

STUDENT FEES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FY2015 PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

DEBATE & ADVOCACY

(Formerly University of Houston Forensic Society)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to meaningfully improve competitive excellence, student success, and community engagement this request to the Student Fees Advisory Committee envisions a **unified Debate & Advocacy Program**. The program will provide University of Houston students with expanded access to competitive opportunities, academic engagement and community programs. This FY15 request realigns existing debate and forensics programs in order to leverage the historical success and current strength of both programs to best support competitive and academic excellence.

BACKGROUND

Debate competition began at the University of Houston in 1949 and was an early leader in the development of collegiate debate, creating a tradition of competitive success, argument innovation and community support. Historically, the strength of the debate program translated into student success, debate alumni have gone on to become regional and national leaders, including CEOs, justices on the Texas Supreme Court, national political candidates, and much more.

In the 1980s, institutional support for debate waned as did the program's success. Subsequently, in 2002 the Forensics Society (UHFS) was re-formed in the Division of Student Affairs with support from the Honors College; since this time UHFS has competed in Individual Events tournaments (events include: After Dinner Speaking, Poetry, Prose, Impromptu, Dramatic Duo, and Parliamentary Debate). UHFS has maintained an open membership policy to all students regardless of prior experience in competitive speech and debate. Through speech and debate workshops, students gain critical advice and feedback on how to improve their public speaking skills. UHFS has historically been able to expose its members to a greater variety of public speaking styles.

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON DEBATE HISTORY

The University of Houston has qualified to compete at 22 National Debate Tournaments (NDT), the premiere collegiate debate competition. This success is in the top 15% of all programs that have competed at the NDT.

Numerous finishes in the late elimination rounds of the NDT, including a 2nd place finish in 1969 and 3rd in 1970.

Three top Individual Speakers at the NDT.

The first female to win top overall speaker - Patricia Stallings ('57). Another woman would not win this award until 1987.

However, UHFS does not currently compete at National Debate Tournament (NDT) style debate, also known as Policy Debate. The Policy Debate program, which competes on the NDT circuit, was restarted in 2012 and is housed in the Honors College.

In the spring 2013 a review of the Forensics Program (Forensics Society) was performed by the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services. As a result, organizational restructuring of the program was proposed and the Assistant Director position was eliminated based on the assessment by the Student Fees Advisory Committee that the program was administratively top heavy.

In the fall of 2013, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services entered in to a discussion with the Honors College on a possible reorganization of the Policy Debate Program (housed in the Honors College) and the Forensics Program (housed in Student Affairs). The outcome of this discussion resulted in an administrative proposal to **merge the Policy Debate and Forensics Programs into the University of Houston Debate & Advocacy Program**. The program would be administratively housed in the Honors College and would offer students the opportunity to participate in both Policy Debate and individual events competition.

The new combined program would be led by Sarah Spring, Assistant Professor, who currently serves as the Director of Policy Debate within the Honors College. This reorganization would allow for a reduction in funding from Student Service Fees for speech and debate by approximately **40%**. In addition, the combination of these existing resources of the Forensics Society and the Policy Debate Program will provide a strong foundation for the University of Houston students involved in policy debate and individual events to consistently succeed at the highest levels.

