Mean Green Comet Debate Institute

Middle School

What to Expect

Our staff has worked with high school and middle school students for decades. We pride ourselves on setting the standard for debate training everywhere. With this model, we are dedicated to providing superior summer instruction in competitive speech and debate for middle school students.

Solid Foundations Built with Contemporary Instruction

Competing on today's speech and debate circuits require the ability to blend an understanding of traditional concepts with an eagerness to explore new ideas and strategies.

Our senior teaching staff were selected because of their experience as classroom teachers who demonstrate a commitment to mastering changing practices. Building champions requires low teacher-student ratios, high quality practice sessions, and one-on-one attention. Our classroom sessions are led by 2 or more instructors with a limit of 12 students. Students learn research, writing, and presentation skills and engage in daily practice. Our balanced approach ensures students have the most well-rounded experience possible.

Setting the Standard

As middle school debate continues to grow in the area and around the country, we are proud to be among the first to offer a summer program for competitive debate at the highest level. Our staff has more than a decade of experience directing one of the nation's leading speech and debate workshops. Alumni have enjoyed incredible success at local, regional, and national level competitions at the high school and college levels and have matriculated to some of the finest colleges in the world.

Purposeful lessons allow us to establish high standards targeted at building solid foundations reinforced through practice. Students in competitive debate at the middle school level excel over their peers in areas of critical thinking, close reading of literature, and writing. The confidence gained through participation positively affects students in all areas of their academic and social lives.

Student-Centered Instruction

Students are divided into small “labs” based on their experience which mimic classrooms and which are led by two or more instructors. Our goal is to place our most experienced teachers alongside contemporary champions in each event in order to provide a well-rounded approach to
learning. Instruction is tailored to the individual student with the goal of meeting students where they are and guiding them along their own competitive paths.

**Director's Statement**

As a father, a lifelong educator, and champion debate coach, I know well the importance of participation in speech and debate. In a rapidly changing world, young people require strong analytical and advocacy skills to face tomorrow's challenges. Competitive speech and debate help provide these invaluable skills. More than just trophies, we aim to help students cultivate a voice. Speakers and debaters know this, and that is why many are already busy preparing for the 21-22 season. New obstacles will continue to mount, and our focus as coaches is on ensuring students develop the fortitude and problems solving skills to take those on.

Summer workshop is vital to the success of forensic competitors. A week of debate camp equates to roughly a semester of class time. In days past, these camps were afforded only to the elite, and their weeks of preparation put them far ahead of their opponents. This will continue over the summer, and as most, if not all, workshops move to an online format, debaters, parents, and coaches will make their workshop choices over the next two months. Those students who wish to excel will be attending camp of some kind, and we understand clearly the kind of impact losing instruction will have compared to peers.

There are a few reasons that Mean Green Comet is well equipped to meet this challenge:

- **We can bring enormous institutional support to bear on this unique teaching environment.** Online learning is not easy, and there are real dangers to trusting this process to the ill-equipped or poorly trained. Over the past year, our instructors have logged hundreds of hours of online instruction, and we know well the need to reach students individually. Debaters have been able to engage effectively online. This year's debate season happened virtually, and we have learned valuable lessons about online instruction. We have become accustomed to the online format and will do everything possible to make sure students still receive the highest quality instruction we can provide.

- **We have successfully adapted to online learning.** While the reality of online competition appears to be with us for now, our instructors see this as an opportunity to develop engaging curriculum for Middle School students. Students will practice speaking every day, will be required to be present and on video during direct instruction, and will receive frequent breaks from the screen. Individual class sessions will be brief to capitalize on attention span and will be reinforced with practical application. Students will research in preparation for debates on an assigned topic in the same way they would during a competitive season. We will also require students to work in small groups and 1:1 sessions as often as possible to maximize instructional time and social interaction. An online tournament will conclude our session and give students a chance to compete in this format.

- **We will continue to provide top quality instruction at an affordable price.** Some of the prices workshops are charging for an online format are simply unreasonable. The two most important elements students take away from their workshop experience are social interaction and intensive
practice. Hours of boring lecture are insufficient. Growing competitors need intensive and repeated individualized practice in front of highly qualified teachers. We are making this happen. In our Middle School session alone, the three most experienced teachers together bring five advanced degrees and over 70 years of coaching experience. While we build quick lessons reinforced by activities, practice, and independent research, we will also provide this summer an inordinate amount of reinforced individualized practice.

