

FY26 SFAC One Time Request - A

Speech & Debate

10/20/2025

Rationale

This request represents a direct one-to-one continuation of our request from the last fiscal year. In the start of FY24 the program hit a capacity wall, with both the Policy Debate team and the Mock Trial program having to turn students away and shortening their recruitment cycles. Maintaining the size of the program along with its expansion was proving impossible and placed a Herculean strain on resources and attention.

The increased budget granted from SFAC for the past two years has allowed for the program to resume a pathway towards growth, to cement successes of past organizational choices, and to plan for a sustainable future. With our partnerships with external bodies like Harris County Department of Education's CASE, our commitment to the Honors Debate Workshop, and the continued hosting of major events like the 2023 Cross Examination Debate Association's national championship, the 2025 American Debate Association National Tournament, and the 2026 National Debate Tournament we are in the midst of being able to transition to relying less on SFAC funds and more on externally raised funds. Relying on SFAC funds for continued stability is a crucial part of this transition, and we ask for one more year of our funding at the increased level.

We have consolidated the request here because it allows for the easiest and most succinct transmission of the nature of our request to the SFAC members.

Expense	Amount	Comment
Coaching – Legal Debate	\$10,000	Graduate Assistantship for Legal Debate
Travel – Legal Debate	\$40,000	Support for an expanded Legal Debate travel schedule
Coaching – Policy Debate	\$30,000	Coaching support for a full-spectrum Policy Debate Program
Travel – Policy Debate	\$90,000	Sufficient funding for a complete travel season for the Policy Debate Program at all levels of debate
Travel—Model Debate	\$40,000	Travel support for the Model Debate Program to have an effective travel season
Event Hosting Budget	\$25,000	Budgetary support to supplement hosting national level tournaments
Administrative Fee	\$15,000	
Total	\$250,000	

Coaching—Legal Debate

This position is currently being developed with the UH Law Center to expand support for the Moot Court program which will be competing at its first tournaments this semester. This offers the best path for certainty for our students and for institutionalized success going forward.

Coaching—Policy Debate

Policy Debate is an intensely demanding activity that requires active coaching and education. UH Debate currently has a roster of three part-time assistant coaches in addition to its Director and Assistant Director, but all are paid well below market standard despite the work being rigorous and intense. Increasing this support would allow for the program to stabilize its coaching relationships and hire additional coaches, which is a sine qua non for its ability to continue to operate at the level of competition and participation that it currently does.

Travel Expenses

Travel budgeting depends on a number of variables that change depending on the level of competition, distance, and many other factors. On average, costs are lower for smaller regional tournaments and larger nationally competitive tournaments tend to be further away. The majority of this money would go toward the cost of transporting and housing additional team members who might currently be denied the opportunity for travel next year if budget allocations remain the same. This would also cover the costs of tournament registration, hiring judges to cover tournament obligations (which is quickly becoming one of the largest cost centers for a team of our size), and whatever additional tournament costs would accompany. The following chart gives an example of a standard tournament outlay:

Example Debate Tournament Expense Outlay

Category	Days	Rate	Units	Sub Total
Lodging	3	\$114.00	8	\$2,736.00
Lodging - On Drive	1	\$85.00	8	\$680.00
Food – Students	4	\$15.00	24	\$1,440.00
Food – Coaches			2	\$120.00
Fees		\$60.00	24	\$1,440.00
Judging		\$300.00	4	\$1,200.00
Gas				\$250.00
Ground Transportation				\$600.00
			Total	\$8,476.00

Event Hosting

The UH Speech & Debate program has been able to host multiple successful events over the past years, including a regular season Policy Debate tournament, the 2023 CEDA National Championship, and multiple High School tournaments. While each event is rewarding to the program it comes with a trade-off in terms of budget and participation. Further, attracting competitors to the UH Campus from around the country is difficult without offering a high standard of hosting in terms of food, spaces, awards, and other intangible factors. Having a supplementary part of the budget dedicated just to costs associated with hosting tournaments would not just remove the trade-offs with travel but allow for a guarantee that all events hosted by the University of Houston would operate at the highest possible standards, attracting future attendance and success.