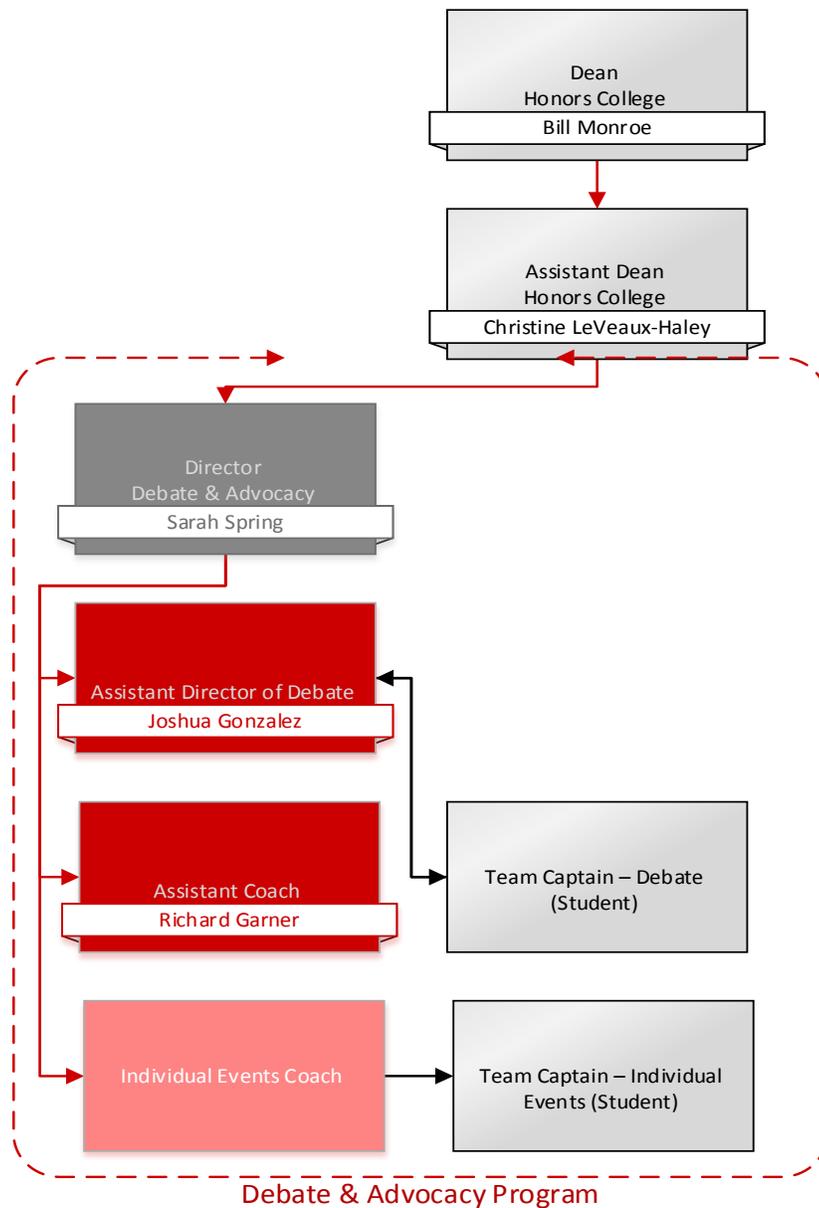
The mission of the Debate & Advocacy program is to support meaningful competitive and academic success for University of Houston Students. It will achieve these goals by:

- Enabling competitive success at the highest-level of Debate and Speech tournaments.
- Providing coaching resources to students in Debate and Individual Events.
- Creating opportunities for community engaged learning in outreach with advocacy and debate organizations.

The benefits to the students will be enhanced access to competition, academic support and qualified coaches. Additionally, the co-curricular nature of Forensics competition creates incentives for academic engagement outside of the classroom that will support student success.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

The University of Houston Forensic Society will be one of the two options in the new Debate & Speech organization under the advisement of Professor Sarah Spring, Director of Debate, in the Honors College. Both the Policy Debate Team and UHFS will be considered equal opportunities for student involvement, engagement and success in the University of Houston unified Debate and Advocacy Program (aka Debate and Speech team). The new organization chart is as follows:



ACTION FROM SFAC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY14

As noted in the FY2014 recommendations, SFAC was “extremely distressed” with the Forensics presentation and proposal. Feedback from the committee included concerns on the multiple revisions submitted passed the deadline, concerns with the inability to be accountable for some expenses, and a financial request that was significantly out of proportion with the number of students served. In addition, the committee made it clear that they felt the organization appeared to be administratively top heavy. It was also strongly suggested that salaries for paid staff be reviewed along with the role and scope of the organization be refocused.