• **We provide a legacy of workshop experience dedicated to your success.** Practice is most important if it provides a challenge. Because of our experience, community networks, and reputation, we assemble a diverse group of individuals at every level to provide challenging practice against some of the best competition around.

• **We offer superior technical capabilities and support.** We have on staff a full-time member of the University’s technical team who will support us through the duration of the workshop to navigate any technical difficulties our staff or students may encounter. Because we work directly through the Honors College at UTD, we have access to several resources that other camps simply do not – even those who rent dorms and classrooms from the best schools in the world. Trust the safety of instruction delivered through an expensive infrastructure already in place for tens of thousands of students university wide.

• **We will continue to provide top quality.** We have on staff a full-time member of the University’s technical team who will support us through the duration of the workshop to navigate any technical difficulties our staff or students may encounter.

We know that choosing a workshop for 2021 can be difficult. Many parents, students, and coaches will have questions about how the process will work and what is being done to prepare to meet the challenges I have described. We are committed to helping you feel safe in choosing us.

Dr. Jason Sykes
Middle School Division Director
Middle School Schedules 2021

- Sessions will be held daily 12pm – 6pm, including weekends
- More detailed schedules will be released in early June

Session Descriptions

Lincoln Douglas Elite

New for Summer 2021, we are offering a unique opportunity to work for 2 weeks with what we believe to be one of the strongest Middle School faculties available anywhere. Limited enrollment will ensure maximum attention is provided for these select students who should have a demonstrated record of competitive success. Led by Dr. Sykes and supported by expert teachers and debate champions, this lab ensures a rigorous, engaging, and demanding curriculum that will help students develop in ways not offered by other workshops.

Lincoln Douglas Scholars

This program will concentrate exclusively on Lincoln Douglas Debate and aims to be the most rigorous experience available for Middle School LD debaters. This program will serve highly advanced students who have already participated in two years of debate and have already attended two years of summer workshop. The lectures, strategy sessions, and curriculum will not repeat from previous years. Students will read and assess critical theoretical books and essays, will be required to engage in extensive research and progressive argument and case writing, and will learn how to work with advanced policy arguments. Participants in the advanced workshop will compete in a tournament at the end of the session. This program will provide the same curricular goals as a third-year high school policy debate program but is tailored for highly successful Middle School Lincoln Douglas Debaters preparing for a competitive tournament schedule.

Lincoln Douglas

This program will concentrate exclusively on Lincoln Douglas Debate and is suitable for students with little to no experience in the activity. Consistent with our focus on balance, students will focus on building a strong foundation rooted in traditional Lincoln Douglas debate. Students will focus on: case writing, value/criteria, foundations of philosophy, persuasion, and how to work with policy arguments.

Public Forum

This program will concentrate exclusively on Public Forum Debate and is suitable for students who have one or less years of experience in PF debate. Students will receive instruction in Public Forum that will provide a foundation for Middle School tournament success. The program has a focus on balance, with a curriculum that concentrates on speaking, presentation, and delivery at
the same time teaches research techniques, basic argumentation, and case writing. The goal of this session is to help students develop the skills necessary to propel themselves forward in Middle School public forum debate tournaments.

**Middle School Introduction**

This session is designed for middle school students (grades 5-8) interested in gaining an introduction to a broad range of speech & debate events and is designed for students with less than 1 year of experience. Students will work in very low ratios with experienced classroom teachers to discover the world of competitive speech and debate. Consistent with our philosophy, we will focus on helping students develop a love of expressing themselves in a competitive environment while also offering an environment to improve academic skills. Concentrations include speech delivery, organization, and writing. Students will prepare and deliver speeches in Original Oratory, Extemporaneous Speaking, impromptu, Public Forum, and/or Congressional debate. Evening activities will focus on providing students with a break while also exploring concepts important to their development during this week. These introductory sessions are sure to provide a balanced experience that sends students home eager to continue exploring speech and debate during the school year.

**Divisions, Dates and Pricing**

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Division Director

Jason Sykes, Ph.D.

Dr. Sykes is the Director of Speech & Debate at Coppell High School. He has coached debate since 1997, and he worked at several summer institutes before establishing UNT's Mean Green Workshops, which he directed for 12 years before UNT and UTD combined their camp efforts.

