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News

High school students argue world issues at TU tournament

Brian Stelter
The Towerlight

Hundreds of high school students from across the Baltimore region argued, persuaded and performed at Towson University's fourth annual Speech and Debate Tournament Saturday.

Students from two local leagues spread out across the TU campus competing in events which included policy debate, Lincoln-Douglas debate, dramatic interpretation and extemporaneous speaking.

Chris Baron, program manager for the Baltimore Urban Debate League, estimated that 550 students participated.

"This is definitely the largest tournament in Maryland," Baron said.

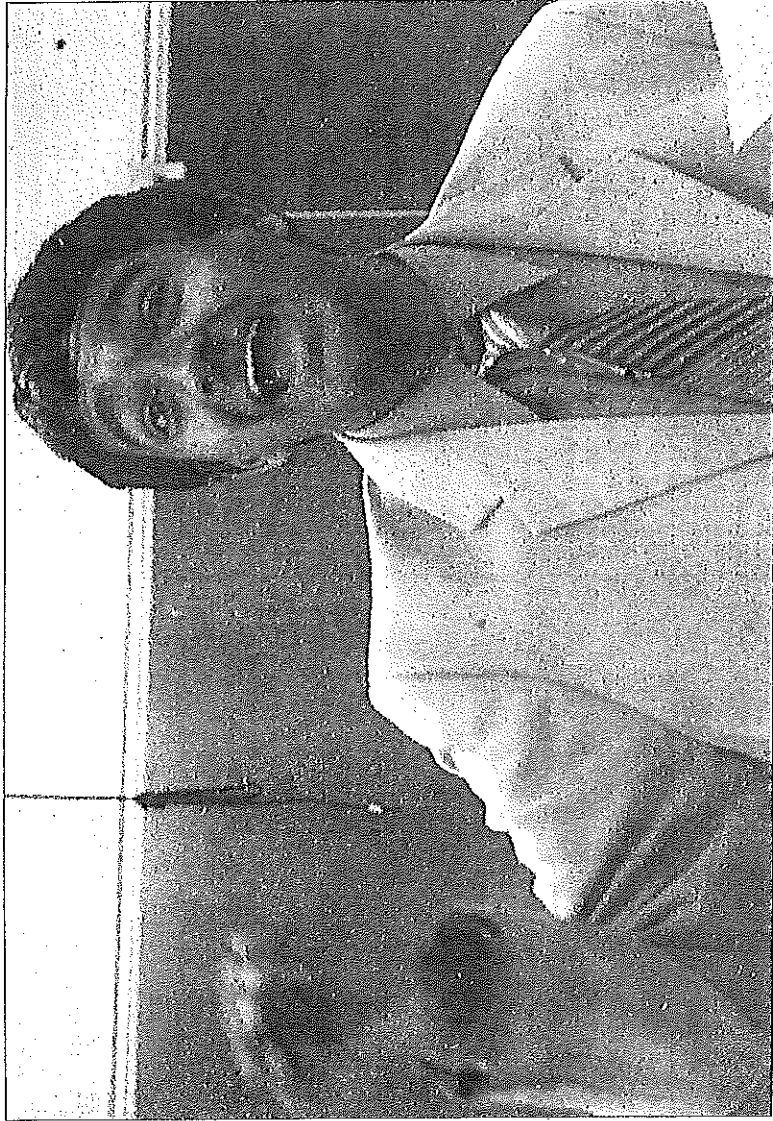
The University's Speech and Debate Program sponsored the event, jointly organized by the Baltimore Urban Debate League and the Baltimore Catholic Forensics League.

The debating skills of students were on display as the tournament commenced.

McDonogh High School senior Corey Chow seemed confident as he introduced his argument in the first round of policy debate.

"The United States should ratify the Law of the Sea treaty," he declared, and then rapidly identified support for his position.

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Steve Lefkowitz/The Towerlight
McDonogh High School student Vilas Moni participates in Towson's fourth annual Speech and Debate Tournament Saturday. The competition brought hundreds of Baltimore high school debaters together to discuss issues such as nuclear warhead proliferation and the Coast Guard budget.

