Online Camp Announcement

Parents and Students,

The safety and education of our students has always been our top priority at the Mean Green Comet (MGC) Debate Institute. For this reason, we have carefully weighed all options and decided to move the 2020 MGC online. This decision was not made easily, but we are confident that it is the right thing to do. We realize that these are uncertain times for everyone. When we made the call to move this year’s MGC online, we began by making sure we could provide the same excellence you’ve come to expect from our summer programs. We believe the answer to that question is a resounding AFFIRMATIVE!

Over the last two weeks, our staff has been in collaboration with the UTD eLearning coordinators to make sure we are leveraging the best of our university’s eLearning tools as we make this transition online. COVID-19 has changed the landscape of our activities for the foreseeable future, and we know it’s vital that our institute innovate and adapt to these new realities.

What will the ONLINE MGC offer?

I. eLearning Resources:

Online Education & eLearning Director: We realize that one of the most challenging elements to online education is adapting to a new educational environment. This is why the MGC’s first step was to bring in an eLearning expert to assist staff, students and parents with the transitions. The MGC is excited to announce that Brad Skiles will serve as our Online Education Director. Brad has worked in information technology in higher education for nearly 25 years. As an adjunct professor of communication, as well as data architecture, he has nearly 30 years of teaching experience, with 10 of those years teaching in online or hybrid environments. When UT Dallas transitioned all courses to an online format due to the Coronavirus, Brad was asked to assist professors with their individual migrations. Brad is also the head coach of the UT Dallas Speech team, which helps him to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities for adapting eLearning to speech and debate competitions. He has presented multiple keynote addresses, conference presentations and delivered his first TEDx program in 2019.

Exclusive and dedicated online technical support: It’s important to us that your camp time is spent learning and interacting with our award-winning faculty, and not spent trouble-shooting technical issues. Brad and his team will offer webinars for our parents and students to help everyone get the most out of the stat-of-the-art digital resources available to MGC students. These exclusive and personalized webinars will provide students and parents a chance to explore our digital resources, receive help, ask questions, and feel comfortable before camp begins. And once programs officially begin, our team will remain available to provide the support and assistance every family needs to have the best possible summer experience.

Blackboard: Each student will have access to UTD’s outstanding online learning resource, Blackboard. Blackboard is one of the premier eLearning tools in the world. With their web and mobile applications, Blackboard provides students full and direct access to the information they need, wherever they are. With fully modern voice and video capabilities, the instructors and the students can fully participate in the virtual classroom. instructors can have the whole class together, break the class into working groups, share files, share screens or even share a white board to allow for mobile collaboration. The instructor can also add one
or more moderators to assist with managing chat rooms. The online classroom can also be recorded to be shared or reviewed later by the students.

Lecture and sessions will occur collaboratively in online classrooms. All lectures and sessions will be recorded and made available for the duration of the 2021 season for all participants and their coaches. Blackboard will not only allow students complete video access to their instructors but will also allow cross-collaboration between divisions giving students access to more of the expertise of our award-winning staff.

**Microsoft Teams & Blackboard Collaborate:** Part of our new digital reality is learning to leverage video conferencing tools for competition. Using two different online platforms, Microsoft Teams and Blackboard Collaborate, students will participate in numerous LIVE practice debates, performances and speeches. Students can also record their speeches and send them to staff members for suggestions and critique. Each division will use a mixture of live and recorded practice speeches and performances.

**II. Our same commitment to excellence:**

While online instruction requires adjustments in how students engage with staff members and other students, the MGC’s staff and outstanding online and eLearning platforms uniquely position the MGC to be a leader in online debate education. The Mean Green Comet Institute is leveraging our excellent staff of educators, fluent in the best online teaching technologies, to ensure the excellence you expect from us that will not be changed.

**Outstanding Curriculum** – Instruction will still follow our model of lectures, small group breakout sessions, individual coaching sessions, office hours and practice debates/performances. Students will collaborate with each other using Blackboard virtual classrooms for labs and debate against one another using Blackboard Collaborate and Microsoft Teams platforms. Our staff, primarily high school instructors, are well acquainted with online teaching and are ready to bring their unique curriculum to MGC students.

**Student to Staff Ratio** – In the new online platform, students will still be organized into labs and given access to all the award-winning educators on staff. Unlike other summer debate camps that have 30 to 40 students in a classroom with only 2 instructors, the Mean Green Comet Debate Institute guarantees a 10-to-1 student-to-staff ratio that is especially important as students learn to navigate the new, online debate environment they face in 2020 and beyond. Smaller student-to-staff ratios allow students more individual instruction with our nationally recognized staff.

**Commitment to affordable summer programs** – The MGC believes that summer debate education should be accessible to all who desire to learn and improve, and as such we have always had a commitment to making our summer programs affordable. We are continuing this commitment as the MGC moves online for summer of 2020. You’ll find our adjusted prices for all programs on our main webpage, [https://debatecamp.utdallas.edu/](https://debatecamp.utdallas.edu/)

**III. Next steps for you:**

Our commitment has always been to offer outstanding and affordable summer education, and as we made this transition ONLINE, we remain committed to cost-conscious pricing. To that end, we have made significant adjustments to the price of the MGC in 2020.

You can enroll online by following this link – [https://debatecamp.utdallas.edu/enroll](https://debatecamp.utdallas.edu/enroll) – selecting your session, and following the prompts.

We sincerely hope that you will continue your speech and debate education with the MGC this summer, but we also realize it is a challenging time for parents and students and understand if your summer plans have
changed. If you desire a refund or wish to have more information about our online transition, programs, staff or plans, please contact me directly and we will be more than happy to assist in any way we can.

We know the MGC is uniquely positioned with the outstanding staff, eLearning / online tools, technical support, and curriculum to lead on this important learning experience. We look forward to working with families this summer to prepare students for their 2020-2021 competitive season.

Thank you,
Scott Herndon
Louie Petit
Camp Directors