Speech and Debate, USU’s ‘Cinderella team,’ ends the year as national champ

03/28/2019

Members of the USU Speech and Debate team, winners in the 2019 national competition, are, front row l-r: Naomi Ward, Zoe Hall, Sam Hendricks and Chantelle Gossner; middle row: Brock Redman, Kaleb Webb and Rachel McDonald; back row: Garrett Smith, Coach Tom Worthen and Ammon Teare.

It’s March Madness for USU Speech and Debate, which scaled the brackets to earn its ranking as the nation’s best at the country’s largest comprehensive speech and debate tournament, according to Coach Tom Worthen.

The nine-member team finished in first place at the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament, sponsored by the International Public Debate Association and hosted at Hofstra University in Long Island, N.Y. The debate team is housed in the Department of Languages, Philosophy and Communication Studies within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences.

The USU team entered this competition as the defending national champion following its success at the 2018 national tournament at Boise State University. That competition ended with six USU debaters receiving top prizes. Worthen added that at the close of six debate rounds, USU held the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds for the elimination rounds.

Although USU was the top seed, the team “as a whole is more like the Cinderella team of the collegiate debate world,” Worthen said. “We compete against universities with large budgets, paid coaching staffs and students on scholarships, and yet, with none of these things, we consistently come out as tournament champions.”

Worthen launched the university’s debate team in 1981 and coached it for a year until lack of funding closed it. In 2003, he restarted his efforts to build a team, which has been successful since then.

As an overall team, USU this year placed in the Debate Team Sweepstakes, Individual Event Team Sweepstakes and overall Combined Team Sweepstakes.

Sam Hendricks earned first place in Open Division IPDA debate, as well as placing in the top 10 percent in Persuasive Speaking and the top 20 percent in After Dinner Speaking. Hendricks was also selected to “showcase” her persuasive speech as one of the top persuasive speeches at the tournament, said Worthen.

Chantelle Gossner placed second in Open Division IPDA Debate and in the top 20 percent in Extemporaneous Speaking.

Other individual students placing at the tournament were:

Rachael McDonald: placing in the top 20 percent in Novice Division IPDA Debate, Interviewing and Informative Speaking.

Zoe Hall: placing in the top 20 percent in Broadcast Journalism and Impromptu Speaking.

Brock Redman: placing in the top 20 percent in Jr Division IPDA Debate and Informative Speaking.

Kaleb Webb: placing in the top 20 percent in Jr Division IPDA Debate.

Earlier this year, USU took first in the Northwest Forensic Conference in Debate and second in Speech events. The conference consists of over 30 colleges and universities from Alaska, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Utah.

“This is the March Madness for speech and debate,” said Worthen. “As we worked our way through the brackets, we ended up taking first in the nation — again.”
and California. Worthen noted that, in total, the team has won over 10 conference championships in the last 13 years.

For more information contact Coach Tom Worthen at 435-994-0023.