DEBATE: Competition rises during day of articulate speeches

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Issues in the debate included nuclear warhead proliferation, pirate attacks in South Asia, Coast Guard budgeting processes and the definition of the word "establish." In every instance, the two opposing teams connected the dots from their argument back to the original prompt.

In policy debate, four students compete in three consecutive rounds. One team of two students takes the affirmative position, while the other two students argue the opposite. Each participant has eight minutes to construct their argument.

"It may seem like eight minutes is a lot of time, but when you're up there, it flies by," Chow said.

After each student speaks, the opposing team is allotted three minutes for cross-examination. At the end of the round, each student is allotted a five-minute rebuttal to conclude their case.

The teams prepare exhaustively for each debate.

"It's a year-long process," Chow's teammate, McDonogh senior G.M. Bennett, said. "We started over the summer." He estimated that his team's preparation spanned thousands of pieces of paper.

Bennett said his strategy included direct appeals to the judge, pointing out flaws in the other team's argument.

"It's a lot of fun when you find a hole in someone's argument, and it's glaring, but they have missed it, and you just know that you've won that argument," he explained. "I don't think there's a better feeling than that."

Chow and Bennett challenged two students from Loyola Blakefield, a private high school in Towson. They identified the basic reason they enjoy debate.

"I like arguing," sophomore Budri Avubaker-Sahrin said. He said his parents were his first audience.

Other students also cited a passion for arguing. Kelly McCartney, a freshman at Wilde Lake High School, sat with teammates in Stephens Hall, preparing for a Lincoln-Douglass debate. It was her first debate tournament.

"I like to argue," she said. "My parents are lawyers; it's in my blood."

Senior business administration major Baya Tuvshintugs judged the McDonogh/Loyola debate in Linthicum Hall.

A debater for seven years, Tuvshintugs has served as a judge at local events since her freshman year at Towson.

"I think people who have debated before are the best judges, because they know what the kids are going through," she said. "They know the pressures, and the stress, and the excitement as well."

Tuvshintugs is a varsity debater in

the University's speech and debate program who came to Towson from Mongolia after being awarded an international debate scholarship. She said judging is less of a challenge than debating.

"I think you have to try to be as objective as possible," Tuvshintugs said. "Instead of voting for the team that you like, or that you sympathize with, you have to look at the arguments to see who won, based on whose arguments were best and most persuasive."

Devin White, a 2002 Towson graduate, teaches at Atholton High School in Howard County and has coached the school's debate team for two years. White judged several events in Saturday's tournament.

"It's a lot of fun," White said. "A lot of the kids are very bright. They're pretty up-to-date on current events. It's pretty impressive to watch."

Many of the judges had prior experience participating in the various events.

As high school students, Terri McCarthy and Kerri Littrell competed in speech tournaments; as college students, they critique speech events in Van Bokkelen Hall classrooms.

McCarthy, a senior at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, judged dramatic interpretation.

"I love listening to the kids," she said.

Students competing in the event select a portion of a dramatic novel, story, or play, and perform it as an actor.

Later in the afternoon, Littrell judged extemporaneous speaking. In the event, students randomly select a speech prompt based on a current event, and the performer has half an hour to prepare an informative speech.

Marcus Harvey, a senior at Baltimore City College High School, was challenged to prepare an oratory on questionable intelligence regarding Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Students in the hallway outside praised Harvey's speaking skills. "He's the best," a competitor said.

Harvey's success in debate has led to opportunities after graduation.

"This is the biggest way I am getting financial aid for college," Harvey said.

Many scholarships are available for talented forensics students.