Dr. Sykes's students are highly decorated across several events. Their accomplishments include participation in late elimination rounds at major tournaments in Texas and across the country. They have won the TFA State championship in multiple events (4 state titles in the last 3 years), the Glenbrooks, Harvard, and the Tournament of Champions, among others.

Dr. Sykes was inducted into the TFA Hall of Fame in 2020 and won the St. Mark's Acolyte Award in 2006. He served on the TFA Executive Council from 2005 to 2009, the Lone Star NSDA District Committee from 2007 to 2009, and the North Texas Longhorns NSDA District Committee from 2019 to 2021. He is a Life Member of the National Debate Coaches Association.

As an undergraduate, Dr. Sykes competed in CX Debate at the University of North Texas. He won several tournaments and speaker awards and advanced to the elimination rounds of more than two-dozen events, including the National Debate Tournament and four CEDA National Championship tournaments, where he was honored as an All-American and 15th Speaker.

https://debatecamp.utdallas.edu/middle-school/makepdf
Assistant Division Director

Toby Whisenhunt

Director of Debate, Highland Park ISD for 12 years.

Toby has qualified teams for the CX UIL State tournament in 11 of those years, making it to elimination rounds frequently and semifinals once. He also has had a student advance to the semifinals of the UIL State Tournament in Lincoln Douglas. He has qualified numerous teams for the Texas Forensic Association tournament which includes a top speaker and a state championship in Cross Examination. He has qualified teams for the Tournament of Champions in Kentucky and had debaters advance to elimination rounds. He developed and implemented the middle school debate curriculum at Highland Park ISD and regularly fields teams of 7th and 8th graders who successfully compete at high school competitions. His passion for debate, ability to connect with students, and skill of explaining complex concepts in an accessible way makes him an ideal coach for novice and experienced debaters alike.

Division Staff

Dr. Brian Lain
Dr. Brian Lain

Dr. Brian Lain is an Associate Professor and Director of Debate at the University of North Texas (UNT). Dr. Lain has coached students to every college debate and speech national qualifier including:

- The National Debate Tournament (with 2 top speakers and several first-round at large teams),
- The Cross-Examination National Debate Tournament (with a top speaker and a 2nd place team),
- The National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence (with two elimination round participants),
- The National Parliamentary Debate Tournament (several Elimination round teams),
- The Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament (with several showcase speakers),
- The AFA National Speech Tournament,
- The US Universities World's Tournament, and
- The National Forensics Association Tournament.

Dr. Lain is a well-known teacher at the University of North Texas having won the ‘Fessor Graham Award at the University of North Texas in 2014 (the highest honor given by the UNT Student Body). He was recently named UNT’s exemplary online instructor in 2019. Dr. Lain has served as Director of Debate at UNT since 2002. Under his direction, UNT Debate has excelled in national and international competition. The program has consistently been ranked in the top 30 programs by points rankings.

Dr. Lain’s research program focuses on assessment in debate and he led a research team investigating the relationship between summer debate camps and civic engagement development among adolescents.
Chris Agee

Director of Debate, Newman Smith High School

Coach Agee will begin his 25th year of coaching speech and debate at Newman Smith High School this fall. Inducted into the TFA Hall of Fame in 2014, he has dedicated his teaching career to furthering the principles of speech and debate. Adept at simplifying difficult concepts, non-verbal communication, and argument construction, Coach Agee can tailor instruction--in a variety of events--to different campers at different skill and confidence levels. He is also an avid soccer/football fan and serves as the assistant golf coach at NSHS. This will be his 16th year of instruction at a summer debate institutes.
Erick Berdugo

Director of Debate, South Grand Prairie

Erick has been coaching debate for 30 years. His students have competed at the national tournaments including TOC, MBA Round Robin and the Glenbrooks. When not teaching or coaching the debate team he is also a Physics teacher. He is involved in active scientific research where he has published several research articles in the fields of Physical Chemistry and Crystallography.
Glenda Ferguson

Glenda will be returning for her second summer in the middle school debate division and her 12th year at the Mean Green Comet. She retired three years ago after 45 years of teaching and coaching high school debate. She coached multiple teams to late elimination rounds at UIL and TFA state tournaments. Here is just a short list of her many accomplishments:

- Member of Texas Hall of Fame
- Member of National Speech and Debate Association Hall of Fame
- Educator of the Year Award National Debate Coaches Association
- Former NSDA Board Member
- Barkeley Forum Key Coach Pelham recipient
Ciarra McClinton

First year out and will be attending Baylor University in the fall and will be debating for the Baylor Bears. Over the past three years, I have competed in numerous tournaments and my senior year broke at nearly every bid tournament I attended. During my last year of debate I got really into critical blackness literature and have read authors from Wilderson to Fanon to Hartman. I am stoked to work with you all at camp and can’t wait to see you grow!

