

Editors Column

Northwood High's Speech & Debate: A Top-Ranked Team



Audrey Park
Grade 11
Northwood High School



Speech and Debate Tournaments at the high school level provide both discipline and bonding. [Source: Amber Chih]

Debate is the cornerstone of speculation and progress. Its existence allows for the collective advancement of politics, culture, and philosophy in modern society. As a result, speech and debate tournaments at the college or high school level are no longer monotonous or juvenile feats. Such a fact is apparent to the Irvine Unified School District, especially to the active members of Northwood

High School's School-Sponsored Speech and Debate (S&D) Club.

Throughout the years, many schools have been able to integrate the practice into a quantifiable and academically recognized activity by allowing students to introduce it as a club. For instance, at Northwood High School's own S&D Club, all types of students from Freshmen to Seniors and STEM majors to future Law prac-

tioners gather every Thursday to get on the same page about participating in future tournaments. While it may be difficult to include all of the details about the largest student-led team in Orange County in one article, it is paramount to discuss its competition-preparation strategies and student experiences for current or future generations of S&D enthusiasts to reference.

One may ask, 'How can the activities of a S&D team be managed between the lunch periods of a school day?' Well, members will know that if it was not for sacrificing hours outside school, many of the team's milestones would not be possible. As a matter of fact, many participants of the bigger tournaments are expected to join after-school meetings, Zoom calls, and summer sessions. For example, the summer sessions may only be a few weeks long, but they require frequent or mandatory attendance after registration, and are no more interactive than a regular summer class, despite being mainly student-run. The classes provide guidance on the foundations of S&D, which are not covered during regular school meetings. Coupled with

after-school meetings that discuss the focus of each tournament, S&D at Northwood must be experienced through several different channels throughout the year. While the frequency of these meetings varies by occasion and semester, one thing is clear: S&D is nothing without a time commitment.

Despite all these time-related challenges, many students consider S&D to be a significant part of their academic profile and identity. For instance, Amber Chih, a 10th grade member of the S&D team, states how, "When I first realized that speech and debate wasn't just about arguing, but rather about clear communication and persuasive speaking, I knew that I had to try it out. My first tournament was kind of scary, since I was expected to speak a 10-minute, original oratory with no script, addressing a societal issue. But the community genuinely makes it so much better and not scary at all; everyone is so supportive."

You heard it: S&D is not just a school activity, but an opportunity to gauge personal achievement. So think about joining your school clubs today.

Student Reporter

Showing Appreciation to the Sheriffs



Chaewon Wi
Grade 11
New Covenant Academy

How often do we set aside time to show appreciation and share heartwarming affirmations to those protecting us? There are a lot of people who look over us, such as parents, teachers, sheriffs, and the police. In December, I had a chance to express my gratitude to the sheriffs for their hard work and resilience in protecting the community. My friends and I volunteered to write letters and pack hand warmers alongside chocolate pies to show our appreciation for their discipline and commitment to their jobs during the cold winter season.

Sheriffs take care of the security of the city and civil documents, all while helping people when they are in need of assistance. We often see police cars or law enforcement who do jobs similar to sheriffs on the streets or in restaurants; but it's not easy to go up to them and show gratefulness for their service. For me, it was challenging to talk to these members of law enforcement because of the language barrier. As a Korean immigrant, I always thought that I wasn't able to express my gratitude towards the policemen or sheriffs who work



The sheriffs holding the gifts of hand warmers, choco pies, and letters that my friends and I packed to show our appreciation for their hard work. [Source: Julie Yoo]

hard to provide protection for the city because I'm hamstrung by language. However, I had to stir up the courage to call the front desk to introduce myself and my friends and ask if we could drop off the gifts we made. Through

this experience, I was able to show love and express how much they are appreciated in the city by handing them a gift and words of kindness. I learned that sometimes, my fear could be overcome with a little courage.

The sheriffs were nice and seemed touched and happy by the gifts we had prepared and spent some time getting to know us by introducing themselves. They offered to take a picture together and called more of their co-workers for a group photo. It was a heart-warming experience that I will never forget because it gave me a positive energy to see the officers' happy and touched. The officers' smiles proved that it was worth our effort and time to pack gifts for them and visit them to show how grateful we are to have them in the city. I hope that it also gave positive energy to the officers, letting them know that they are remembered and appreciated every day.

