



August 21, 2020

Dear colleagues,

The closure of campuses nationwide and the cancellation of several national championship tournaments for competitive debate and speech minimized the visibility of debate and speech programs this year. On top of this, the budgetary outlook academic years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 for many colleges and universities is bleak, potentially placing many programs at risk of being cancelled or severely underfunded. Two programs already have been cut this season for budgetary reasons while others have seen severe cuts in budget.

With limited or no in-person tournaments and campus events in the Fall, programs need to increase their campus visibility this season to demonstrate the value they offer their university. One way to easily gain exposure this coming academic year is to host a [DebateWatch](#) event. Started in 1996, DebateWatch was created to promote voter education by bringing people together to watch presidential debates and have people discuss their thoughts about the issues and topics raised in the debates.

While many programs already host DebateWatch events, the [American Forensic Association](#) (AFA) is partnering with the [Commission on Presidential Debates](#) (CPD) to widely promote debate and speech programs' DebateWatch events. The aim is to have as many programs as possible around the country host DebateWatches to promote the value of competitive debate and speech activities. As a community, we can come together in this extraordinary time to promote the value of what we do.

Our coordinated effort will help with promotion of all the events happening across the country. Another benefit is that by participating and recording the discussion groups, we will have a national data set for several potential presidential debate research projects, which could aid research being conducted by you, your students, or colleagues at your university. More details regarding human research review approval and how to record breakout discussion sections will be sent in a follow up communication.

Hosting a DebateWatch event is rather easy and cost-free. First, select the date(s) for your watch event. The three presidential debates are: Tuesday, September 29 (hosted by University of Norte Dame), Thursday, October 15 (townhall format at the University of Miami), and Thursday, October 22 (Belmont University). The vice-presidential debate is October 7 (University of Utah). All debates begin at 9 pm and run for 90 minutes.

Second, register with the CPD at <https://www.debates.org/debatewatch/debatewatch2020-registration/>. There is no cost to register.

Third, begin planning your event. Although several campuses will be closed this Fall, a DebateWatch can be hosted through Zoom. We recommend working with your university computer and information technology staff to create a security registration system that requires a university email or identification number. Depending on the size of your event, you should consider having breakout rooms in Zoom with

staff or volunteers moderating the discussions. The CPD offers guidelines and questions to ask of the participants <https://www.debates.org/debatewatch/hosting-a-debatewatch/>.

We are developing an advisory committee consisting of experienced DebateWatch hosts to assist you with any questions you might. Look for additional communication from us on our new social media pages on Twitter (@AmericanForens1) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/AmericanForensicAssoc>).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



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Co-signed,

American Debate Association

American Forensic Association

Committee on International Discussion and Debate (NCA)

Cross Examination Debate Association

National Debate Tournament

National Educational Debate Association

National Forensic Association

National Parliamentary Debate Association

National Speech Tournament