

## PHILOSOPHY OF BELLAIRE DEBATE

Overview: The philosophy of Bellaire Debate was forged from informed choices between two conflicting ideas: the academic defensibility of the program vs. competitive urges from outside forces. This paper explains why Bellaire Debate chose the academically defensible philosophy. Bellaire Debate has a large uniquely talented group of students that other squads around the city and state do not enjoy. These students thrive on academic challenges and teaching methods that expand their ability to think, reason, research, organize and present their ideas.

DEBATE CAMPS. Summertime is the peak period for our debaters to conduct research on unique and innovative cases and arguments. Debaters are expected to complete their summer research assignments at the University of Houston and/or Rice University libraries. Debate camps do not broaden perspectives they narrow them. Workshops are anti-intellectual creating non-intuitive and repetitive arguments (most of which are written by college debaters and not the high school students attending the camp). Bellaire Debate believes students should have academic ownership of arguments they run in the competition instead of running positions run by everyone else. Debate camps are expensive with many promoting unethical practices including falsification of evidence, college debaters engaging in sex with high school students, as well as no accountability financially (two people in charge of large camps were fired for financial misconduct). Bellaire Debate has chosen the academically defensible method of topic preparation by choosing not to attend debate camps.

ARGUMENT USAGE. Bellaire debaters are expected to create unique and innovative cases and arguments that are not produced at summer institutes. We are fully aware of arguments being promoted by debate camps but choose not to use them. Bellaire Debate finds kritiks, politics arguments and mirrorlike counterplans are not designed to increase knowledge but to limit the intellectual base. A coach who is creative and knows how to bring out the creativity in his students will be extremely successful within this philosophy. Other schools use the counter-intuitive arguments produced at debate camps. Our objective is to be different in our choice of arguments. A coach who understands kritiks, politics arguments and mirrorlike counterplans can be a great asset to our students by helping them prepare the most effective answers to those arguments.

ELITISM. Bellaire Debate believes that debate should be taught to all students who wish to learn. Our squad has traditionally been amongst the largest in the nation and we intend to see that tradition continue. Debate 2, 3, and 4 represents an advanced application of skills taught in debate 1. Students will be given assignments appropriate for their experience. Students who perform below expectation will receive guidance and assistance from the coach to help complete their assignment in a more appropriate manner. Due to the fact that some students learn more quickly than others, Bellaire Debate believes that there is a place on the squad for all students who are putting forth effort. Coaches do not “cut” or otherwise eliminate students from the squad or the event they are coaching without first demonstrating that the coach has worked personally with the student to improve their performance on multiple occasions without success or cooperation. In cross examination debate high numbers are critical to adequately research a topic. The efforts of the least experienced student are just as crucial to the overall research picture as the most experienced. Bellaire Debate finds the “star” system to be academically indefensible. The coach is responsible for developing all talent on the squad (not just the can’t miss students). Practice rounds are a critical means of developing a student’s debate skills. Other coaches believe in telling their students what to say just minutes before entering the round. Bellaire Debate chooses not to follow that path. We believe the academically responsible choice is to create students who can think independently without the need for massive last minute instruction. Bellaire Debate also believes in providing a variety of competitive situations which allows for more rounded student growth. The vast majority of students will travel to tournaments in the Houston area as often as their personal schedules allow. We believe that debaters ability increases as they attend tournaments. Coaches are to do everything possible to find spots for every student wishing to debate on a given weekend. Regional and national circuit tournaments are available to those on a limited basis who have demonstrated their ability to consistently master the level of competition in Houston area tournaments. Bellaire Debate has built a tradition where our debaters are equally successful in front of all types of judges regardless of their experience or background. Bellaire Debate is not going to focus primarily on the national circuit style due to the lack of educational defensibility. Many squads have chosen to relax dress standards and their expectations for professionalism and behavior. Bellaire Debaters are expected to adhere to the established dress code and behavioral standards.

THE RESULTS. The philosophy of the Bellaire Debate squad is centered around academic defensibility over the conflicting positions associated with competitive urges practiced by many in the debate community. The TFA State tournament was run at Baylor University until 1985 using the highest standards for judging. During this time Bellaire won the TFA State title 3 times. While the judging standards have almost disappeared from TFA State in recent years Bellaire has ranked at the top in the number of students qualified for state level competition while also appearing in elimination rounds on a consistent basis. We have seen more than our share of success at the UIL State tournament since 1990 with 3 second place teams and 4 others earning third place. Results at NFL Nationals have been even more impressive with 16 Bellaire teams ranked in the top 14 since 1990. While the people swayed by competitive urges may argue that our teams could have placed higher in State or National competition we find the price for that success to be too expensive for the large number of students that would be sacrificed in the name of that success.

Bellaire Debate stands for:

**Saying no to all summer debate camps?**

**Foregoing the usage of any purchased evidence not researched at Bellaire?**

**Promoting unique cases and arguments not advanced by debate camps?**

**Saying no to counter-intuitive arguments?**

**Supporting the idea of a large squad where kids are not cut?**

**Saying no to the “star” system?**