

Speech and Debate, formally known as Forensics [fuh-ren-siks], is an activity where students across the nation compete in a variety of public speaking categories in hopes to create change regarding specific topics. For more than five decades, students on the high school and collegiate level would compete to become the next State, National, and International Champions in their respective speech categories. Being the oldest R-S-O on Illinois State Universities campus, the Forensics team has received plenty of national recognition over the years most recently placing fourth place at the National Forensics Association tournament.

NAT: SPEECH MEETING

At the head of every great Forensics team is a director who oversees the activity and acts as the faculty advisor. Usually having some background in Forensics, either competition or coaching experience, a director is chosen based on their qualifications for the job and their ability to work closely with students. Recently, a few directors within the community have been hit with sexual assault charges and forced to step down from their positions as directors. I got the chance to speak with I-S-U Senior and President of the Forensics Team, Riley Carroll, about the recent allegations and her initial reactions.

CARROLL, :25

I think I was shocked. It's a shocking time. Hearing some of the actually ridiculous and unimaginable things that are going on, i think it would be shocking to anyone. You don't want to believe that humans can be so terrible and that people who are supposed to be creating this safe space for us are doing really terrible, blatantly obviously bad things.

Since its inception, Forensics competitors have advocated for victims of assault giving them a voice when they felt they couldn't speak at all. Like Carroll mentioned, the Forensics community

has been deemed a safe space for many years but in light of these recent allegations, the feeling of helplessness has arisen in many students.

CARROLL, :25

I feel a lot more powerless than i initially did in this community. We're going around advocating and speaking about these things and for these things and the people who are judging us and supposed to be agents. Like our agents for change, we offer solutions. And to know that they are actively working against what we are trying to advocate for is really disheartening.

I got the chance to sit down with second year graduate teaching assistant and Forensics coach Maddisen Jansen and she explains how she was partially surprised by these allegations.

JANSEN, :23

I was surprised in some ways and not surprised in others. Hearing about the thing, i'm not surprised that in the abstract these things occurred but it was surprising in that these were people i knew and i thought everyone respected. Especially because some of these men have been in the community for decades. I was surprised about how long it took for us to get here.

Every year, at least two students compete with a piece that is centered around sexual assault, harassment, or extortion. Last school year, two students who were on a team ran by an alleged assaulter ran a piece with that as the focus and they were ranked lower at Nationals because of the allegations about their coach. Jansen explains how most competitors are left in the dark when things like this occur.

JANSEN, :12

I think it is inappropriate to use the ballot to communicate that about a certain program.

Philosophically, I don't think that's the way to deal with that. Dropping competitors from those programs in many cases when they may not know.

When asked if she thinks that the main aggressors have been caught, Jansen explains that this was only the beginning of a larger issue.

JANSEN, :27

We hear rumors on the circuit of folks being inappropriate with their team members. I can't help but wonder how many teams are trying to close ranks so to speak. I worry that as much visibility that we've given these other two people that that may be distracting from other potentially inappropriate behavior. You don't know. And it's frustrating.

For W-Z-N-D's Birds-I-View I'm Patrick Sheard