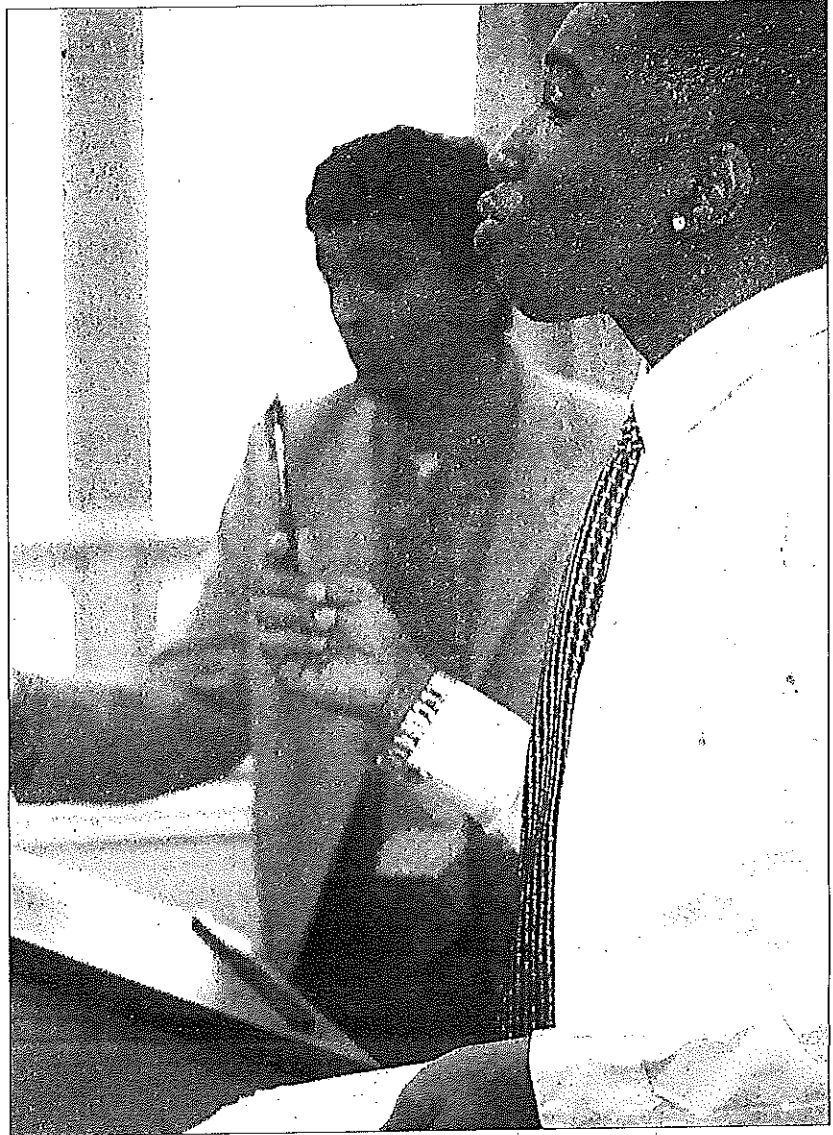
"It's the same as recruiting athletes," Harvey said. In the coming months, he will commit to Western Kentucky University or Florida State University for the fall.

Jessica Turrall, a junior at Baltimore City College, hoped to be in Harvey's position this time next year.

"My coach says that if I continue to get better, there might be scholarship opportunities for me," she

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Devin White
teacher,
Atholton High School



Steve LaForty/The Towsonlight

Lake Clifton High School student Devan Cooper uses hand gestures to emphasize his points during Saturday's High School Speech and Debate Tournament. The event was held in various buildings across Towson's campus.

said. Turrall competed in dramatic interpretation, performing a tribute to legendary jazz singer Billie Holiday. She said she appreciates the skills she has honed through speech tournaments.

"It teaches you how to compete fairly," she said. "If you mess up, it is truly your fault. But then it makes you better."

For many of the students, public speaking is the most valuable skill they have obtained through speech and debate events. Catholic High School freshman Stephanie Lawrence cited it as an example of how she has improved.

"These [tournaments] give you confidence to get up in front of people," she said.

Baron said holding the event at Towson lets students consider their future endeavors.

"It gets them familiar with the college environment generally, and specifically with Towson's campus and Towson's speech and debate team," he said.