

# 2024-2025

## Union University Debate Team Handbook



Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone;  
for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.  
Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;  
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.  
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,  
the tongue that makes great boasts,  
those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail,  
our lips are with us; who is master over us?"  
"Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,  
I will now arise," says the LORD;  
"I will place him in the safety for which he longs."  
The words of the LORD are pure words,  
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,  
purified seven times.  
You, O LORD, will keep them;  
you will guard us from this generation forever.  
On every side the wicked prowl,  
as vileness is exalted among the children of man.

**Psalm 12, (ESV)**

## **Why does the Union University Debate Team exist?**

Debate is both an exercise and a competition, but neither exercise nor competition have intrinsic value. We debate primarily because debate shapes us: It makes us more capable of loving God with our minds and it makes us more confident when we share the Gospel with others. We debate also because it shapes others. When we debate, we help others think better. When we debate well, we call attention to the fact that God created a world with truth in it that can be perceived by those created in His Image.

The practical way that this works is that we debate to fulfill God's commandments. In Matthew 22:37-40, our Lord identified the greatest commandments: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And "Love your neighbor as yourself." If the way that we debate helps us to do these two things better, we are fulfilling our purpose. If it draws us away from these two things, it would be better for us to leave the podium.

## **How does the debate team fit within Union University's mission?**

Union's mission is to provide Christ-centered education that promotes excellence and character development in service to Church and society. Debate directly promotes all parts of Union's mission. We are "Christ-centered" because our focus is always first on Christ. We provide "education" in our form of debate and regular practice: we participate in the IPDA because it promotes a form of debate that promotes education and communication. We "promote excellence" in what we do through competition which drives us toward excellence. Debate has winners and losers, victory and defeat. This has value because it keeps us sharp. We promote character development through competition as well, but in particular through our team. We hold each other accountable. We encourage each other through disappointment and victory alike. We are able to promote these virtues in service to the Church because, as a Christian community, we are training up the Church's members to be excellent communicators, knowledgeable teachers, humble encouragers, and thoughtful members. We promote these virtues in society because debaters learn intellectual curiosity, empathy, and respect, making them better citizens and members of their civic culture. On top of these things, we serve Union by aiding in recruitment, retention, and multi-disciplinary learning experiences.

# What do we do?

## To be Christ-Centered:

### Worship & Pray Together

All members of the debate team are expected to regularly attend a local church. Because we travel on weekends, this must be a high priority for all team members. When we must be away on Sunday mornings, we will meet together for a worship service before beginning the competition that day. This is a service that we put on, but we welcome members of other teams to participate, and members of the team are encouraged to invite them as appropriate. Prayer serves a central part of our normal team meetings as well, and members of the team are expected to participate in praying for and with one another.

### Evangelism

One of the most important ways we can focus on Christ with our words is through the spread of the Gospel. Though evangelism can take many forms, as a debate team, our specialty is in training ourselves how to share the Gospel through persuasion. One of the primary purposes of debate is learning to clearly and effectively communicate with others so that we can share the Gospel.

As members of the debate team, we will become familiar with different kinds of evangelism and learn to meet people where they are through thoughtful communication. This also means that we will intentionally invest in relationships with those outside of the faith and disconnected from Christian community so that we can have opportunities for sharing the Gospel.

### Service

Mark 10: 45 states “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” We follow the example of our Lord. There will be a many opportunities throughout the year during which we will serve our community and each other. This includes the way we contribute to campus life: We will volunteer on Campus and Community Day, we will seek opportunities to serve where our skills are useful, we will be agents of comfort and aid to those around us. This also includes the way we conduct ourselves at tournaments: We will pick up trash, arrive on time to rounds and competition, help where we see opportunity. We will help other teams, not just ourselves. This also includes the way we treat each other on the team. We will do additional rounds to help people get qualified. We will jump in to help each other prep. We will come alongside our members who need help in their everyday life.

### Clothing

Our clothing should not interfere with our purpose: pointing to God’s Holiness and loving our neighbors. Make sure the parts of our bodies that need to be covered are covered regardless of body position. Debate is a professional activity, so we will dress professionally. At tournaments, this means business attire. (Slacks, blazers, suits, dresses, skirts, etc. *If you cannot afford business attire, please contact your coaches for assistance.*) Judges are expected to wear jeans/pants and a union or union debate shirt during the tournaments. Within reason, team members should wear their 2024-2025 debate t-shirt after they are eliminated from competition/on the last day of competition.

