

Debaters win consistently

By ROY FUGITT
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If you want smooth talkers—we've got 'em. And they've got the trophies to prove it. The UK debate team won over 80 trophies at invitational tournaments last year, said Dr. J. W. Patterson, debate team coach and speech professor. But despite its success, the team has received little recognition. Patterson estimates that in his four years as coach the squad has won over 250 awards and trophies. Last year's team finished third in one national tournament and in the runner-up position at the other. This gave UK the distinction of being the only university in the nation to place in the top three positions of both national tournaments. UK also received an individual award at one of the national competitions, the Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha National Tournament early last year.

Gil Skillman, A&S junior, won the individual speaker award at that tournament. During the current season, Skillman and his new partner, Gerry Oberst, A&S senior, took top debate honors at the UK National Round Robin tournament in October, and at the University of Georgia National Round Robin in November. They also won at the West Invitational Tournament several weeks ago in California.

Skillman's partner last year, Mary Thompson, was enticed by the Wake Forest coach to enroll at that university by what Patterson jokingly calls "the ultimate extreme to get a good debater." Thompson married the coach and is presently debating for Wake Forest.

The other top UK debating teams are Guy Campisano, A&S sophomore, and David Donovan, A&S junior, and the team of David Howard, A&S sophomore, and John McClung, A&S junior.

In competition earlier this month, Campisano and Donovan went undefeated through eight straight rounds to win the Drury College Annual Round Robin Debates in Springfield, Mo.

They then proceeded to win second place in the Southwest Missouri University tournament also held in Springfield. The Kentucky pair dropped the final debate to the University of Kansas.

While other UK teams were making their presence known in California and Missouri, Howard and McClung ventured to Nashville and reached the quarter-finals of the annual Vanderbilt University Tournament before falling to Emory University in a 2-1 decision.

When asked about the team's lack of recognition, Skillman, considered by many to be the top debater in the nation, said he has become accustomed to anonymity. He qualified that by adding that he sometimes resents being unknown when he gets into a

but is geared to a specific audience. "Debating is on the intellectual level," he said.

With a strong winning tradition UK maintains its position among the five debating schools in the nation competing against such schools as Harvard, Kansas and Southern California. Patterson and his squad praise the advantages of their debating experience.

Patterson said the chief value of the competition is the promotion of "intelligent, effective and responsible advocacy," while allowing the students to become acquainted with some of the best minds in the country.

He said debate teaches students to "analyze and research, which sharpens their skills in reflective thinking."

The students, on the other hand, expressed a more practical view of debate's advantages. McClung and Howard, who both plan to attend law school, said debate research techniques are very beneficial, especially when writing papers for class.

Skillman and Oberst said they have benefited from their increased research ability—they know where to look for information. The ability to organize and use their research material to analyze problems and arguments as well as generally knowing how to work under pressure are also gained from debate, they said.

Because of their experience, Skillman and Oberst are able to see fallacies in political speeches and in television commercials, they added.

Competition teaches a person to better express himself which would be advantageous when encountering a prospective employer, Skillman and Oberst said.

Much practice and travel is required of debaters and this taxes their academic and social life. Although they said they enjoy debating, the six find they are always behind in class and must rely heavily on the notes of other students.

McClung, a political science major, said some instructors do not like students missing classes and have tried to get McClung and others to quit the squad.

Skillman suffered a "traumatic experience" in December when he received his first "B." He does not, however, feel debating was the reason he received the grade. The economic major has an impressive 3.97 grade point average.

Despite all the travel, the team said debating is not as glamorous as it seems. The squad has experienced many all-night drives in crowded cars filled with luggage and eight passengers. They also know about strange towns with the ole "two blocks down and turn left" routine.

UK's next competition will be in early February against Boston College. The team will also compete against Harvard this semester.

Skillman is optimistic about UK's chances at the national tournaments in March and April and his chances for winning the individual debate award again.

"We have already won more pre-national tournaments this season than in any recent year," Skillman said.