

Forensics team prepares for national competition

BY COURTNEY KAUFFMAN
Staff Reporter

Passions are high and practices long as Truman State's forensics team prepares for the National Forensics Association Championship Tournament April 14-21 in Athens, Ohio.

The forensics team is a comprehensive program that contains speech and debate elements. Although the team has been adjusting to a new director this year, the members have been successful, bringing home awards in many categories. The speech-related events are broken up into events such as performance, interpretation of literature, public address and limited preparation. Truman's team focuses on a type of debate called Lincoln-Douglas that involves a 1-on-1 policy debate.

Communication professor Christopher Outzen, acting director of forensics, said he has been transitioning into his new position as director throughout the year.

A typical team meeting breaks down into handling business — such as organizing campus events — preparing for upcoming tournaments and practicing, Outzen said. The debaters often will run practice debates against each other or do research, he said, while the speech side is a lot of individual practice with some performance workshoping.

Outzen said this will be his first time traveling with the team to a national tournament. He said he looks forward to seeing how the team handles the atmosphere. Outzen said he has traveled with Truman to smaller competitions and primarily judged the individual events speech section. Normally, Truman attends weekend-only tournaments in the Midwest, he said.

"[Nationals] is a marathon, [that's] the way I think of it," Outzen said. "We are traveling on April 14 and come back April 21, a total of eight days. In between there it's all either practice near the site or the actual tournament, [which] runs for five days."

Outzen said he likes to tell the team members the tournament is all about pacing. It can be difficult for the team not to put all the energy into day one, he said, and become exhausted as a result, but then the members are out of energy for the rest of tournament. He said his goal is to remind the students why they are there — not just to compete but to compete in events they are passionate about.

The team has been performing well this year compared to other teams in the Midwest, Outzen said. The speakers consistently have performed well and the debaters often are in the top elimination rounds of local tournaments, he said. Although Outzen said he is unsure how Truman will rank against schools they have yet to compete against, he said he thinks Truman's long history of excellence in debate will garner Truman a top position.

"I try not to focus too much on the competitive head-to-head stuff," Outzen said. "I want our students to feel like they walk away from every tournament, and especially every national tournament, feeling like 'I did better — I improved and learned a lot and I feel like I can do even better next year.'"

Outzen said he is impressed with this young team. He said one of his favorite parts of the job is getting to see the new members who join each year improve.

He said he would love to get Truman back to the top 10 nationally in speech as well as debate. He said his primary goal is to rebuild the team on the speech side and get the team to the point where it brings home trophies.

The team's passion is a key asset Outzen said. Forensics stands for passion, advocacy and action, and the team is open to anyone who thinks they can represent these qualities and be a good team member, he said.

Freshman Collin O'Connell, Missouri state champion in novice parliamentary debate, said he joined the team after attending a few of the practices.

O'Connell said he participates in Lincoln-Douglas debates for the Truman team. This type of debate is a policy form of debate where one debater argues in favor of a specific plan for change while an opponent argues to counter, he said.

"It helps me critically think better," O'Connell said. "You have to think about how different arguments interact with one another and what strategy you're going to use — it prepares me for complex decisions later in life."

O'Connell said Truman's team is different than his high school's debate team because it is more polished and experienced.

Freshman Brian Kantanka, novice nationals dramatic interpretation winner, said he competed in high school and had an affinity for it that led him to join Truman's team.



Submitted Photo

Truman's Forensics Team celebrates the end of the Gorlock Gala, one of the bigger tournaments of the team's competition season. The team is preparing for Nationals April 14-21.

"It's a cool feeling, people actually want to hear what you're going to have to say [and] they are hanging on every word — that's what I love about this activity," Kantanka said.

Kantanka said the topic for dramatic interpretation is chosen by the student and makes finding a piece the most difficult part of preparing. He said he spends 12 hours per week practicing — it takes a lot of practice to know what your message is and how you want to deliver it. There is a huge physical aspect to delivery and every movement is rehearsed, he said. Though team members put a large amount of time into practice, it isn't difficult for them to balance with effective time management skills, Kantanka said.

Kantanka said this will be his first national competition with the University forensics team and he said he is very excited. Truman has a good debate reputation that sets them apart, he said.

"[The competitions are] a lot more professional in college," Kantanka said. "It's fun, but everyone is there for a reason, not like in high school when some people were just there to hang out and not necessarily to compete."

Freshman Kelsey Barnes, a Lincoln-Douglas debater and novice nationals

champion, said she got involved with the team after being a part of the debate team during high school.

"It's pretty awesome to represent Truman as a school," Barnes said. "For me, I chose to go to school here and I'm showing people the kind of person a Truman student is — the kind of person who shows up to win awards and is recognized as a solid competitor."

Barnes said the competition requires a lot of practice and research, which includes two weekly practices and individual coaching. Outside of practice, she said she spends three to five hours researching and preparing. Barnes said practices normally consist of refining the details of the argument with each member debating each other or going through drills.

The competitions put a strong emphasis on education and communication, Barnes said. She said as a communication and psychology double major that these qualities fit well with her future plans.

"There's such a good future we're building right now," Barnes said, "This is just the beginning."

For more information on the team or how to join, contact Outzen at courtzen@truman.edu.

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