

Accentuating the Affirmative

Debate Team's Record Speaks For Itself

CHERIN POOVEY

What has the competitiveness of a basketball game, the quickness of hockey, the drama of tennis and the intellectual spontaneity of a chess match? According to Allan Loudon, the answer is "debate."

Debate? A structured form of argumentation that guarantees fairness? "You could compare it to almost any sport," said Loudon, director of forensics and instructor in the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts. "It's competition; we scout our opponents and we recruit talent. The excitement is certainly there." Maybe debaters don't have to worry about uniforms or mud in their cleats. But like athletes, they must be dedicated, hungry, hard-working. They must be willing to drive long hours to attend tournaments, get back late, get to class early, prepare for the next tournament, and still keep up with studies. Then there is the mental preparation. Debaters must spend hours researching and organizing material, learning it, remembering it, and developing it into arguments.

A debate squad victory seldom gets the publicity with which athletic accomplishments are favored. So what attracts students to debate?

"They have the satisfaction of knowing they are matching wits with some of the brightest students in the country," said Loudon. Debate matures and assures, enhances self-confidence and brings a new aspect to the student's education.

Debate has long been a Wake Forest tradition, said Loudon. "We found trophies dated 1904," he said, "when they must have been riding horses from place to place. Back then public policy clashes served

as a primary form of entertainment." Through the years, the squad has grown in numbers and stature: the 1940 team won the national championship in oratory. Prominent names such as Eugene Worrell and Franklin Shirley, who started the Department of Speech Communication, are no strangers to a trophy case whose contents were considerably supplemented by the squad's 1987-88 performance.

Last season was heavy on the affirmative: Gloria Cabada, a politics major from New York who was graduated in May, won the Top Speaker trophy at the National Debate Tourna-

ment held in March. That, said Loudon, is equivalent to being recognized as the country's best college debater. Ms. Cabada will continue to work with the 1988-89 team as an assistant coach while she pursues a master's degree. Ms. Cabada and her partner, junior Alan Coverstone (Peoria, IL) finished fifth in the country. Another Wake Forest team of junior Judd Kimball (Spokane, WA) and sophomore Ted Tyson (Boston, MA) also qualified for competition in the national tournament, tying for ninth. At the end of the season, the overall squad was ranked ninth nationally; their ranking one year ago? Fortieth.



SUSAN MULLALLY CLARK

Members of the nationally ranked debate team include Gloria Cabada (foreground), winner of the Top Speaker Trophy; and (left to right) Alan Coverstone, Ted Tyson, Coach Ross Smith, Director Allan Loudon and Judd Kimball.

Louden attributes much of the team's improvement and success to Ross Smith, a former Wake Forest debater from 1976-78 who became debate coach three years ago.

"This is one of the few areas in which Wake Forest

competes nationally in an academic realm. Given the school's philosophy and its emphasis on the liberal arts, it's natural that we would excel in it," Loudon said.

Smith attributes last season's success to the talent and leadership of Gloria

Cabada, the enthusiasm of the younger debaters, and to the fact that the entire squad competed in some of the nation's toughest tournaments. "We don't just go to ones where we can win," he said. "We go to the most difficult; that's the best way to learn and improve."

Recent accomplishments have brought some long-awaited spotlight to a debate program that has been consistently recognized as one of the best in the country for a university its size. In addition to fielding competitive teams (last season 12 Deacon teams participated in 22 major tournaments), Wake Forest hosts the country's largest national varsity debate tournament each fall and conducts a high school debate workshop each summer that draws students from across the country. Many of those top debaters, Loudon said, choose Wake Forest over such forces as Northwestern, Baylor and Michigan.

"We have a high profile nationally among high schools," he said. "A significant number of applicants learn about Wake Forest through debate."

Just what does it take to be a successful debater? Primarily, says Loudon, it takes tenacity. You've got to want to win and be willing to work long hours to achieve that goal. Secondly, it takes someone with excellent research skills who is able to assimilate large amounts of information in a relatively brief time. Thirdly, it takes knowledge of strategy: debaters must

be quick thinkers who anticipate the competition's logic. Not surprisingly, it takes the ability to speak confidently and persuasively.

Whatever debate demands from students, it gives much in return. "It broadens the education phenomenally of those involved," he said.

"It makes them more open-minded, because they realize there are dozens of perspectives for every situation. Debaters can find endless amounts of information on a topic when someone else would say, 'There is none.' These are students who are not easily intimidated, not easily taken in," he said.

Debaters also learn self-discipline, if they don't already have it. "It's interesting that debaters are also some of the students who have the highest grades," he said. "They know they have to get the work done and they do it."

As far as this season's squad, one point isn't arguable: success. Their goal is to finish first in the country. "We could do it—it will be tough, but it's possible," Loudon said. "We have some debaters who have what it takes."

Smith agrees. The squad has a winning combination of youth and experience, he said, and the next two years in particular look very promising. The squad loses only Cabada; other top debaters return along with several outstanding freshmen, Loudon said. "We should be tough," he said. "They've got to want it because it asks an awful lot."