March 23, 2021

Dear colleagues,

Periodically, we meet to discuss issues that confront intercollegiate speech and debate activities, organizations, and professionals. While the speech community meets regularly for this purpose, the debate community has met periodically. It has been 12 years since Wake Forest University hosted the third National Debate Development Conference in 2009.

In that time, much has changed. Major shifts have occurred in assessment requirements, program participation, coaching positions, funding and resources, questions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and technology, to name a few areas. Within the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our activity unlike any recent development. It has raised questions about the value of online and face-to-face competition, justification of program resources and staffing, tournament structure, and event formats. Severe university budget issues related to COVID-19 will compound all these problems in the years ahead. While our current circumstances filled with many risks, there are several opportunities for us to confront these matters in an informed and ambitious manner.

We are organizing a fourth National Debate Development Conference for **June 4-6, 2021** in a virtual format hosted on Classrooms.Cloud. The conference theme is, "Reimagining the Future of Intercollegiate Debate: Pedagogy, Practice, and Sustainability." Dr. David Cram Helwich and the University of Minnesota have graciously offered to host the event and it is **free of charge to attend and participate**. The American Forensic Association, American Debate Association, Cross Examination Debate Association, the National Debate Tournament, and the Universities of Kentucky and Minnesota are co-sponsoring. We have reached out to other organizations, so our list of co-sponsors may expand.

We plan to produce several deliverables from the event. Through Wayne State University Press, we will release a low-cost or open source proceeding, like what Dr. Al Louden produced in 2009. We also plan to produce program advocacy and development materials and other best practices documents that will be shared with the co-sponsoring organizations. Lastly, we hope to have some recorded archiving of alumni stories to help with program advocacy.

We have four guiding principles for the work of this conference:
- Promote accessibility, diversity, and inclusivity in debate.
- Make debate integral in the university's mission.
- Achieve retention and growth in intercollegiate debate programs.

- Maximize in-person and remote debating to increase accessibility and inclusion while maintaining the educational and interpersonal benefits of in-person debate.

Much like the previous NDDC, we will organize the conference around several working groups, with some interspersed speakers and panels about relevant topics. A tentative daily schedule can be found in this letter.

When you register, please indicate which working groups you are willing to volunteer to help, or indicate that you are interested in the Director Development track. You can participate in more than one group. The expectation is that these groups will begin work around May 7 and will work on tasks until the conference. There will be meeting times at the conference, but these are to finalize work and translate that material into reports and other final material that can be distributed. Think of this work like the CEDA topic committee and its pre-meeting working groups. We have a tentative list of working groups at the end of this letter. Working groups will be finalized around April 16 and we ask that you **sign up for working groups and register for the conference no later than April 23**: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1-4hGaVy8N-jo00lgl7iVG8NEntX6-WoE33KxNYCmMr8/viewform?ts=60538021&edit_requested=true

We have a conference page at the AFA website. It will be updated with new information and documents as we finalize the conference: https://www.americanforensicsassoc.org/debate-development-conference/

We hope that you will join us in June and volunteer to help in the workgroups. This is an important time for us to reflect on what we have learned in the last year and decade and to enter the future on a stronger foundation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either of us.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kelly Young
Wayne State University
President, American Forensic Association
Kelly.young@wayne.edu

Dr. David Cram Helwich
University of Minnesota
Director of Forensics
helwi012@umn.edu

Tentative Schedule

Friday	PDT	MDT	CDT	EDT
Opening Session	7-8p	8-9a	9-10a	10-11a
Workgroup 1	8-10a	9-11a	10a-12p	11a-1p
Panel	10a-11a	11a-12p	12p-1p	1p-2p
Break	11a-12p	12-1p	1-2p	2-3p
Workgroup 2	12-2p	1p-3p	2p-4p	3p-5p
Panel	2-3p	3-4p	4-5p	5-6p
Break	3-5p	4-6p	5-7p	6-8p
Social Events	5-7p	6-8p	7-9p	8-10p
Saturday				
Workgroup 1	7-10a	8-11a	9a-12p	10a-1p
Panel	10-11a	11a-12p	12-1p	1-2p
Break	11a-12p	12-1p	1-2p	2-3p
Workgroup 2	12-3p	1-4p	2-5p	3-6p
Panel	3-4p	4-5p	5-6p	6-7p
Break	4-5p	5-6p	6-7p	7-8p
Social Events	5-7p	6-8p	7-9p	8-10p
Sunday				
Workgroup 1	7-9a	8-10a	9-11a	10a-12p
Workgroup 2	9-11a	10a-12p	11a-1p	12-2p
Break	11a-12p	12-1p	1-2p	2-3p
Workgroup Presentations	12-3p	1-4p	2-5p	3-6p
Closing Session	3-4p	4-5p	5-6p	6-7p

Fourth National Debate Development Conference, June 4-6, 2021
Tentative Working Group and Presentation List

Workgroups Areas Summary
- Assessment and Research: promotion for directors/program-wide and data collection
- Audience / marketing policy debate
- Director Development (how-to course for directors)
- Format
- Governance
- Institutional Relations
- Program Development
- Student Instruction
- Technology & Participation
- Topics

Expanded Workgroup Areas
- Program and Promotion Assessment and data collection
- Audience—"marketing" policy debate
- Director Skills Development (how-to course for directors, with sessions led by veteran directors and alumni)
  - Alumni cultivation
  - Assistant coach training / acculturation
  - Budget management
  - Crisis communication
  - Program advocacy (internal)
  - Public relations and social media management
  - Recruiting
  - Team culture
- Format
  - Competition's role in debate
  - Judging
    - MPJ / judge selection
    - Professional development / training
    - Written feedback
  - Rate of delivery
  - Role of coaches in argument production
  - Space for "shorter round" models (6-2-4, etc.)
- Governance
  - Calendars
  - Consolidation / staffing
  - Divisions (Open/D1, D2, etc.)
  - Documentation of program decline
  - Incentivizing "non-elite" competition—regional tournaments, low-engagement competition options

- o Organization schemes (regions v. conferences / leagues)
- o Student-led program-specific issues
- Institutional Relations
- Program Development
  - o Advocacy materials
  - o Program-in-a-box
- Student Instruction
  - o Novice curriculum & retention
  - o JV curriculum & retention
  - o Debate skills in broader social and political contexts
- Technology & Participation
  - o Best practices
    - In-round practices / conduct
    - Platforms
    - Technology (and access)
  - o Participation
    - Tech-enabled competition formats
    - Tech-enabled league formats
    - Recruiting online-only start-up programs
    - Incorporating classroom debaters
- Debate Topics
  - o Content
    - Rotation issues
    - Type (including breaking the "states cp" stranglehold on domestic topics)
  - o Timeline
  - o Vetting / selection process

Whole-Conference Panel / Presentation Ideas
- Alumni cultivation
- Crisis-as-opportunity—how bad is it, what can we do
- Crisis communication
- Institutionalization within your college / university
- Online 2020/21—lessons learned
- Program advocacy (internal)