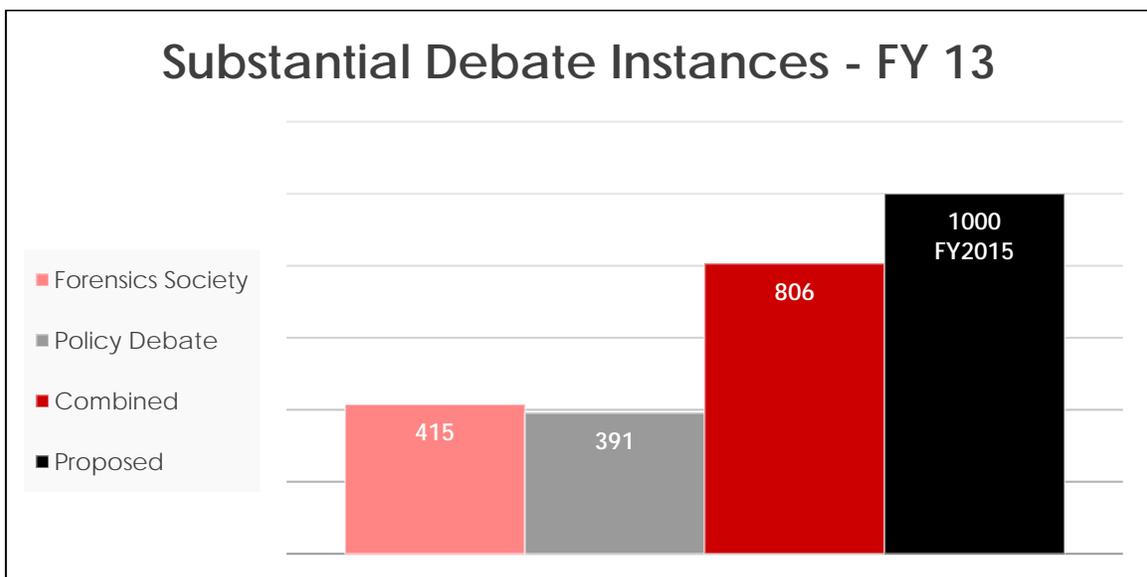
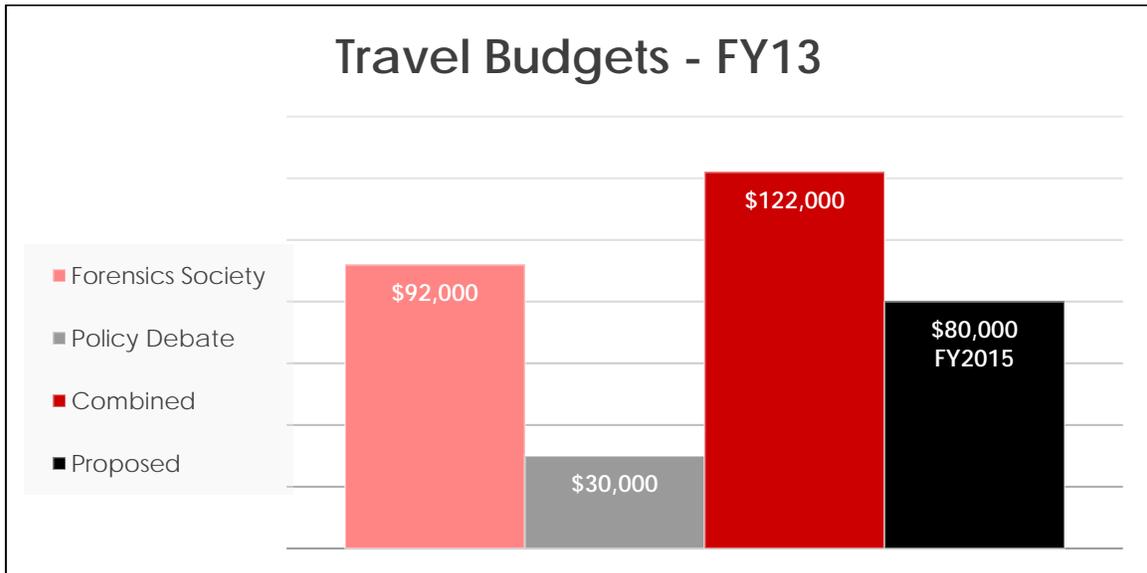
In direct response to the expressed concerns by the committee, a review of the Forensics Program (Forensics Society) was performed in the spring of 2013. As a result, organizational restructuring of the program was proposed and the Assistant Director position was eliminated based on the assessment by the Student Fees Advisory Committee that the program was administratively top heavy. In the fall of 2013, the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services entered in to a discussion with the Honors College on a possible reorganization of the Policy Debate Program (housed in the Honors College) and the Forensics Program (housed in Student Affairs). The outcome of this discussion resulted in an administrative proposal to merge the Policy Debate and Forensics Programs into a University of Houston unified Debate and Advocacy Program. The program would be formally housed in the Honors College and would offer students the opportunity to participate in both Policy Debate and the types of individual debate currently being supported by the Forensics Society which includes After Dinner Speaking, Poetry, Prose, Impromptu, and so forth.

