Pacific’s Speech and Debate team is known for sharpening students’ presentation and argumentation skills, preparing them for careers in courtrooms, boardrooms and the political arena. It’s a program that draws students from all over the nation.

“I transferred specifically to Pacific because of the Speech and Debate Team,” says Emily Sheldon ’09, who is majoring in political science and gender studies. “It is one of the powerhouse teams.”

What makes Pacific’s team work is that the University supports the team with funds and a full-time coach, Sheldon says. Coach Marlin Bates says the team practices four hours, three times a week and is in tournaments 20 out of 30 weekends in the school year.

“We are always competing, practicing and working on the next big thing,” he says. “That got us to where we are today.”

And where are they? Last year the team’s Lincoln-Douglas debaters ranked in the top 32, and the Parliamentary Debate squad was in the top seven with 400 competing schools in both categories. Final scores put Pacific at 12th in the nation — in
The Paul Winters/Pat Kennedy speech and debate tournament in November attracted hundreds of students from colleges across the nation and brought back more than a dozen alumni to work as judges and organizers. Hugh Linstrom ’71 said he volunteered as a coach because his time on Pacific’s speech and debate team under legendary coach Paul Winters helped guide him to a successful career as an attorney. “Being able to research, organize your thoughts, speak to a group, put things together in a persuasive manner—that’s my bread and butter,” Linstrom says.

Volunteering for the tournament is a way for him to stay in touch with Pacific and to give back, he said. “Everyone has a little teaching in them,” Linstrom says. “Plus, you want to cheer the students on.”

Doug Pipes ’64 also was on the speech and debate team under Winters. “I was recruited from Fresno State’s team by Paul,” Pipes said. “We ended up winning the national championships in 1964, as well as the nationally televised debate tournament held in Chicago that year.”

Hugh Linstrom ’91 serves as judge

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Doug Pipes, Coach Paul Winters and Raoul Kennedy accept the National Debate trophy in 1964

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Pipes served as a judge advocate general in the Air Force, was in private practice and then prosecutor for Contra Costa County for 31 years.

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An audio interview with Dr. Bates can be found online at go.Pacific.edu/PacificReview.

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