I believe that we should show more appreciation and gratitude to the people around us because a small act of service could mean a lot to them. Some people might hesitate to say good words to the people who protect them because of initial nerves, however, the thought behind the word will be recognized by the people who are receiving it. I hope this article will instill courage to show gratitude and appreciation to the people around us.

Student Reporter

An Unforgettable Trip to the Dominican Republic



Aspen Lee
Grade 10
Santa Fe Christian Schools

For most high school students, a week off from school means getting to take a break from homework and pause life for a moment. Despite the academic recess, Santa Fe Christian School also provided fifteen students with the opportunity of a lifetime, giving them a chance to travel to the Dominican Republic to serve in this third-world country, replacing a week from school. From walking around Santo Domingo to learn about the history of the DR, painting houses and churches for over 7 hours a day, to tutoring English at the Freedom Christian School, the female-only group flew across the Atlantic Ocean to spend ten days in the foreign country in company with one another.

Following their arrival at Santo Domingo International Airport, the group immediately drove to San Pedro de Macorís, a large city towards the coast of the country, and were warmly met by the missionaries who would provide housing for them the entire week. Contrary to their initial impression, the fifteen SFC students were met with long days in the Dominican heat, painting the missionary's pillars, walls, roof, and gates as it had been years since they had been last cared for. Although the group was unable to leave the house for their first two days, the painting and reconstruction allowed for space



SFC student, Aspen Lee, greeting and helping the Freedom Christian School students in the morning. [Source: Kara Grace]

to connect with one another and experience gratitude for all they had back home.

However, the majority of their trip was spent at a Christian school in the middle of many bateyes, or impoverished communities, in Ramón Santana. With 357 students, Pre-K to 11th grade, Freedom International Ministries began their school in 2011 in the streets and old churches of Lima with around 20 three-year-old students. In hopes of furthering them academically, the original group of pastors expanded their ministry to accommodate as many children from the bateyes as they could. Spreading the truth

that they are loved by Christ is an ultimate goal of the ministry, in addition to teaching them English to expand their future careers into something beyond working in the sugarcane fields and being restricted from dreaming as they otherwise would be. On a weekly basis, Freedom Christian School receives groups from all across the world to expand their campus through construction, to teach the students through games and activities, and to display God's unconditional love for them through the people who come to serve.

The group from Santa Fe Christian Schools came to the campus and was welcomed with



On the last day of tutoring, fourth grade Freedom Christian School students all came together with SFC students to take one last picture before parting ways. [Source: Mia Murphy]

limitless love and joy from all of the students, ages three to eighteen. One SFC student, Mia Murphy, described this trip as "truly life-changing, as [she] learned that you don't have to know someone to love them and that joy isn't dependent on having much. The kids [they] tutored at Freedom Christian Schools were so kind and full of life, showing [each of the American students] the beauty of pure happiness and connection." Disconnected from their busy lives in San Diego, all fifteen students from SFC were able to realize what truly matters in life, loving one another despite their circumstances.