The UHFS Team membership has been fluid throughout most of the last year and currently sits at 10 – 15 students. The team hosted six summer camps for middle school and high school students, hosted one collegiate tournament, and is currently planning on attending a competition at Cal State Northridge. Professor Spring will be accompanying the students on this trip. There will be additional opportunities for the UHFS members to compete in the spring 2014 semester under the new organization, UH Debate and Advocacy Program, and leadership provided through the Honors College.

BUDGET

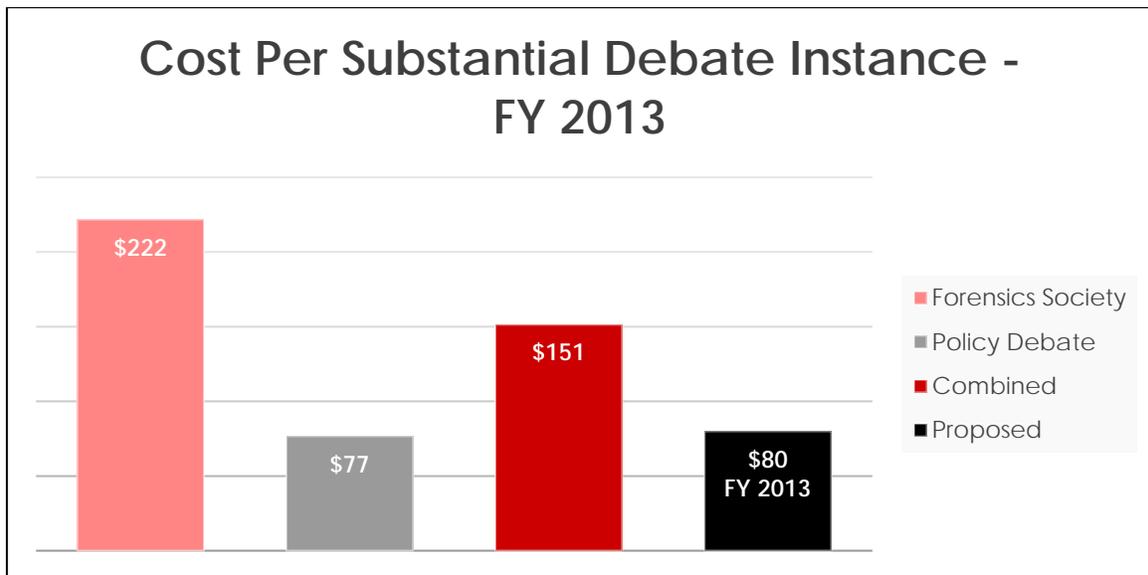
The budget proposal for FY15 is for base funding \$100,000.00 which is a reduction from the one time funding for FY14 by 45% and from the base funding for FY13 by 65%. Expenses in the proposed base budget include funding for a .5 FTE with benefits (Individual Events coach), student employees, basic operations, and a majority of the base funding for student travel. While the strategic goals for the upcoming year are focused on competitive excellence, academic excellence, and community engagement, student fee dollars will not be dedicated to hosting middle school forensic competition events and summer camps for elementary school age children. There will be outreach through The Houston Urban Debate League, but this outreach will be in the form of volunteer hours such as judging and coaching.

The core components of the FY15 funding will be used to support travel to competition. These opportunities will be expanded to more students and to support travel to more competitive tournaments. The Debate & Advocacy program will allow more students to travel by creating operational efficiency and by reducing unnecessary spending. The following chart, using data from FY13 in comparison to the FY15 proposal, compare travel spending and the amount of substantial debate instances for UH students between programs.¹



By travelling to larger and more competitive tournaments, the Cost per Substantial Debate Instance in the proposed program creates more opportunities for a broader array of University of Houston Students.

