 2020). The Bonanza is also a TOC qualifying tournament.
- C. Refugee Community Debate League – Fall of 2023 brought the third cycle of the John R. Park Debate Society’s Refugee Debate League. The program ran from September to December with weekly classes taught to refugee youth from the greater Salt Lake area at the Department of Workforce Services Refugee Center in Downtown Salt Lake. Participants chose the topic of gun control for their debates. The program’s success was covered by official University media as well as KSL news.
- D. Starter Evidence Briefs – Throughout the season, the team continued their tradition of providing various evidence briefs online to those competing in high school debate across the state and country. Evidence briefs are used by students who need assistance with research and coaching.

4. Plan for 2024-2025 Outreach

The 2024-20245 academic year will mark the 16th year of our high school and community outreach programs. In previous years, our program has focused most of its efforts on providing judging and coaching support for local high school debate programs. As a result of the success of the free high school debate resources made available online, next year our goal is to continue to offer this support through the fall and spring to expand these efforts in size and offerings. Teams of our college students will be assigned to conduct various portions of the workshops under the supervision of the Director of Forensics. Including the novice workshops provided at the Bonanza tournament. The team also seeks to replace the Utah Tournament of Excellence with an end of season clinic to help prepare students for the national tournament. This change comes as a response from the community and aims to meet the needs of students. These clinics will implement curriculum and work with teachers and students to develop debate skills. Similarly, the Beehive Forensics Institute will remain a part of the team’s outreach program as summer camp will be offered in July 2024. Based on feedback from local students and coaches, the BFI will add three new

events to its programming for this season (Congress, Extemporaneous speaking, and Impromptu speaking). In addition, our outreach efforts will provide an on-campus experience for high school students and will incorporate the Office of Recruiting to answer questions and assist students aspiring to continue their education at the University of Utah. This experience will occur during the annual Beehive Bonanza tournament in October. Additionally, the JRP will investigate adding a TOC at the 2024 tournament based on feedback from local coaches. Next, the team will continue the Refugee Debate League through at least the fall semester to expand the influence of debate to refugee youth. While these events and programs are set for the 2024-2025 schedule, the JRP will continue to seek additional opportunities for outreach. Anyone seeking partnership with the JRP for outreach programs, coaching assistance, etc. should contact the team's Outreach Manager (information below).

5. John R. Park Debate Society Contact Information

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