

SIUE Speech and Debate Team Competes Virtually

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE – The expanded virtual world normalized by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is presenting new opportunities for participation in otherwise hard to access events. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Speech and Debate Team is among the organizations adapting to conditions and engaging in synchronous and asynchronous tournaments featuring nationwide competition.

In early November, the team competed in an event hosted by Casper College in Casper, Wyo., with other virtual competitions still to come. By participating in such

intercollegiate competitions, the team seeks to develop critical thinking, public speaking and writing skills while representing SIUE throughout the country.

“This activity helps improve students’ skills in public speaking, presentation, writing, research and argumentation,” said faculty advisor Nick Niemerg, assistant director of constituent relations for the SIUE Foundation. “At some point in everyone’s professional lives, they will have to talk to someone else. Being part of the Speech and Debate Team helps individuals develop the communication of their thoughts, ideas and opinions effectively and concisely.”

Team captain Ally Moulton, of Chatham, and Brayden Allen, of Granite City, represented SIUE at Casper College’s synchronous competition by showcasing prepared speeches in different categories.

Moulton, a senior majoring in English secondary education with a minor in applied communication studies, joined the team after transferring to SIUE, bringing prior experience from her previous college and high school.

She performed a prose interpretation based on a short story and an informative speech over the history of Polari, a language historically used by the LGBTQ community. Although still growing accustomed to the current virtual format of speech competitions, Moulton appreciated the opportunity to compete with students across the country.

“The virtual aspect allows interesting opportunities for visual aids, such as easily sending informative links to those watching,” said Moulton. “It’s also more convenient than driving to in-person tournaments, and allows us to compete against schools normally too far away for travel.”

Moulton aspires to teach abroad and become a high school English teacher and speech coach.

Allen, a sophomore psychology major, began participating in speech and debate events in fifth grade to express himself and join a community. During the virtual competition, he performed in the dramatic interpretation and prose interpretation categories, placing sixth in dramatic interpretation.

“Both of these events involve taking a monologue and performing it to a crowd, which is typically in front of you,” said Allen. “Moving to an online platform forced us to find new ways to keep the audience engaged. I find it similar to what teachers are going through. We were never trained to do this online, so we’re now having to go through trial and error to figure out how to keep the energy we had last season.”

Allen hopes to take both of his performances to this year's national competition. After graduating with his bachelor's, he aspires to earn a master's in psychology and work as a speech coach throughout his studies.

Niemerg noted a unique connection to this particular virtual event. Casper College's Speech and Debate team is led by SIUE alumnus Doug Hall. Hall earned a master's in interpersonal communication from the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Applied Communication Studies in 2013. Upon hearing SIUE's interest in his college's competition, Hall welcomed the team's participation.

SIUE's Speech and Debate Team is currently looking for new members with all experience levels. For more information, interested students should contact Niemerg at nniemer@siue.edu or Moulton at almoult@siue.edu.

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