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Speak Out Dallas: Empowering Youth through Rhetoric

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Speak Out Dallas
Empowering Youth through Rhetoric

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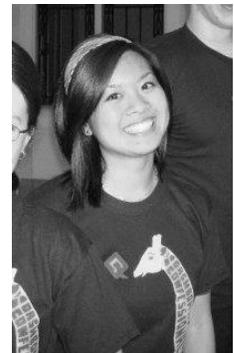
PARTICIPANTS, PARTNERS, AND SPONSORS

Nicholas Elledge, Class of 2011, President's Scholar, 3.91 GPA
Majors: Political Science, Economics, Public Policy, Spanish
Minor: Latin American Studies
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- Author of The Art of Interpretation, a 180 page speech curriculum 2007
- American Legion Oratorical Contest National Champion 2006
- NCFCA National Overall Sweepstakes Speech Champion, 2005
- Traveled as an intern with The Institute for Cultural Communicators for 18 weeks in fall 2007 with 11 other interns teaching thousands of 12-18 year olds at four-day speech and debate conferences
- SOAR Knoxville inner-city speech teacher 2006
- Guardian Speech and Debate Club, Senior coach 2004-2006
- Volunteer teacher and organizer of a ten week Beginning Public Speaking Class in 2006
- SMU Mock Trial, Vice President and Award Winner, 2007-2009

Elizabeth Tsai, Class of 2011, Former SMU President's Scholar
UT Austin Business Honors, Project Administrative Assistant
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- 1st place Business Today International Business Conference Case Competition, Nov. 2008
- SMU and UT Austin Elected Student Senator
- TFA State Debate Finalist
- Vice President of Plano Senior Speech Team
- People to People International Diplomacy Model U.N. group leader

Ben Voth, Faculty Sponsor
SMU CCPA Associate Professor and Director of Forensics and Debate

Ruth Gold, Community Sponsor
Communication Applications Teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School

Teresa Moon, *Communicators Advantage Project, Curriculum Development Partner*

Nathan Brown, *National Media Alliance, Video, Graphic, and Media Design Partner*

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Our team strongly believes that effective communication and critical thinking are the most important skills youth can possess. Our goal is to better equip teachers with the resources they need to make speech and communication an engaging and fun learning activity. Our plan is to develop supplementary curriculum, host a regional teachers' conference, sponsor a local debate seminar, and create a website to aid teachers as they empower youth to effectively express themselves.

PROBLEMS (OR OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT)

Statistically, the number one factor in a student's ability to get a job is communication. Communication skills, critical thinking, and leadership -- from interpersonal communication, to college and job interviews, to commanding the public platform -- allow students to maximize their existing talents and succeed in their pursuits. Yet there exists a commonly acknowledged lack of fundamental communication skills among youth. As such, students are left ill equipped and unprepared for success and more importantly cannot effect positive change in their community. As Rene Martinez, former director of parent and student engagement in DISD, told us, "No one disputes that your problem exists. It definitely does." Though this skill can empower and break cycles of underachievement, students are only required to take ½ credit of speech and the subject is not TAKS tested. Due to recent RIF policies, some speech teachers have been cut altogether.

In conjunction with this general need, there exist specific problems that permeate the school system. They affect not just one classroom but all.

One major shortcoming is the speech curriculum, described as devoid of activities, outdated, and difficult to use. As was bluntly put by Woodrow Wilson's speech teacher Ruth Gold, "Our curriculum is really bad." Varying from district to district in quality, she went on to explain that DISD's curriculum is one of the worst she has seen. It is not only decades old, it is largely a conglomeration of readings and fill in the blank worksheets, more a joke to students than an challenge to step outside their boxes.

Additionally, all teachers are required to obtain professional development hours. In DISD, all teachers must acquire twenty-one by Thanksgiving break. However, seminars and conferences are usually expensive and require costly travel and lodging. For speech teachers it is difficult to find a communications related conference or seminar, often leaving them without any option but to attend an unhelpful or off-topic event merely to meet their professional development requirement. Professional development hours for communications teachers regularly have high cost and little benefit.

Impeditive difficulties also exist to the Dallas Urban Debate Alliance and the Urban Debate League (UDL). Robert Hearne at Woodrow Wilson HS took responsibility for the debate team after the old debate coach was "RIFed". However, Rob has no formal experience in the structure and technique of debate, especially the mechanics of the National Forensics League (NFL) in which UDL schools compete. Many teachers like Robert wants to help students learn debate and critical thinking but lack a formal groundwork to help their students. He said, "If you could use your grant money to do some sort of one day conference or training session it would really help us out."

PLAN OF ACTION

Our plan is to develop a curriculum, host a teachers' conference, hold a small debate seminar, and create a website.

➤ Supplementary Curriculum

The curriculum will cover a gamut of topics ranging from oratory to limited preparation speaking to interviewing to literary interpretation. It will be designed to fill shortcoming in the current curriculum by including fun and engaging activities and an adjustable range of difficulty to fit student's needs. Each lesson will include discussion questions, activities, readings, and homework, all to be used at the teacher's discretion. As speech is not a TAKS tested subject, the teachers have flexibility over the content and method of their teaching. We provide our curriculum as supplementary, meaning the teachers are free to use as much of it as they please without need of official approval by the district.

In order to better understand the challenges faced by Dallas speech teachers, Nick Elledge will be teaching several speech classes from our new curriculum between March and May at Woodrow Wilson High School.

