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University of Oregon Speech, Debate, and Mock Trial Program Shuttered After Nearly 150 Years of Excellence

EUGENE, Ore. 9/17/2025 After nearly 150 years of shaping leaders, innovators, and public servants, the University of Oregon has announced the cancellation of its historic speech, debate, and mock trial program (officially the Forensics Program). Alumni and students are deeply concerned and are coming together to explore ways to ensure the program's future.

One of the first groups formed on the University of Oregon campus, Forensics has been one of the nation's most enduring platforms for debate, speech, and mock trial—serving thousands of students and earning national recognition, including **six national championships**. From hosting landmark tournaments such as the David Frank Tournament of Scholars, the Robert D. Clark Invitational, and the David Frohnmayr Invitational, to producing alumni who have gone on to lead in courts, boardrooms, and legislatures, the program's impact has been profound. In the late 1890s, the program even held popular public debates to help fund the original Ducks football team.

The cancellation is especially difficult for the current students and staff, who had been preparing for the Fall competition season. Alumni and supporters hope to work with the University to find a sustainable path forward.

"Forensics is a gateway to further education and successful careers, which is what a university should deem as top priority," said Shelby Malstrom, a 2012 UO and Forensics alumni. "We ask that you maintain the program through the fall, which has virtually no associated cost, and that you help us find a permanent home within the university."

The University's suggestion that Forensics operate as a student club under the ASUO is neither practical now nor sustainable long term. The abrupt decision makes recognition and funding impossible in time for this year's competition season, and the club model cannot provide the professional leadership, staffing, and stability needed for national success. The result would be lost travel opportunities, no ORCS or Nationals for mock trial, restricted competition to nearby events, and the absence of professional educators who help students achieve the full educational benefits of forensics. Unlike forensics, most ASUO clubs travel only a few times a year—a structure wholly incompatible with a program that has been a cornerstone of the University for nearly 150 years.

Alumni are rallying in an effort to save their beloved program. Many credit forensics with providing the communication, leadership, and critical thinking skills that shaped their careers in law, business, public service, and beyond. The closure, they apprise, undermines Oregon's academic reputation and will directly harm future philanthropy. In a democratic society, they warn, it is also short-sighted.

Alumni emphasize that the program contributes to Oregon's academic reputation and strengthens civic engagement. "Ending this program will do more than close a chapter in university history," said Trond Jacobsen, Director of Forensics and alumnus of the team. "It strips future students of the opportunity to find their voice, build lifelong skills, and represent Oregon on the national stage."

Advocates argue cost savings will be negligible—funds were already allocated, and alumni donations continue to be available to offset expenses. They are eager to collaborate with the University to explore permanent solutions that protect both student opportunities and institutional priorities.

For more information about alumni efforts to save Oregon Forensics, visit <https://oregonforensics.com>.

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