



The Denver Urban Debate League 2009-10

Since our launch in August of 2008, The Denver Urban Debate League (DUDL) has experienced remarkable success giving Denver High School students the opportunity to learn and achieve through debate. In partnership with Denver Public Schools, we brought debate to **5 Denver high schools** and built a network of **50 high school students** participating in rigorous academic debate for the first time ever. Each student has the support of **one or two experienced educators** at each school trained to coach debate. In the 2009-10 school year, **DUDL plans to expand to serve 6-8 schools, and double our participation numbers.** This year, as we expand to serve more students, we will also be increasing professional development opportunities for our coaches, and enrich our competitions by incorporating two divisions (novice and open) in our competitions.

Full time Executive Director, Jessica Clark, works with teachers and students, and recruits volunteer mentors from the professional community and local colleges to assist the students and their teachers. At our first competition last fall, Gully Stanford from College In Colorado, watched DUDL students in action. Gully seemed truly excited about the program, and he exclaimed on his way to observe his second round of debates, "This thing has legs!" Gully is not alone in his enthusiasm for this valuable new program in Denver's public schools. Both the *Rocky Mountain News* and *Education News Colorado* chronicled the success of DUDL's first year in their publications.

The Denver UDL, like all UDLs nationwide, serves students who face incredible odds at school and at home as they work to graduate from high school and go into college. One young woman who has taken top honors at DUDL competitions, has spent much of her adolescence in and out of different foster homes. She has enjoyed debate as a way to focus her energy in a positive direction. Another DUDL debater works after school to help support his six siblings. Nationally, close to 100% of urban debaters graduate from high school and 75% go on to college. The Denver UDL aims to continue this trend.

The Denver UDL has hosted seven debate tournaments to date. Each tournament has been supported by a local law firm or corporate sponsor, and hosted at a Denver high school. On average, 40 students have participated in each tournament. Students typically compete in 6 preliminary rounds lasting 1 & 1/2 hours each at each tournament.

In this challenging economic climate, DUDL proved to be an excellent investment for Denver Public Schools. The DUDL Advisory Board has been extremely successful bringing corporate partners to the table such as *Qwest Communications*, *Xcel Energy*, and several major law firms including *Baker Hostetler* and *Wheeler Trigg O'Donnell*.

Our corporate partners have supported DUDL not only financially, but with their time, effort and enthusiasm. DUDL's sponsoring organizations have been active participants at League events, demonstrating to our students and the larger community that these organizations are committed to improving meaningful opportunities for Denver's youth. Through these relationships **over 70 volunteers** have served as judges at DUDL competitions, interacting with our students directly and serving as role models and mentors. One of our volunteer mentors had this to say after his first experience with the Denver UDL this past year, "I had a great time and found it to be such a meaningful experience. I spent time in the Judge's Lounge talking to a coach about the brilliant debater I'd just judged, learning that debate is the **ONLY** thing keeping him in school and giving him a

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chance to succeed right now. This Urban Debate League is truly a great endeavor--making the world a better place in a tangible and important way.”

In addition to our many corporate sponsors and community volunteers, the Denver UDL has forged valuable relationships with CollegeInvest, The University of Denver Sturm College of Law, Regis University, Metro State College, The University of Wyoming, and the Colorado Campaign for Inclusive Excellence (CCIE). Each of these organizations have made significant in-kind contributions, including college scholarships, and provided volunteer debate judges and mentors who serve as strong role models for our students.

In addition to the tournament schedule, students have had the opportunity to participate in exciting training events as well. As part of The Colorado Campaign for Inclusive Excellence’s Dream Team project, DUDL debaters have had the opportunity to practice their speaking skills in the courtroom of a U.S. Federal Judge. In January, all of our students were invited guests to one of the largest parliamentary debate competitions in the world, hosted by Regis University, where they were able to spend the day working with distinguished college debate instructors to hone their argumentation skills.

In March, DUDL hosted the Denver City Debate Championships, at The University of Denver Sturm College of Law. The tournament culminated in an awards banquet to celebrate the accomplishments of our outstanding students, with their families and community of supporters. In April the top four (two 2 person teams) debaters (based on the City Championship results) traveled to Chicago to represent the Denver UDL at the Chase Urban Debate National Championship. Both teams delivered an impressive performance in preliminary rounds. **One of the teams, from West High School, won 4 of 6 preliminary debate rounds, qualifying for a coveted position in Octo-Finals in the Open (Varsity) division.** The debaters from West then went on to elimination rounds in the “First-Year Break-Out” division for novice debaters coming from brand-new leagues (St. Louis, Bay Area, Houston, Boston, Los Angeles, Memphis) and **tied for third place “First-Year Team” in the Nation.**

In August 2009, DUDL sponsored the First Annual Denver Summer Debate Institute at Metropolitan State College of Denver, where students and teachers had the opportunity to build their skills and work with respected urban debate educators from around the nation, along with successful college debate assistants, to prepare for the coming year. The DUDL Summer Debate Institute provided students in Denver the kind of quality debate institute experience typically available only to students who have funds available to travel to expensive university institutes.

The Denver UDL wants to make debate available to every student in the Denver metro area. Debate can change the lives of urban students and enrich the communities in which they live. Our continued partnership with Denver Public Schools is the most important factor in making this vision a reality for Denver’s students.

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