

Debate Team Offers More than Speaking Skills

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Staff Writer

Many students may not know about the debate team at Methodist College, but it is a valuable experience in some students' lives. Surprisingly, the debate team has traveled all over the East Coast to compete in tournaments, and just last week it competed at Wake Forest.

The debate team was established by two students in 1991 without the financial support of the school. And within a few years, Methodist hired experienced debate coach, John Humphreys. With his advising, the debate team expanded.

This year, the debate team consists of two new, and three returning students along with advisor Todd Lyden.

They usually meet with Lyden twice a week. "We try to work out in the student's schedule. We talk about it and usually assign readings to understand what we talk about."

The members first learn about the basic functions and requirements for particular debate styles. After building on this foundation, they start learning the skills needed to be a successful debater in different categories. When understanding the basics of debate, they start practicing to prepare for a specific debate style. They debate against one another or sometimes against the advisor.

The debate team focuses on three debate styles: policy, parliamentary, and public. With the policy style, the debaters decide the topic and research it prior to the debate. Everything needs to be ready before the debate. The parliamentary style requires impromptu skills because

debaters are given the topic at the debate. With the public style, the members attend different types of public services, such as inviting a speaker to campus.

Methodist offers two credit hours for participating in the debate team. The school also offers scholarships; up to \$800 a semester for recruited freshman and \$400 for walk-on students. "It requires full-time participation and a minimum GPA," Lyden said.

The team travels to many places for competitions from Georgia to Boston. "For the students who don't have a place to go on weekends, it is a way to get away from the campus with a few bucks," Lyden said. The debate team usually pays for food, transportation, and hotel.

There are no conferences in the competition; and sometimes small schools compete against big schools, such as Harvard.

Anyone who is willing to try the debate team is welcome according to Lyden. Traditionally, the team's members have had no experience in debate, but turn into novelist debaters.

"Ideally, this is great for anyone. I have chemistry, history, communication, sports management, computer science and political science majors. I also have many athletes. On a regular basis, they perform well in spite of a full schedule," Lyden said.

Lyden sees one obstacle with debate: stage fright. "Many students get scared at first and don't even try. Once they can get over the fear of public speaking, everything else is something anyone can learn easily, such as research skills, critical thinking skills, and argumentation skills. Most students did not think they could do well, but once they tried and applied themselves, they could," Lyden said.

Junior Taurean Johnson has been in the debate team for a year and a half. He remembers his experience. "I am a big guy. For me to say I am scared is funny. But the first time, I was nervous," Johnson

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