➤ Conference

The Teacher's Conference will be hosted in early August at SMU for teachers of speech and communication in the DFW area. This conference will be of little or no cost to the teachers and will count as 7 professional development hours. The teachers will receive a spiral bound and CD copy of the new supplemental curriculum and will benefit from our keynote speaker, breakout sessions, workshops, and student presenters. A conference questionnaire will provide valuable feedback and research information for further program development.

We do not anticipate attendance will be an issue at the conference. Teachers are required to receive professional development hours, our conference takes place in early August when most teachers are available, and it will be of little or no cost. Our guest speaker considerations are currently Rick Rigsby and Teresa Moon. Our marketing will include letters, e-mails, phone calls, our website and promotional video, and word of mouth. We also anticipate that hosting at SMU will give the conference a non-regional dimension, drawing teachers from all over the metroplex. Teachers generally submit PD hours to the school principal; to help expedite this process we are currently working with Kristina McCalip for automatic district-wide PD hour approval in DISD schools.

➤ Website

After the conference, teachers will be given a login to our website on which they may network and discuss ideas with other teachers through a forum and download electronic copies of and updates to the curriculum. We will also have a private feedback section on our website for praise or constructive criticism. Teachers who attended the conference may share their login key to activate an account for other teachers who did not attend the conference. As the website will be the public face of our organization, we have apportioned a large part of our budget to ensure its professionalism. It will be used for advertising and media, transactions, distribution and downloads, and as a forum.

➤ Debate Seminar

We will also host a local debate seminar with Kason Kimberley from the Dallas Urban Debate Alliance for coaches and participants of the Urban Debate League in Dallas. We will be working with Dr. Ben Voth, our faculty sponsor and coach of the SMU debate team, and the Greenhill High School debate coach Aaron Timmons. The seminar will be small in focus, pertaining only to DISD schools with an estimated 20-60 participants. Attendees will receive a syllabus with the days class outlines as well as materials provided by our speakers. We will focus on Team Policy debate and speak briefly on Lincoln-Douglas and Forum debate.

If our project is successful, our long term growth goals include going national with our low-cost curriculum and teacher network as well as lobbying the Texas legislature for more comprehensive training in rhetoric and communication in Texas schools. These projects have not been included in our budget as they are tentative and could likely be paid for by curriculum sales, a small membership fee, or sponsorships and donations.

TIMELINE OF ACTIVITY

The project has been in planning and development since January 2008 at which time it received a planning grant of \$1,500.

Curriculum

- February Purchase curriculum development resources, begin planning and content phase
- March Begin writing phase
- March-April Teach 4-8 class periods at Woodrow Wilson High School
- May Cover design, continue writing
- June First revision and editing phase, send for review
- July Second editing phase, solicit recommendations, printing, upload to website

Conference

- March Contact Speakers, reserve facility, obtain district PD approval
- April Design conference materials
- May-July Marketing and advertising, press release
- July Purchase administrative supplies
- August Host conference, post conference photos, videos and testimonials

Website

- February Begin website construction, concept design
- March Contract bid, graphic and web design
- April Website launched with dates posted
- May Develop and upload promotional video
- June-July Advertising and marketing
- August Open forum, open teacher accounts, upload conference media and testimonials

Debate Seminar

- March Meet with coaches, schedule location and date, select instructors
- April-May Advertising and marketing, finalize topics and syllabi, host seminar

ESTIMATED BUDGET

Website ~990

- Webhost - \$20
- Web design - \$750 minimum (estimates from designquote.net and nationalmediaalliance.net)
- Graphic designer - \$100
- Promotional Video - \$120

Curriculum ~1075

- Editor - \$300
- Cover Design - \$50
- Run of 100 copies at \$6 each - \$600
- Reference Resources for Writing - \$125

Teacher’s Conference ~2,600

- Facility rental - \$500
- Keynote speaker fee and airfare - \$1,300
- Print and registration materials - \$200
- Conference photographer and videographer- \$300
- Screen printed materials \$300

Debate Seminar ~ 640

- Hospitality and refreshments – \$30
- Speakers Gifts - \$100
- Photographer - \$100
- Facility est. - \$250
- Syllabi (print and bind) - \$140
- Print and registration materials - \$20

Discretionary Postage and Travel - \$50

990
1075
2600
640
50
\$5,355 ¹

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF OUR PROGRAM

¹ Funds over \$5,000 will be raised through a small fee for conference attendance and/or curriculum download

We expect our project to be a tremendous encouragement and help to speech, communications, and debate teachers in the DFW area. The curriculum will give them a much needed resource to better reach and teach students, our conference will enthuse and inspire, our debate seminar will educate and inform, and our website will network teachers to share their ideas and struggles.

There are several demonstrable indicators of success we look to fulfill including number of curriculum copies downloaded and distributed, number of conference and seminar attendees, questionnaire feedback from the conference, written recommendations, and video testimonials. Other less tangible results include improved graduation and retention rates, testing scores, college attendance, career options, community leadership, and scholarships.

Ultimately our goal is to equip young communicators to become leaders in their communities. Communication builds confidence, leadership, motivation, critical thinking, and hope for the future. It creates positive peer role models and is a worthwhile and fun school activity. In short, we know that this skill empowers.

Our project has tremendous potential for growth and continuation beyond summer 2009. Once the initial groundwork is laid, we can offer a similar conference annually, expand to support the Dallas Urban Debate Alliance, draw media and government attention to the need for more than ½ credit of required speech in our schools, and offer our resources to teachers in other parts of the country. As W.B. Yeats put it, we are not filling a pail, we are lighting a fire. We want to make a change that sparks the next minds that make more change; this project is our plan for doing so.