

Two-time debate champ ready to move on

By Beth McKenzie
Staff Writer

Paul Skiermont could talk his way out of anything. And for good reason.

Skiermont, a political science senior, was chosen as the top national speaker at the National Debate Tournament for the second year in a row, which was no small feat.

This year's tournament, held at the West Georgia College in Carrollton, Ga., marked only the second time in the tournament's 49-year history that the same person has claimed the title back to back.

As a member of UK's debate team, he is one of a select few to represent the University in various competitions throughout the year.

But Skiermont is no stranger to competition.

He began his debate career after joining the speech team during his sophomore year of high school. He knew some of the people involved with debate and knew they did a lot of traveling.

"It was really exciting," Skiermont said. "We got to travel the country — Dallas, Atlanta."

It was after he won the national high school debate competition that he met professor J.W. Patter-

son, UK's debate coach.

"I owe a great deal to him for recruiting me," Skiermont said. "I would never have come to UK without that."

The two spent a lot of time corresponding and, facing competition from big name debate schools like Wake Forest, Patterson sold Skiermont on UK.

"I'm glad I didn't go on the academic reputations and first impressions," Skiermont said.

He is quick to add that UK does have a long line of successful debaters, even though some may not look at UK as being tough academically.

Those people expect schools like Harvard to win, he said — so when you're beating those schools, it's fun to represent UK.

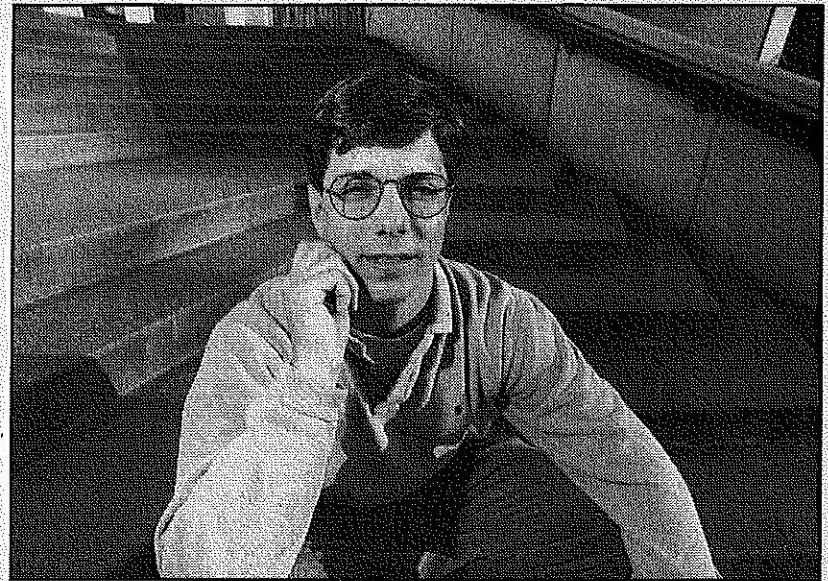
A winning record doesn't hurt, either.

Skiermont has won a number of honors over the past four years, Patterson said.

"Obviously, based on his record, I think few would dispute him as being the top speaker in the nation."

Instead of taking 15 credit hours in addition to debating, Skiermont chose to carry a lighter load and graduate next fall.

Although this is his last year on the team, Skiermont still won't



GREG EANS *Kernel staff*

FAST TALKER *Top debater Paul Skiermont will graduate from UK in the fall and begin work on a new challenge — becoming a trial lawyer.*

find himself with much free time, even after graduation.

His next goal is to make a name for himself as a trial attorney.

Big on his list of law school prospects is Baylor University.

"They offer a scholarship with the number one criteria being debate experience," he said, "so I think I stand a pretty good chance at it."

Skiermont's departure from

debate force Patterson to rebuild the team next year.

But when Skiermont first arrived at UK, the debate team was going through the same adjustment period.

Maybe that's a plus for next year's crop.

"Right off as freshmen, we were thrown to the wolves, competing in major tournaments," Skiermont said.