Brenden Dimmig

Brenden is the Director of Speech and Debate at Melissa High School. This past year, Brenden was the Assistant Director of Debate at the Delbarton School. At Delbarton, he helped create the middle school debate program and assisted multiple teams in earning silver and gold TOC bids in Public Forum. Before coming to Delbarton, Brenden helped coach parliamentary debate as a graduate debate coach at the University of North Texas. He also helped coach teams to TFA State elims, nationals, UIL State semis, and UIL State finals. Brenden is excited to be back at MeanGreenCommet, and helping students reach their potential!
Addy Sykes

Addy Sykes is currently a second year student of Colorado State University where she is studying psychology and business. Addy was a nationally competitive debater throughout middle and high school at The Hockaday School in Dallas, TX. She has maintained leadership positions in debate, leading her team as president and previously teaching at summer debate camps. Addy competed primarily in Lincoln Douglas but has experience in Policy debate, Congress, and several other speaking events. In Lincoln Douglas, Addy placed first at the Jesuit College Prep Invitational, reached late elimination rounds at the Isidore Newman School Invitational, the Colleyville Heritage Winter Invitational, and several local tournaments. In Policy debate, Addy got to Octofinals at Cal Invitational at Berkeley HS Tournament and Quarters at Longhorn Classic at the University of Texas Austin. Throughout her time in Speech and Debate, Addy has been a high ranking speaker, receiving several speaker awards. Addy is excited to work with lots of bright minds this summer!
Jose Sanchez

I am about to be a senior at the University of North Texas, where I am studying English Language Arts and communication to obtain teacher certification. I have a passion for reading, writing, and education and have varying levels of experiences in both planning and instruction. In the 8 years I have been involved in Speech and Debate, I have helped teach others at high school and summer camps every year since I graduated - this year will be my 3rd year returning to help with the Mean Green Comet. I really enjoyed teaching and learning from an amazing group of students last year, and hope this year will once again be just as great.
Makayla Kovar

Makayla is an undergraduate student at the University of Texas at Dallas majoring in political science as well as minoring in gender studies. She competes on the parliamentary debate team and was admitted to compete in the Global Practice Hub Debate Challenge. Her high school experience was primarily with Lincoln Douglas and policy debate. She is a returning instructor at the Mean-Green comet debate camp, this being her third year as a lab leader. She is a recurring communications intern for the environmental non-profit Paper for Water and leads development for the youth change-makers council to empower youth to make a difference in their communities and solve the water crisis.
Sahil Chiniwala

Sahil Chiniwala won the TFA State Championship in PF this year and has been competing in Public Forum debate for 3 years. Among other awards, he competed at the Northland Christian Round Robin, was honored as the 5th speaker at the Cal Round Robin, and won the Grapevine Classic. He has reached late elimination rounds at numerous national tournaments and recently cleared as the 6th seed at the Tournament of Champions. Having worked with young debaters as a middle school coach outside of school for the past three years, Sahil is excited to be teaching at MGC this summer.
Vanuli Arya

Vanuli Arya is currently a rising sophomore at Rice University studying Cell Biology and Cognitive Sciences. She competed in policy debate at Coppell High School for three years, qualifying to state and national tournaments such as TFA State and the TOC. This is her second summer with the MGC Debate Institute. During the school year, she teaches an introductory debate course to middle school students at the Coppell Debate Academy. She is familiar with both policy and PF arguments, and is excited to work with more incredible students this summer!
Rana Duan

Rana Duan is a first year out and has participated in speech and debate since middle school. At Dulles High School, she competed mainly in Public Forum, but she has some experience in Lincoln Douglas and Impromptu. She’s mainly found success reaching late elimination rounds on the local circuit but has also competed and broken at a few bid tournaments like UH and Katy Taylor. While this is her first year with MGC, Rana spent much of this year teaching and working with PF novices, and she's excited to work with an amazing group of students this summer.

Enroll Now

[Click Here to Enroll]

MGCDI enrollment is open! Follow the link above to reserve your spot in our 2021 summer program. The final deadline for all registration is June 22, 2021.