¹ Substantial Debate Instances are competitions where there are more than 10 competitors entered in the division. Average number of competitors at Policy Debate competitions – 50 (for tournaments attended by UH in 2012-2013).



The expense for the salaries for existing coaching staff and operational expenses that are not directly in support of students are part of existing funding that supports the Policy Debate program in the Honors College.

2014-2015 STRATEGIC GOALS

COMPETITIVE EXCELLENCE

The Debate & Advocacy program will seek to achieve competitive success at National and regional Debate & Forensics tournaments. These competitive opportunities will be available for students at all levels of debate or speech experience. By building upon the strong academic foundation available to University of Houston students, the program will aim to consistently succeed at the highest competitive levels, particularly against Top-Tier Research Universities.

Action Steps

Expand Competitive Opportunities.

The Debate & Advocacy program will facilitate substantial debate instances for UH students (approximately 1000).

Succeed in competition.

Qualify to compete at the National Debate Tournament (only 78 teams qualify each year) and the American Forensics Association National Tournament.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

The co-curricular partnership of academic and student programs will enable students to succeed in the classes and after graduation. Additionally, the program will create active student engagement across the campus by prompting students to engage in intellectual questions, debates and discussion.

Action Steps

Public debates.

A series of public debates on issues of local, regional and national topics, will allow UH students to engage important questions and think reflexively about their communities.

Academic support.

Co-curricular programming and support for debate and speech will expand civic engagement and advocacy resources for University of Houston Students.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Debate & Speech program would focus community engagement on areas of student and staff expertise – debate education. Debate is a particularly important skill for many students, particularly those at-risk.² The Houston Urban Debate League (HUDL) has worked to build a growing non-profit education resource for students in HISD. Debate outreach from the University of Houston will support debate as a premier pathway to college in partnership with the HUDL.

*In our urban high schools, **competitive debate is one of the great equalizers** of educational opportunity. Urban debate leagues help ensure that teens in the inner-city get the same exposure to academic rigor as teens in wealthy suburban schools—where competitive debate teams have long been a fixture.*

Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education
April 12, 2012

Action Steps

Support HUDL.

The Debate & Advocacy program will create community-engaged learning opportunities for UH students with the HUDL.

² Participants in an Urban Debate League have been shown to perform better on the ACT and have higher high-school GPAs. Mezuk, Briana. 2013. “New Findings from the Chicago Debate League Study” NAUDL National Championships presentation, Forthcoming via *personal communication*

RELATIONSHIP TO UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON & DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS STRATEGIC INITIATIVES³

NATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

These goals aim to create opportunities for competitive success for all UH students. In particular, to compete against at the highest levels of debate, speech and forensics competition.

STUDENT SUCCESS

Competitive success and academic achievement are mutually reinforcing goals. Competition provides positive incentives for interdisciplinary student engagement in highly complex academic issues.

COMMUNITY ADVANCEMENT

Support for local and regional debate and speech programs will allow UH to again be a leader in debate education, access and innovation.

GLOBAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Debate & Speech in both content and form facilitate a cosmopolitan engagement with issues relevant to a global community. For instance, the Policy Debate team in 2013 is competing in an innovative public debate competition sponsored by the French Embassy to the US on the question of cultural goods and services. Debate & Speech help students engage with these complex and important questions.

POLICY DEBATE & STUDENT SUCCESS

“Debaters...were **significantly stronger academically** through much higher rates of professional internships while in college, acceptance to graduate programs, and job offers within their chosen majors at graduation.”⁴

“Tournament debating substantially increases the intensity of **the active learning experience**. The drive to win increases the intensity of the discussion, while the attention to detail and the need to think reflexively about the argument and ideas at hand required to do so are all amplified through the competitive lens.”⁵

³ N.B. At the presentation for the SFAC members, we will demonstrate a continued congruence with the Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services strategic plan and the new organization.

⁴ Rogers, J. E. (2002). Longitudinal outcome assessment for forensics: Does participation in intercollegiate, competitive forensics contribute to measurable differences in positive student outcomes? *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*, 23, 1-27

⁵ O'Donnell, T. (2010). A Rationale for Intercollegiate Debate in the Twenty-first Century. *Navigating Opportunity: Policy Debate in the 21st Century*, ed. Loudon, A. 27.

