

Student Congress

Event Overview

A Student Congress is modeled after the procedure for floor debate in a legislature. It is designed to test a student's ability to speak to an issue in an extemporaneous manner and to reveal the individual's knowledge of parliamentary procedure. Bills and resolutions to be debated are determined in advance and students are given about two weeks to prepare.

Student Congress is an event that includes argumentation, analysis, questioning, clash of ideas, and delivery. Although students may have prepared notes, a good speech responds to the arguments made by others and advances the debate. Judges should evaluate or rank speakers based on the speaker's overall contribution to the debate rather than as an oratory contest.

A student presiding officer will run each session. In order to speak or ask a question, a congressperson must be recognized by the presiding officer. All speeches should be delivered from the front of the room. Each speech is limited to three minutes. In addition, each speaker is open for a maximum of one minute of cross-examination. Notes and prepared material are allowed in delivering speeches. Visual aids and props are NOT allowed.

Mechanics of the Round

At the beginning of the round the Presiding Officer will instruct the students to sit in a pre-arranged seating chart. The Presiding officer will sit in the front of the room, the judges will sit in the back, with the student competitors in the middle. The PO will call for motions and the debate will begin. At the end of the session the PO should call an end to the round.

During the round

Take notes. You will have a seating chart to keep track of students asking and answering questions. Students should write their name on the board so that judges can confirm their identity. Keep track of what you liked about each of the speakers as they spoke. It is a good idea to keep a ranking going as they speak, compare each speaker to those that have gone before, and determine where they would be ranked. After the round look over your notes to confirm your rankings and make adjustments.

How do I determine the winners?

There is no single answer as to who is the winner of the round, rather the judge should take a holistic look at the round. Was the student's speech articulate? Did the student use sound reasoning with evidence to support their arguments? Did the student respond intelligently and eloquently to questions asked? Did the student actively ask questions during the round? Were the questions asked relevant? Was the student courteous to his/her competitors? The best speaker in the round will be the person who has done all of these things the best. Please remember that students may only get a chance to speak once during their round, so if a student does speak more than once, they do not get double the points of a person who speaks only once; you should evaluate both speeches in determining a person's ranking.

There are three types of Congress speeches you might hear in a round. Early in the round are *constructive* speeches, which create new arguments. As the round progresses, students should give *rebuttal* speeches, in which they attempt to negate arguments made earlier (the students may also *extend* previous arguments with new logic or evidence). Finally, near the end you might hear

a *crystallization* speech, in which the student will review and evaluate the arguments. Remember, some students have to speak later in the round. They shouldn't necessarily be penalized for that.

Each student will be ranked from 1-10 with 1 being the highest and 10 the lowest. All remaining students tie at 10th place. On the ballot please write comments for the individual students. Comments should be constructive; ideally they will point out a few strengths and areas of growth for the speaker. If you have any questions please talk to a member of the tab room staff after the round is over