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As Directors of Forensics and Directors of Debate at Big 10 institutions, we urge the University of Oregon to sustain its support of a robust and professional program committed to helping students benefit from forensics. As the strongest conference of leading public and private research universities, our institutions recognize that robust forensics programs overseen by dedicated and experienced academics are central to our institutional missions. There is more than a century of evidence that this model is the surest way to ensure students realize the benefits of forensics participation. This is the model at Northwestern, USC, Michigan, Minnesota, MSU, Iowa, Indiana, Nebraska, Purdue, Wisconsin, PSU, and Rutgers. By contrast, a century of evidence demonstrates conclusively that student clubs do not provide quality educational experiences because they lack the professional and rigorous instruction, oversight, and program development necessary for student success.

Aware of the long and successful history of Oregon Forensics, we were thrilled to hear Oregon was joining the Big 10. The Oregon program has a tremendous reputation and long history of excellence, including significant contributions to the history of collegiate forensics. As a cofounder of the Collegiate Advocacy, Research and Debate (CARD) format embraced by a growing number of institutions, the Oregon program plays a leading role in adapting rigorous academic debate to meet the needs of current college students. Oregon is also the leader of the Debate+ innovation that complements the educational experience of debate with enriching educational activities, such as student research conferences, place-based and experiential learning, expert panels, and other opportunities for debaters to refine and apply what they learn at tournaments. The University of Oregon's Forensics program has played an outsize role in intercollegiate debate history in the United States and a notable international role with the "Oregon-Oxford" style of debate still used in several countries in Asia. It has sustained over a century of excellence, owing largely to the university's foresight in investing in a program with strong connections to the institution's academic mission. Dr. Trond Jacobsen, in his 12 years serving as director, has played an important role in sustaining and enhancing that legacy.

The enormous downsides of the "club model" wherein the program operates as a student club without a faculty director are well-established. Without faculty expertise and mentorship, debate clubs tend to reinforce and amplify society's worst "argument" habits, rather than learning the skills needed to transcend and confront them. Clubs also suffer from higher rates of turnover and often severe conduct problems and institutional liability, again owing to the absence of a director invested in program stewardship and culture building across generations of students. In addition, a student-driven club

approach only works to the extent that there are already motivated students on campus. For the benefits of forensics to reach *new* students, a director facilitating the long-term growth and outreach capacity of the program is necessary. Finally, history demonstrates that many student clubs are inequitable, with only the most socioeconomically privileged tending to participate. The comparative advantages of the director model are clear; it is utilized by a majority of Big 10 universities.

Higher education in the United States is at a critical juncture. If higher education is to meet the demands of our moment it will be, in part, because we have prepared students to engage in rigorous academic argumentation and passionate yet civil advocacy and deliberation. Intercollegiate debate and forensics play a critical, if under-recognized, role in meeting that challenge.

We appreciate that the University of Oregon faces budget challenges alongside its Big 10 peers. Facing comparable challenges, our institutions have recognized that robust forensics programs should remain institutional priorities. The tremendous skills strong forensics programs provide to students, and the impact those students have on their peers in classroom discussions, campus leadership, and undergraduate research are profound. Investing in a robust collegiate forensics program provides among the greatest returns of any academic program. This is not idle speculation, but a conclusion validated by our experiences at our institutions and at other leading universities. That conclusion is supported by substantial educational outcomes research demonstrating that participation in robust forensics programs is more strongly associated with student success and professional achievement than essentially any other co-curricular or extracurricular activity. Debaters research and organize information each year at a scale exceeding the typical master's program. The evidence also indicates that forensics leads to stronger academic performance, personal growth, and the capacity to engage in collaborative teamwork yielding positive societal impacts.

We are excited that Oregon Forensics joined the Big 10 and we urge the administration to sustain a forensics program worthy of Oregon's tradition and the social and political needs of this moment. No activity better prepares students to meet these challenges than the acquisition of powerful and enduring skills in advocacy, civil argumentation and debate, collaborative problem-solving, and networking with peers across the country. No co-curricular program better contributes to realizing the mission of leading R1 institutions than an academically rigorous forensics program.

We hope that upon reflection the administration will conclude, as have your peer institutions, that relatively modest investments in a robust collegiate forensics program provides returns for students and the university that are orders of magnitude greater. We look forward to competing against outstanding Oregon scholars at the Big 10 Debate Championships we are planning for the near future.

Sincerely,



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