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Lafayette Debates Swing Into Spring

Over one hundred U.S. debaters have kicked off the first stage of an exciting new program sponsored by the Higher Education Department of the French Embassy in partnership with the George Washington University, *The Lafayette Debates*. Beginning with online debates and multimedia competitions, and culminating in a public debate tournament involving teams from thirty two French and U.S. schools, *The Lafayette Debates* are intended to promote dialogue and relations between the United States and France by engaging future leaders on important topics of mutual interest. This year's competitions address the impact of globalization on culture and cultural industries. The French Embassy will award study tours to France to the top U.S. competitors, so that they can continue their exploration of the topic firsthand in discussions with French government officials, diplomats, and businesspeople.

“Participating in *The Lafayette Debates Online* has been an amazing experience. Not only have we had the opportunity to match wits with a diverse array of debaters across the country, but we have been able to do so without having to sacrifice our academic studies by leaving campus for extended periods of time.” said David Herman, a participating student-debater from Harvard University. “In addition, the highly qualified judging provides an unparalleled opportunity to receive feedback and advice from individuals with years of professional experience in the subjects about which we are debating. Our last round against Stanford was adjudicated by a panel composed of a Georgia state representative, a former Federal Trade Commission deputy director, and the President of the French American Chamber of Commerce of DC! I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, and look forward to our next set of debates!”

“*The Lafayette Debates Online* is an innovative program designed to link online debate events to traditional in person competitions.” added Gordon Stables, the Director of Debate at the University of Southern California. “This first of its kind effort was supported by the Annenberg-Open Society Institute grant because it demonstrates a path of using online events to expand opportunities for in person learning.”

“Information technologies are presenting new and exciting opportunities to connect students not only with each other, but also with experts and professionals from outside of the academy and around the world.” agreed George Washington University Director of Debate Paul Hayes. “The online portion of *The Debates* is a major step forward in realizing these possibilities, and the U.S. debate community owes an enormous debt to the Higher Education Department of the French Embassy for making this possible.”

Currently, the “double octofinal” rounds of *The Lafayette Debates Online* are “with the judges.” This means that the thirty-two teams who have advanced in the tournament to this point have complete their online debates against each other, and are waiting to hear from their judges as to which sixteen teams will be advancing to octofinals. This April, *The Debates* will move from online to in-person competitions, as top debaters from thirty-two schools travel to Washington D.C. for a tournament hosted by the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies.

“I am excited to see so many students with enviable eloquence, representing universities from the entire United States, from Ivy League to small liberal arts colleges, competing in this year’s tournament.” said IERES Director Peter Rollberg. “Last year’s final debate was as exciting to watch as a good basketball game. In particular, observing how the students' passion for argument and debate revealed new viewpoints and perspectives on our topic was absolutely fascinating.”

For more information about *The Lafayette Debates*, please visit our website at www.LafayetteDebates.com