## To be People-Focused

### Virtuous Debating

We will aspire to glorify God in our debating by debating in beauty, in goodness, and in truth.

Beautiful debating means that we aspire, in excellence, to pursue our craft well. The way that we debate honors and blesses both our judges and our opponents. We win and lose with grace. We winsomely communicate. We do not cut corners or cause grief. We use compassion, meekness, and joy.

Good debating means that we honor God by treating our opponents the way we want to be treated. It means refusing to cut ethical corners or violate our principles. It means avoiding abusing debate rules and practices to gain an advantage over our opponents. It means sometimes forgoing advantages we might find in the name of a fair round. It means avoiding personal attacks or manipulative lines of reasoning.

Truthful debating means that we never lie or distort the truth. It means that we avoid taking debate positions that put us out of the bounds of what can be ethically and truthfully stated. It means citing our sources and quoting them truthfully. It means avoiding distortions and not spreading falsehoods. Truthful debating means avoiding sophistry.

### Pronouns

To honor Truth and to love our neighbor well, we will avoid utilizing pronouns in debate rounds by using language like “my opponent”, “the affirmative”, “the negative”, etc. Not only does that honor our convictions, but it helps us de-personalize argumentation in-round (which keeps a focus on argumentation). In between rounds, you could utilize the same language or simply call people by his or her name.

### Encouragement

We seek opportunities to compliment our teammates’, opponents’, judges’, and everyone else we encounter’s character. This means we will have to invest in our relationships enough to notice character strengths. We will strive to do this instead of complaining.

### Humility

Our successes belong to God. Our strengths come from each other. Our struggles are to be shared. For this reason, we will avoid boasting. We will give credit to God and each other. We avoid boasting and encourage reflection. We will admit when we are wrong and take steps to make amends. We will be restrained when we celebrate and thoughtful when we grieve.

### Effective/Empowering Feedback

Emotion clouds precision. Feedback should never be given immediately following a round. The ballot process is important for that reason. When filling out ballots, we should highlight strengths and prioritize constructive criticism. This means we critique things on which improvement is possible and are within the debater’s control. Ballots will balance critique and encouragement and not become unbalanced in either direction. Ballots should also be thoughtfully filled out. There is no practice round too insignificant for substantive feedback.

### Charity in Communication

Members of the debate team will spend a substantial amount of time together. Whenever people spend time together, communication can lead to hurt feelings, frustration, and anger. We will scrupulously avoid using our words to harm these relationships. When we have been hurt by someone else's words, we will commit to being generous in interpretation of intent. We will consider context. We will develop stronger community and communication skills and empathy.

### Celebrate and Grieve Together

As a team member grieves, we join in the grief. As a team member celebrates, we will join in the celebration. This applies beyond the specific debate context. We will pray for each other in all areas of life, both in gratitude and supplication.

### Handling conflict

When we have a problem with someone on the team or with a coach, we will go directly to the person with whom we have the problem rather than complaining about them to others. When we approach each other in this way, we will do so primarily seeking redemption and forgiveness in humility and charity. The goal of any such interactions must be understanding and reconciliation.

When conflicts or disagreements are not resolved in this fashion, we will seek to have the conversation again with a Team Officer as mediator. When this also fails to resolve conflicts, we will seek to have everyone involved meet with a coach as appropriate. It is better to immediately address issues than to let wounds grow and fester.

(This is a general rule: University guidelines will take precedence in more serious issues.)

### Honoring authority

Officers and Coaches have been chosen to lead, to set standards, and to bear standards. We will respect them as they try and do this. We understand that they want what is best for us and the team. Authority extends upwards. The officers are under the authority of the Coaches. The Director of Debate is under the authority of the Dean of Instruction. We are all under God's authority. We all commit to defer to the higher authority and the highest authority. This also means that sometimes those in authority will leave room for discussion, but other times urgency or appropriateness will not allow for this. When decisions are made and stated, we commit to follow them. When circumstances do not permit discussion, we will save our concerns for the appropriate time.

### Dating/PDA

It is natural for romance and relationships to develop between people who spend time together, but discretion and dignity will rule our behavior. No public displays of affection are permitted, even jokingly, between anyone of any sex. Team members in relationships should behave in ways that do not display their relationship by their actions while in a team setting.

