

USU Speech and Debate Team Ends Season as National Champions

Thursday, Mar. 30, 2017



The Utah State University Speech and Debate Team was named national champions in debate following a season in which its members competed against 500 students from 28 states.

The distinction was awarded at last week's Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament at Boise State University. The tournament, hosted by the International Public Debate Association, is the determining factor in national championships in speech and debate, said coach Tom Worthen.

Worthen said the designation of "best in the nation" says much about USU and its debate students. "To have the depth of placing in the top for all three divisions of debate is something that does not happen often at the national level," he said.

The IPDA debate consists of one-on-one debate with topics changing every round. Worthen said the USU team earned first place in the nation in Open division debate, second place in Jr division and first and second places in the Novice division. Among the topics up for debate were the issues of whether reduced federal funding for the arts weakens society and the advantages and disadvantages of for-profit charter schools. The tournament was held March 22-25.

Worthen said the USU team earned more awards than any other team participants. When it came to the final rounds in the three divisions of debate, four of the six debaters were USU students. Especially noteworthy, said Worthen, is that the USU team has not lost in Novice division debate all year, taking first place seven times with four different winning debaters.

The tournament closed with USU debaters compiling a win-loss record of 54 wins and 14 losses. Individually, Tanner Petersen took first place in Open division debate with a 14-win and one-loss record topping Boise State University in the final round. Alex Hall placed second in the nation in the IPDA Jr division.

Naomi Ward and Zoe Hall placed first and second in Novice IPDA debate. With both students from the same school, no final debate was held and they will share the national title, said Worthen.

In the Lincoln Douglas Policy debate, Chantelle Gossner received a superior rating and was the second-highest seed going into elimination rounds where she earned fourth place. Brayden O'Brien received an excellent rating in Open IPDA.

In speech, the students were awarded on two levels -- the top 10 percent received a superior rating

and the next 10 percent an excellent rating, said Worthen. More than 1,500 events were held.

Those earning awards superior ratings were Tanner Petersen in Persuasive Speaking and Impromptu and Chantelle Gossner in Persuasive Speaking.

Earning an Excellent rating were Samantha Hendricks in Congress, Informative Speaking and After Dinner Speaking; Naomi Ward in Persuasive Speaking and Informative Speaking; Garrett Smith in Interviewing and Persuasive Speaking; Zoe Hall in Persuasive Speaking; and Alex Hall in Extemporaneous Speaking.

Worthen said the students' preparation required them to perform math problems while reciting their practice speeches. "That way I knew the speeches were memorized and they could focus on delivery and not what word was coming next," he said.

The USU team marks its seventh overall conference win in 10 years and its second national championship honor, said Worthen.

Contact: Thomas Worthen, 435-994-0023, tom.worthen@usu.edu