Student Reporter

The Hidden Cost of Overloading on AP Classes

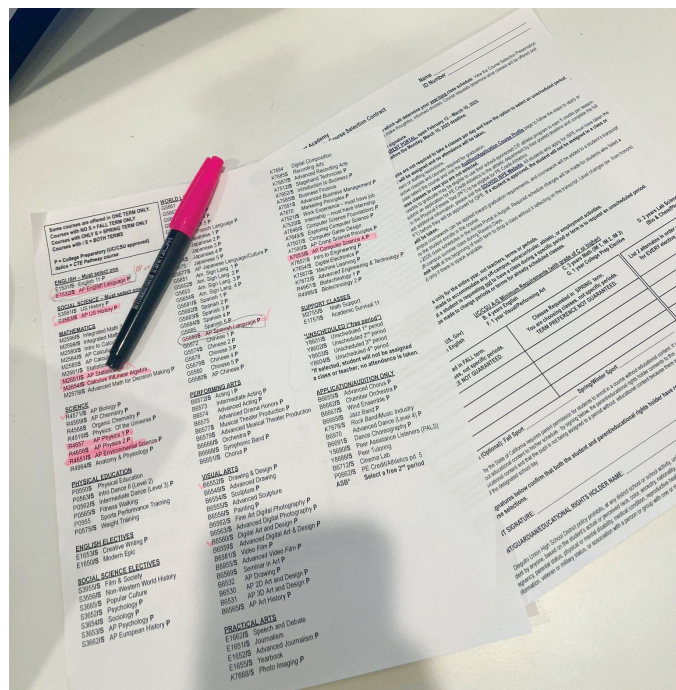


Joseph Kwak
Grade 10
Canyon Crest Academy

It's that time of the year again. Students are selecting courses for the next school year, and many are choosing AP classes—not because they're interested in the class, but because they believe it will look good on their transcript. While AP classes can show academic excellence, taking too many without considering personal interest can lead to burn-out, stress, and declining grades.

The pressure to take many AP classes comes from the thought that the more advanced classes a student takes, the better the application will look to colleges. But this is not exactly true. According to College Board, AP classes can strengthen an application, but they should align with a student's strengths and passions. When students fill their schedules with AP classes, they may find themselves overwhelmed by work from a subject that they don't enjoy, leading to a decrease in motivation and decline of their GPA. Instead of taking challenging classes solely to enhance your transcript, students can explore alternative classes that they find interesting. You can find out about different classes by going to a course fair or talking to your counselor. Speaking with other students or your teachers can help you find classes that are manageable and exciting.

Beyond academics, excessive



Although you may be tempted to take all AP courses to make your college apps look good, remember, that's not always the best idea. [Source: Author, Joseph Kwak]

coursework can have an effect on a student's mental health. Huiyu Kim, a high school sophomore at Canyon Crest Academy, described his experience with AP classes: "I am taking 5 AP classes this year in hopes of boosting my GPA and trying to impress colleges, but it went the other way. My grades were declining and I could bare-

ly get any sleep because of the overwhelming workload." Like Huiyu said, students often sacrifice sleep, hobbies, and social interactions just to keep up with the challenging classes. According to the American Psychological Association, high school students experience stress levels that rival those of adults, with academic

pressure being one of the biggest factors.

Studies show that nearly one-third of teenagers struggle with feelings of overwhelm and sadness or depression due to stress. Additionally, over a third frequently experience exhaustion, while almost a quarter have skipped meals as a result of stress.

On the other hand, the students who balance their schedules with courses that they enjoy often perform better and enjoy their high school experience more. Colleges don't just look at the number of AP classes a student takes, but they also value the student's passion and their involvement with the school. Admissions officers prefer students who pursue subjects that they are genuinely interested in and put time into other areas outside of school, such as extracurricular activities or personal projects.

So, as course selection approaches, students should ask themselves: Am I choosing these classes for me, or just for my transcript? Instead of taking every advanced class there is just to impress colleges, students should focus on their passions, strengths, and long-term goals. Finding a balance between academics and personal interest can lead to a more fun and exciting high school experience.

Student Reporter

What I've Learned Selling Girl Scout Cookies



Audrey Choi
Grade 7
The Nueva School

In front of coffee shops and local grocery stores, Girl Scouts set up cookie stands. Arrays of colorful boxes and posters saying "Get your Girl Scout Cookies here!" cover the stands. People line up to purchase and discover the season's cookie line-up. Every year, from January to March, Girls Scouts encourage people to purchase cookies to support their troop. As a Girl Scout myself, I've learned so much from selling cookies and it is an incredibly beneficial experience as a growing child.

Selling Girl Scout cookies has greatly improved my social and communication skills aimed at both strangers and fellow Girl Scouts. Naturally, it's difficult to walk up to strangers on the street and ask them to purchase cookies, yet Girl Scouts are expected to do so. In the beginning, I learned how to talk to adults in a convincing and professional tone. But even now, I grow in my confidence to hone these skills every time I sell cookies. Selling Girl Scout cookies

is also a way to grow my communication skills within my troop. We tell each other what resources we need to make a transaction and what roles we play when selling cookies.

