

NATIONAL CHAMPION TALKIN' BRONCOS DOMINATE SPEECH AND DEBATE

By Mike Journee

“BOISE STATE DOESN'T LET ANY OTHER TEAMS HAVE TROPHIES.”

Written a few years back, this headline topped a press summary about a weekend tournament dominated by the Talkin' Broncos, Boise State's defending national champion speech and debate team.

Things have not changed much since then. Since 2005, the team has claimed two biennial Pi Kappa Delta national championships and finished as runners-up twice, making them one of the top two teams at each of the last four national championship tournaments. It is a legacy of dedication, hard work, intelligence and tradition built by class after class of brainy, über-competitive mental athletes.

“It's a place to be competitive with skills that very few people have,” says Dr. Manda Hicks, the newly installed director of forensics at Boise State. It was she who wrote the headline a few years back when she was assistant director for the program. Hicks was drawn back this fall to lead this tradition-rich powerhouse after earning her Ph.D. at Bowling Green State University. “Anyone who has been on this team has a strong connection to it and the university,” she says.

Forensics is the technical moniker for making prepared speeches of all types, speaking off-the-cuff on randomly assigned topics and arguing unexpected points of view on short notice. The program is nearly as old as Boise State. Eugene B. Chaffee, the first president of Boise Junior College and later Boise College, founded and coached the school's first debate team in 1937.

“What I like best is the ability to interact with such a large and diverse group of people,” says Josh Watkins, a junior political science major from Boise and this year's club president. He and his teammates have a collective 3.5 GPA, despite the hundreds of hours they dedicate to honing their speeches and traveling to tournaments each year. “All of these people from different cultures come together with open minds. To do this, to argue a topic from any point of view, you have to be open minded and ready to see the value in another's perspective.”

It is that mentality that makes the team a home for people who might otherwise leave college, says Hicks. She speaks from experience. In high school, she had little motivation or direction until she discovered forensics.

“I didn't have a path,” says Hicks. “Every team always has one or two who probably wouldn't be in college if not for this team. Forensics saves academic lives.”



JOHN KELLY

Dr. Manda Hicks

WHAT IS FORENSICS?

Participants can compete in four different types of events at either the novice, junior varsity or varsity levels:

- **DEBATE** – Building an affirmative or oppositional case around an issue or resolution. Debate involves constructing, defending and critiquing arguments. Formats include parliamentary, public or international debate.
- **LIMITED PREP** – Offering a philosophical viewpoint or analysis on an issue or problem with limited preparation time. Events include impromptu and extemporaneous speaking.
- **PLATFORM** – Preparing and performing traditional speeches. Events include persuasive speaking, informative speaking, communication analysis and speaking to entertain.
- **INTERPRETATION** – Editing and performing brief versions of existing literature, including an introduction explaining the significance of the content. Events include poetry, dramatic interpretation, prose, program oral interpretation and duo.



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Talkin' Broncos team members prepare their speeches for a coming tournament.