### Only Debate in rounds

We will avoid activities that mimic debate but are not debate. Debate is a formal activity. It has rules, signs, and patterns. If we are not in a debate round, we will not act like we are debating. When conversations begin to resemble debates, we commit to listen more, ask questions, collaborate, and encourage. This includes not engaging with non-debaters as if we were in a debate.

### Hotel Behavior

We will keep our hotel rooms safe and above the appearance of immorality. This means there should only ever be members of one sex represented in a hotel room. We will spend time in mixed groups in the hotel common areas. We commit to being respectful of other hotel guests by being quiet. Under no circumstances will we leave the hotel without permission from the Coach.

## **To be Excellence-Driven**

### Meetings and Drills

We commit to regularly attend meetings. This is a requirement for team membership and scholarships. We are to only have one unexcused absence per semester. More than this is grounds for dismissal from the team and/or losing scholarships. During each meeting, we will participate to the best of our ability. Meetings are designed for the team to grow in skill and bond as well as to develop debate skills. We commit to participate in the drills and practice activities and rounds. We commit to learn from and invest in other members of the team as we practice.

### Communication

We agree to pay close attention to the official GroupMe for debate and emails from the Coaches. To this end, we will leave the official GroupMe unmuted and regularly check our emails. We agree to love our neighbor in all the ways that we respond to and participate in these forms of communication.

### Tournaments

We commit to qualify for tournaments by attending meetings, completing the prescribed amount and type of practice rounds, utilizing lay judges, and judging rounds. We will keep track of this through Canvas. We commit to be available for no less than 7 tournaments throughout the year. We commit to be available for the IPDA National Tournament. We will take what actions are necessary to qualify for all eight tournaments. Sometimes we will judge, sometimes we will debate, but regardless we will prioritize tournaments.

### Academics

We are primarily students. This means that our academic excellence takes priority over even crucial debate activities. We, therefore, will maintain a minimum GPA of 2.5 throughout the semester. If we fail to meet this requirement we will still be subject to qualification requirements, but will not be permitted to travel with the team. If we restore a 2.5 overall GPA and a 3.0 semester GPA by the end of the semester, we may return to the team and keep our scholarships. If not, we will forfeit both.

### Practice Rounds

To qualify for debate tournaments, all members of the team are required to complete two practice rounds each week and judge one practice round every other week. We commit to keeping this requirement because it is fundamental to developing into better debaters and preparing for tournaments. We will track this qualification on Canvas and commit to meet or exceed it.

### Timeliness

Paying attention to time is fundamental to debate. We commit to know the time limits for prepping, speaking, and cross examination and the time rounds begin and end. We commit to adhere to those rules. Tardiness affects everyone involved in a debate round and can even delay entire tournaments. Because of this, we commit to arrive early to everything, from departure times, to team meetings, to

debate rounds. If we fail to arrive on time to a departure, we commit to pay for our own transportation or reimburse the team for travel expenses.

## **Future-Directed**

### Union Student Handbook.

We commit to follow everything in the Union Student Handbook. (This also means we must be aware of what is in the student handbook.) As members of the debate team, we are ambassadors for the University. Thus, we must pay special attention to the expectations for Union students. We commit to follow them with enthusiasm and submission so that we can continue to be worthy of Union's trust and support.

### Investing in the community

We have been and will be given opportunities to share our skills with the community through our local STOA club, local schools, and a variety of other areas. By doing this, not only are we stewarding our gifts, but we are also building a community that values and supports what we do, further securing our future and supporting Union.

### In class behavior

People in our classes and our professors will know that we are a members of the debate team. Therefore, we are also ambassadors for the debate team on campus. We will, therefore, speak with humility and openness to learn in our classes and will attend class and complete our assignments in a timely manner.

Everything listed above contributes to our long-term health and survival as a team. So to be future-directed, we are also Christ-centered, people-focused, and excellence driven.

## **Accountability**

By agreeing to be on this team (and accepting a scholarship), you are agreeing to adhere to this handbook. You are expected to live up to not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. The consequence of the infraction will be proportionate to the severity of the infraction (at the discretion of the Coach). Potential consequences are: a conversation with the person harmed, a conversation with an officer, not being allowed to travel to a tournament, and no longer being a part of the team (losing your scholarship). To avoid these, refer to our purpose and core values. Those should guide your behavior and help you hold yourself and others accountable. As disciplinary action is taken, it is private between coach and the team member. Note that it may appear as if no action is taken to protect everyone's privacy and to facilitate reconciliation.