

Smith High School Debate

Congratulations! You are getting this letter because one of your teachers has recommended you to join the debate team at Smith this year. The Smith debate team competes in the Boston Debate League (BDL). Here are some quick facts about the students who compete in urban debate leagues like the BDL:

- Grade point averages rise by 8-10% **EACH YEAR** of debating
- Literacy scores improve 25% more than non-debaters after **ONE** year of participation
- High School graduation rates are near 100%
- College matriculation rates between 77-91%
- UDL students receive millions in college scholarships every year.

Plus, Debate is a ton of fun. Here are some quotes from students who have competed in debate:

- “Because of debate, I have friends from all over the place that I see frequently. It’s great.”
- “It’s fun to crush other teams.”
- “Debate gives you the opportunity to improve your speaking skills.”
- “The skills you learn in debate help you in all your classes.”
- “Debate is not only an opportunity for fun and education, but it prepares you for college and the world beyond.”
- “Debate improved my self-confidence and self-esteem. It helped me learn that I am smart.”
- “Being on the debate team helps your arguing skills- great for future use on parents.”

Debate is not like other team sports or activities. You will work with a partner of your choosing as a two-person team. You will compete at five debate tournaments during the year where you will generally compete in five “rounds.” Each round consists of two two-person teams from different schools debating in front of a judge. At times you will be able to choose the topic, at other times your opponents will choose. At the end of the five rounds, the teams with the best records will go on to the playoffs. From there it becomes a single elimination tournament. You keep debating until you lose, or are the only team left.

We hope you will join the team. Our first practice will be held Monday, September 15th in room 204. You should come by just to see if debate is something you would be interested in. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions at ssmith@boston.k12.ma.us or 617-424-7000 x 8014 or by stopping by my room-204 anytime.

Stan Stark
Smith Debate Team Coach
Smith History Teacher

ENDORSEMENTS OF URBAN DEBATE

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

-Martin Luther King Jr.

"We have put more kids in college through debate -- on scholarships -- than all of our athletic programs combined. Debate is interactive. It puts learning back into the hands of these children, and they have something with the same drive that comes with athletics, only it's academic. The vehicle of debate, and the competition aspect of it engages kids to a point where they want to improve themselves. They improve their reading skills, research skills and their writing skills. This affects their success in all of their other academic areas." Angelo Brooks, Police Officer and Director of Debate, Walbrook Uniformed Services Academy.

"Those four years in debate were the educational foundation of everything I did...that is, 90% of the intellectual capacity that I operate with today. Fordham [University] for college, Fordham for my Ph.D., Harvard for law school—all of that is the other 10%." John Sexton, President, New York University

"But I will tell you that, right there in the prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was as exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been. Standing up there, the faces looking up at me, the things in my head coming out of my mouth, while my brain searched for the next best thing to follow what I was saying, and if I could sway them to my side...then I had won the debate – once my feet got wet, I was gone on debating. Whichever side of the selected subject was assigned to me, I'd track down and study everything I could find on it. I'd put myself in my opponent's place and decide how I'd try to win if I had the other side; and then I'd figure a way to knock down those points." (Malcolm X, in Branham)

"Imagine graduating from high school each year millions of underprivileged teenagers with the ability to articulate their needs, the needs of others, and the ability to offer solutions. I am convinced that someone would be forced to listen to them." Ed Lee, Director of Debate, University of Alabama

"I think debating in high school and college a most valuable training whether for politics, the law, business, or for service on community committees such as the PTA and the League of Women Voters. A good debater must not only study the material in support of his own case, but he must also, of course, thoroughly analyze the expected arguments of his opponent." JFK

"We will soon see, thanks in large part to urban debate, an increasing number of talented, hard-working, and highly successful minority students matriculating at law schools and entering the legal profession." Laurence Tribe, Harvard Law School Professor

"Students in the (Urban Debate League) program learn what it's like to be on a team, a lesson much better learned in the classroom than in a gang. They learn to see both sides of an issue, which helps them de-fuse potentially dangerous situations. Debaters learn how to identify a good argument and reject a bad one, so they're better equipped to deal with the hazards of negative peer pressure... One of the students in the UDL said, 'It just feels good. It makes you feel really good about yourself.'" Laura Bush, First Lady of the United States

Evidence of Urban Debate's Effectiveness

Virtually every study ever conducted on the outcome of debate concludes that such activities have benefits for society that transcend the laboratory of high school or intercollegiate debate. A few of the more recurrent findings in the literature suggest:

- Debate improves educational performance. Students report that debate provides them with "a heightened capacity to hang in and struggle — often in the face of disappointment and defeat." Participation in debate positively correlates with significant gains in cumulative grade point averages and higher critical thinking scores.
- Debate reduces violence. Important new research is demonstrating that a significant correlation exists between the increased verbal skills associated with debate participation and decreased physical violence toward both peers and domestic relations.
- Debate enhances social development. Students report that they feel more confident, more self-assured, and more aware of their strengths and assets through participation in debate. Studies in the field suggest that debate "gives students better social skills and causes them to place more value on their social relationships."
- Debate improves schools and communities. Competitive debate programs lead to increased demands for AP classes in inner city schools. Debate Across the Curriculum programs, designed to use debate as an instructional method across a variety of academic disciplines, offer teachers interactive curricular materials and new sources of professional development, while spreading many of the benefits of competitive debate to new students. Urban debaters tend to devote their skills to improving the communities they live in.
- Debate strengthens communication skills. Students who participate in debate report that they are more inclined to speak up and express their point of view because they feel they have something useful to say and because they feel more articulate in saying it. Studies examining debaters in comparison to their peers indicate that debaters are "significantly better at employing the three communication skills (analysis, delivery, and organization)."
- Debate enhances knowledge of important social issues. Students enthusiastically credit debate with their awareness of and interest in issues involving society at large. Studies of debate outcomes describe the experience as "an introduction to the social sciences" and conclude "it is also a way to reconnect students to public life if they have been overcome by feelings of alienation."
- Recent topics researched and discussed by high school debaters for an entire year include: national education reform, U.S. policy on weapons of mass destruction, United Nations peacekeeping operations, and federal policy toward environmental preservation.