

March 4, 2003

Dear Editor:

The University of Massachusetts Policy Debate Team achieved major success at the East Regional Championships for the country's largest debate association this past weekend, February 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup>. The UMass Policy Debate Team is a fascinating part of our school's history and current landscape, yet its existence, struggles, and fascinating history are relatively unknown on campus.

To that end, we have prepared this informational press release. In this packet please find a description of our recent achievements which we believe warrant press, as well as a brief description of what debate is and an abridged version of the history of debate at UMass.

Please feel free to contact our officers and to attend one of our meetings to learn more about our team.

Sincerely,

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## PRESS RELEASE

### Our Story:

UMass performed extremely well at the CEDA East Regional Championships, held this past weekend at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) is the largest policy debate association in the country. UMass sent two teams, one in the novice division and one in the junior varsity division.

Our novice team of Alex Ambroz and Randy Brueckner achieved a record of **5-1** during the six preliminary rounds, breaking as the **3<sup>rd</sup> seed** overall into out-rounds before losing in the **quarterfinals**. Alex received the award for **Top Speaker Overall in the novice division**. (For more information on the structure of debate and an explanation of terms please see the section titled "What is Debate?".)

Our JV team of Cailin Campbell and David Ryan also faired well, going 4-2 in prelims to break as the **4<sup>th</sup> seed** into out-rounds. Cailin and David made it all the way to JV finals and finished in **2<sup>nd</sup> place overall**. David also received an award for being the **8<sup>th</sup> Speaker Overall** in the JV division.

The most exciting award, though, was that the secret debate society of the east, SAMBA (the Society Advocating More and Better Argumentation), named UMass the **CEDA East Debate Program of the Year**, along with fellow CEDA East newcomer Western Connecticut.

While these accomplishments are impressive on their own, they even more impressive when considering the obstacles the team has had to overcome in the last few years. Our team was **founded only 3 years ago**, and has made giant strides in that time. Additionally and perhaps most notably, we have achieved this success despite being **entirely student-run**. For nearly all programs we compete against, debate isn't merely some student activity; it is a major part of their institution's competition with other schools. No school we have debated against or heard about is entirely student-run like we are. While some have little funding, all at the very least have coaches who are either faculty or graduated former debaters. At school's with the biggest programs, debate is the equivalent of a sport; complete with debate scholarships, endowed professors whose full-time job is to coach, assistant coaches, secretaries, and extremely large travel budgets. For all these reasons, **the success of our program should be taken note of on our home campus, as it has been in the debate community at large.**

### **The Team Reborn:**

Although UMass previously had a strong debate program, by the late 1990's no team was in existence. As fate would have it, the program was poised for resurgence in Fall 2000. Mariellen Jewers, a junior transfer student who had debated with the University of Vermont (one of the largest and most well-funded programs in the East), and Molly Jane Layton, a sophomore who had debated in a league for home-schoolers in high school, decided to start a team, unaware of the history which preceded them.

While initial interest was great, the numbers quickly dwindled as many people backed off from the work associated with starting a new team, and from the work of debate itself. The active membership for that first year was four: Mariellen, Molly, junior Erin O'Brien (who had debated for 4 years in high school) and freshman David Ryan (an enthusiastic newcomer). Nearly all of that year was spent training and trying to establish the team on campus: registering as an RSO and obtaining some of the funding necessary to join CEDA so we could compete. This process was complicated by the SGA meltdown that year, and the team was not recognized as an RSO until the end of the Spring 2001 semester.

Since that time we have slowly been growing as a team. From the initial group of four we have grown to a team of twelve strong. Each year, we participate in more tournaments and with greater success. We are also receiving more recognition as a group on campus. Many people have helped us along the way, including our alumni who provided financial support, members of the CEDA East community who have been boundless in their encouragement and kindness, and the people in the Campus Activities Office, who have been a saving grace.

### **What is debate?**

While there are many types of debate, our team competes in a style known as policy debate, which (especially at the collegiate level) is considered the most prestigious. Policy debate is extended topic; that is, it centers on a single resolution that is debated for a whole year. The resolution is always a proposition of policy; that is, it is always of the form "the United States Federal Government should [do something]." The debate is also switch-side debating, meaning teams must debate both in support of and against the resolution. Finally, the debate is also evidence-based, meaning it centers on research and preparation, rather than extemporaneous speaking.

Actual debates take place in rounds at tournaments held both regionally and nationally throughout the year. A round takes place between two teams (from different schools) each with two members. One team affirms (or debates for) the resolution, while the other negates (or debates against) it. The teams follow a structured series of speeches and cross-examination periods, with judges determining a winner at the end of the round. A normal tournament consists of six preliminary rounds, with the best advancing into single-elimination bracket-based "out-rounds" to determine the overall winner of the tournament. Most tournaments include novice, junior varsity, and varsity divisions based on experience. In addition to team awards, individuals are recognized through speaker awards that are independent of win-loss record.

### **A Brief History of Debate at UMass**

Debate at UMass was founded in 1909. First known as the Forensics Team, the group later changed its name to the Debate Union. In its early days, the team had involvement from many who would go on to become part of UMass lore, including Calvin Coolidge (the then-mayor of

Northampton), and Walter Prince (namesake of the Prince dormitory in Southwest). Though the activity was hampered (as were many things in academia and indeed in many areas of society) during the World Wars, it maintained a presence and some success during those times.

In the late 1950's, debate grew very strong again, becoming instated as a high-level activity within the Department of Speech. In 1966, Ronald Matlon, by far the program's most successful coach, was appointed as director. For the next twenty years UMass was known as a national power: regularly winning tournaments, qualifying for the National Debate Tournament (equivalent to basketball's NCAA tournament), and hosting a variety of debate-related activities.

The late 1970's and early 80's could specifically be known as the program's golden years, as many members of those teams are now program directors and coaches at other schools, and included the pinnacle of the program's competitive success. Matlon, however, left to go to the University of Arizona sometime around 1980, and after that the team slowly began to crumble. First, with Matlon's departure, the Communication Department took away the faculty position that he had held. While pleas from the team convinced the department to hire a series of non-faculty coaches, the program continued to lose momentum. While we don't know exactly how or when the team formally ended, one of our alums (Erin O'Brien, English '02) remembers that UMass was hosting high school debate tournaments up through sometime in the mid-1990's.