



Nadia Lewis

'Barking Bulldogs'

debate team earns national respect

by Juana Mosqueda

Fresno State's "Barking Bulldogs" debate team left some of the country's most prestigious universities in its wake on the way to a No. 11 national ranking.

The team proved its bite was as strong as its bark, defeating Harvard University, Stanford University, University of Southern California, University of California, Berkeley, University of Oklahoma, Arizona State University, Dartmouth and others.



Cary Edmondson

Candis Tate and Sierra Holley

The debate team is offered within the College of Arts and Humanities to engage students in public debate using a variety of formats and to compete in policy debate.

This year's success signals a rebound from tough times. Just 10 years ago the team had to suspend competition because there weren't enough women participating. The Barking Bulldogs were reborn in 2011 and now have 14 members on the team (*including six women*).

Team director and lecturer of communication Deven Cooper, originally from Baltimore, is responsible for all facets of the team effort, from organizing and monitoring communication classes to booking travel plans. Besides coaching the team at tournaments, Cooper recruits students, manages accounts, makes sure dues are paid and heads fundraising efforts.

Cooper is proud of how far the team has come over the past four years.

"Some of my most memorable moments are when debater Sierra Holley and her partner Candis Tate won three of the regional tournaments and made it to the final rounds of a semi-national tournament at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas," he says.

Holley is a political science and Africana studies major. She saw there were not many women on the team and says she joined despite her timid personality. She now dreams of one day becoming a lawyer.

"I joined the team so it could help me improve my speech," Holley says. "I was terrified of public speaking.

"It's intimidating knowing you are in a male-dominated field. A lot of women quit because of this. Sometimes we get harsh comments during rounds, but we always have a lot of support to help us deal with it."

Holley is a big reason the team reached No. 1 in the Pacific District rankings.

At Wake Forest University's Shirley Classic, she helped the Barking Bulldogs beat No. 2 Harvard.

Debater Jamila Ahmed and her partner Nadia Lewis also made history this year. At the Henry Clay Invitational Tournament at the University of Oklahoma, Ahmed and Lewis became the first two African-American, non-traditional speakers to ever receive first-and-second place individual awards.

The feat earned the two students recognition in JET magazine and several online news sites.

Ahmed, a senior majoring in communication, says she was encouraged to join debate because of the opportunities it provided after college.

"I am really glad about the accomplishments of the team this year," Ahmed says.

"We are successfully debating at the national level, and we all joined debate (*for the first time*) in college, which is rare for most debaters."

Holley says the Barking Bulldogs will continue to leave their mark across the nation.

"To know you inspire people in what you have done and achieved makes it worth all the hard work."

– Juana Mosqueda is a University Communications student assistant.