Additionally, Girl Scouts build their experience working with money and, overall, numbers. I had little-to-no experience with calculating or exchanging money, but selling cookies helped build these life-long skills. The Girl Scouts are the ones receiving or giving money to the customer, and becoming comfortable with this inventory-keeping or finance management is incredibly useful later in everyday scenarios. We also have to keep track of how much profit is made in order to make decisions about how we want to spend our profits. As a troop, members learn how to choose between spending or saving, which is beneficial to learn as a child.

Decision making is an incredibly important skill and one that is arguably the most relevant to

everyone's lives, especially to Girl Scouts. Girl Scouts first have to decide where the best location, from a business perspective, for a stand should be. Then, in a split second, they have to decide who they think can be persuaded to buy a box of cookies. Even after selling cookies, Girl Scouts must be able to decide what to do with profits. The profits from selling cookies fund Girl Scouts' trips and other activities that they attend as a troop.

Selling Girl Scout cookies is an extremely beneficial experience for young girls to have in order to build confidence and capability of necessary, life-long skills. In even just a single season of selling cookies, there is so much that a Girl Scout learns. So if you ever run into a troop of Girl Scouts with a cookie stand, don't think of it as buying a box of cookies. Think of it as an opportunity to help guide young girls through their early childhood with a handful of major life lessons, so they can change the world.



A stack of Girl Scout cookie boxes ready to be sold is about more than just the cookies, it's a young girl's path to learning and growth. [Source: Author, Audrey Choi]

Student Reporter

Glamping in El Capitan Canyon: An Alternative to Traditional



Paisley Park
Grade 9
Los Angeles County High School for the Arts



Llamas gazing at the ocean view in the llama and goat farm, just a short hike from the cabins in El Capitan Canyon. [Source: Author, Paisley Park]

Imagine waking up to the pleasant sound of birds chirping and the ambience of a trickling creek in the comfort of a plush bed beneath a sturdy roof. This is glamping, the luxurious alternative to traditional camping. If you are tired of the hassle of camping or the expenses of

traveling abroad, glamping in Santa Barbara County might be a fun local escape, especially for families and larger groups. Budget-friendly, scenic, and with lots to do, Santa Barbara is a gem along the California coast.

Welcome to El Capitan Canyon Resort; a major glamping

ground between the coast of Santa Barbara and El Capitan Creek just two hours north of Los Angeles. Though it offers standard amenities like Wi-Fi and kitchenettes, this resort sets itself apart from the standard hotel. With picturesque views of the ocean, 2,500 acres of parkland, and various hiking trails, it's the definition of glamorous camping. Visitors can choose from housing options like the Safari Tents, the many Cedar Cabins, and Adventure Yurts, depending on the size of the party. My family opted for a cabin, with bunk beds to fit the five of us, but we're excited to try the novel yurts next time. Each of these accommodations includes a firepit and private picnic table for cozy nights with homemade grilled dining, or warming up with friends and family amid nighttime nature. The site is near attractions like state beaches with great surfing breaks, Mission Santa Barbara, and Downtown Santa Barbara; don't miss the local creamery, McConnells, for delicious ice cream. This massive resort offers endless activities such as wine tastings, free beach cruiser bicycle rentals, weekly canyon concerts, and other seasonal events.

Known in the past as the Chumash village Ajuilashmu,

El Capitan Canyon is filled with tree groves and a coursing creek. This county is mountainous, and you can also find peace in the dreamy atmosphere of the woody locale. A big feature of this resort is the Canyon Market, a short walk down from your cabin. There you can order food and purchase necessities like sunscreen, flip-flops, and hats, but also luxuries like instant ramen, wine, and ice cream, just to name a few. My family bought lunch but cooked our own dinner while enjoying the outdoor fire and evening ambience. This resort provides numerous conveniences for visitors, but also maintains the essence of a cozy camping trip. There is a pool as well as a trail leading to a llama and goat farm, too. Guests can take this short trek to the friendly animals, and if they're lucky, feed them! When we visited the farm, it was filled with newborn baby sheep.

El Capitan Canyon Resort is a great option for an easy short (or long) escape from busy everyday life. Glamping here provides everything you need to have a good time outdoors and a coastal adventure, essentially an elevated camping experience. You can be sure it will be a restorative trip for all.