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AlumNews

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## STAND AND DELIVER

Following the alumni from  
Genva's nationally ranked  
debate program

BY CARISSA GEORGELOS

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### THE GREAT DEBATER

Hannah Vandiver in 2012 presenting her speech at a school assembly. Now a graduating senior at the University of Texas at Austin, she was one of Geneva's Forensic Academic All American award recipients.

**Y**ou spend your whole weekend representing your school, throwing yourself into the arena to battle it out and come out victorious. Your shirt is soaked with sweat, your eyes are out of focus, your adrenaline is pumping and you are ready to go back in when the coach calls your name: this is debate!

While not a contact sport, debate is a test of the mind and a student's ability to winsomely (or in some cases forcibly) argue a topic. Geneva students do well at debate. While the debate program refines and takes those skills of dialectic to new heights, the groundwork for what happens in a debate round has been laid all along the way as part of a Geneva education. The teachers and students of Rhetoric knew this foundation was there and that this would be a natural evolution.

Mrs. Leslie Moeller, at the time was head of the board for Geneva, and Mrs. Debbie Ledoux, the dialectic instructor for eighth and ninth grade, then worked together to form a debate team as a club and ultimately an elective.

"They quickly put Geneva's debate program on the map," Ledoux said, referring to the first team.

Over the years the debate tournament has had a profound impact on our graduating students. It is a program who continues to set Geneva apart from other schools of its size. There have been seven students that have qualified for the Tournament of Champions and eight students who have earned the award of Academic All-American, national distinguishing awards.

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## JACK MOELLER

“Debate class is where you put the theories of logic and persuasion that you talk about at school into practice. After four years of it, one does not merely understand how to think critically from a theoretical level; rather, it becomes muscle memory and instinct. Because of debate, I never hear an opinion or argument from any of my peers in college without immediately identifying the weak

points in their argument and how I would respond. This has the twofold benefits of preventing me from being persuaded by an argument that is less than sound and preparing me to engage intelligently in a friendly debate should the opportunity arise. I believe my experience in debate has aided me in numerous other ways as well, from giving me

abundant confidence in public speaking to making me a more responsible voter because of the way I listen to political debates and think through the impacts of policy. Debate prepares students to realize the full benefit of their education in the real world. I would urge all students to strongly consider participating in it.”

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## WHITNEY YOUNG

“I work best under pressure and debate added a lot of work to my life. But while I was working on debate, I became more interested in school, my grades were better and I was excelling in areas beyond debate. It was so worth it. Whether I felt good about a round or terrible, whether the judge affirmed me or ripped me to shreds, confidence was key. The current events I had to learn about

and topics about which I had to have a strong understanding come up really often in my day to day life. It also helped me develop strong study skills that have been useful in college. The debate program teaches students to love learning and opens their eyes to important things going on the world, and is great preparation for a student’s college experience.”

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## JAMES GROVER

“Debate gave me practice in examining both sides of an issue and coming to a conclusion based on reason rather than intuition. In college this is important as you are often asked to evaluate new issues or views different from your own and support your evaluation with evidence.”

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## CALLIE RAMSEY

“If I am who I am because of my parents and my thirteen years at Geneva then I am where I am because of Geneva debate. Debate was important to me not just because it took what Geneva taught me about arguing and speaking persuasively one step further, but because it gave me my ambition. Geneva tells its students that we are capable of great things for the glory of God and it took debate (and a blood contract to Leslie Moeller) for me to envision great things beyond the round tables and the 2A private school division.”



### LOOK BACK AT IT

These debaters all earned Academic All American awards before graduating Geneva in 2013. (From left to right) Whitney Young is studying communications at Pepperdine University, Jack Moeller is in the ROTC program at the University of Virginia, and Callie Ramsey is pursuing an economics/English degree at Washington and Lee University.



### THREE MUSKETEERS

In the spring of 2014, while competing in the Tournament of Champions stands (left to right) Ethan Ryden, now studying architecture at the University of Texas-Austin, Gray Moeller, pursuing a history degree at the University of Virginia, and Davis Metzger, majoring in political science at Gordon College.

### ETHAN RYDEN

“I started doing debate for a very simple reason: getting better at public speaking. Over the four years I was in it, I not only achieved that goal, but surpassed it, which has allowed me to share the gospel and Word of God more clearly and (dare I say) persuasively.”

### GRAY MOELLER & DAVIS METZGER

“We were both members of the program for all four years in Rhetoric School and saw it grow from a small unknown program to one whose name was heard coast to coast. Largely due to the humility of the instructors and the students in the program, many members of the Geneva community never realize the scale to which the debate program operates. Since we are alumni, we have

no such qualms bragging on the program. The Geneva debate program competes and succeeds against the largest and most expensive schools in the United States. Debaters have the opportunity to hone their skills against the biggest and brightest 6A public schools in America. The skills we learned in debate have enabled us to think on our feet and defend our positions on various topics in the wide world of college.

We consider and root out the weakness in the arguments we and others use to defend ourselves and our worldview. This skill for me has carried over the most into the realm of apologetics wherein I can better defend the truth I perceive and root out the arguments others would use to mar truth. In a sense, debate prepared us for the ‘real world’ better than many other things we did at Geneva.”

### ACADEMIC ALL-AMERICAN

This is one of the National Speech and Debate Association’s highest awards and less than one percent of the thousands of students who are members of the Association in any given year win it. You have to meet three requirements to qualify. You must have a composite SAT score of at least 2000, you must have a GPA of at least a 3.70, and 750 NFL (National Forensics League) points. You earn

points by competing in rounds. For example, you earn three points just for competing and up to six points for winning a round. Since most serious debaters spend at least 5 hours in preparation for every hour in competition, this award represents a tremendous commitment of time and energy to debate while simultaneously maintaining high standards in all of a student’s other school activities.

Geneva alumni who have achieved Academic All American awards

Hannah Vandiver (2012)  
Callie Ramsey (2013)  
Jack Moeller (2013)  
Whitney Young (2013)  
Mary Katherine McNabb (2014)  
Davis Metzger (2015)  
Ethan Ryden (2015)  
Gray Moeller (2015)