FUNDING SOURCES

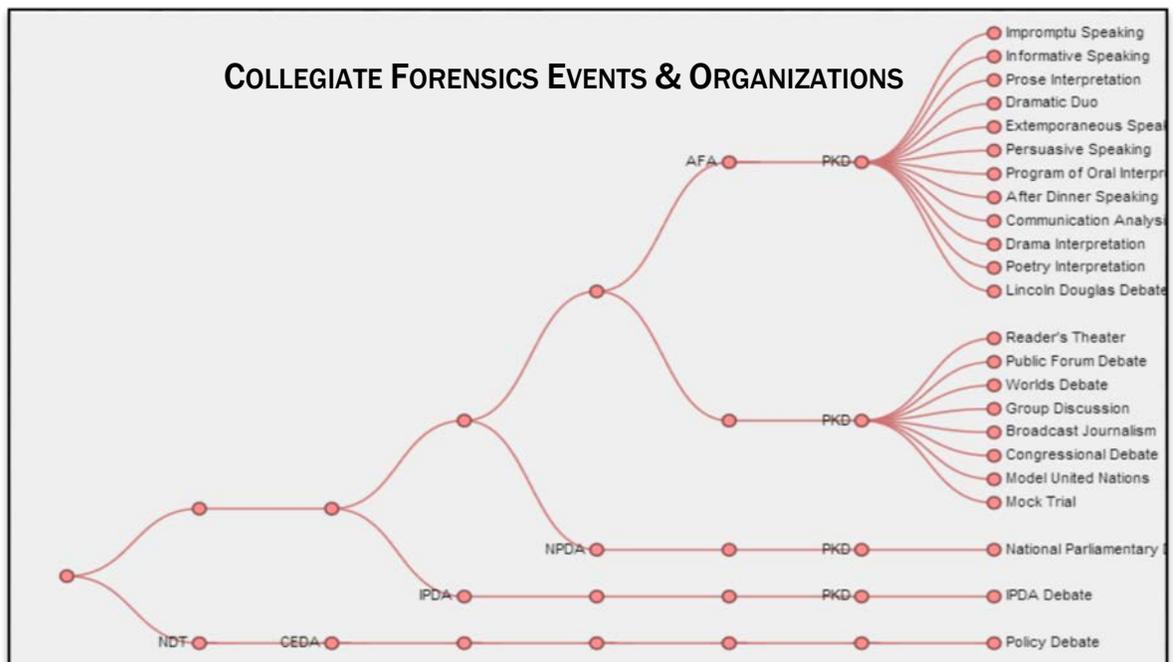
Support for administration, faculty salaries, some travel expenses, and operational expenses that do not directly support student activities will be funded through Academic Affairs and the Honors College.⁶

Support through the Division of Advancement will provide an opportunity to develop future financial support through corporate partnerships and private giving. The merger of the two programs under the leadership of the Honors College will establish a new synergy around speech and debate at the University which will create numerous new giving opportunities for alumni and friends of speech and debate.

DUPLICATION OF SERVICES OR ACTIVITIES

This merger of the two programs not only leverages the historical success and current strength of both programs, but reduces the overhead expenses of two similar programs while providing greater support for competitive and academic excellence. This partnership will foster collaboration and innovation to provide University of Houston students with the best access to competitive opportunities, academic engagement and community programs.

While the both Policy Debate and Speech (individual events) fit into the broad category of Forensics, there are substantial differences between the competitions.



⁶ While some functions will be in an academic unit, the program falls within the MAPP definition of student services: 11.03.01: Student services, under this statute, cover textbook rentals; recreational activities; health, hospital, and other medical services; group hospitalization; intramural and intercollegiate athletics; artists and lecture series and other cultural entertainment; [debating and oratorical activities](#); student publications; student government; student fees advisory committees; student transportation services; and any other student activities and services specifically authorized and approved by the Board, except those authorized by any other section of the Education Code.

National Debate Tournament Policy Debate is the oldest, most prestigious and most competitive debate event in the country. The following chart demonstrates the peer group differential between schools competing in Policy Debate as opposed to Individual Events (AFA).

