

Debaters get top competition at tournament

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Crescent City Debate League co-director and administrative assistant professor Ryan McBride delivers a topic to debaters in the middle-school tournament that took place March 5 (Saturday) on the Tulane University uptown campus. (Photos by Sabree Hill)

The [Crescent City Debate League](#), in its early days made up of only three local middle school teams coached by Tulane University students, is now big enough that it can attract top debate teams from other states to its tournaments.

On Saturday (March 5), 14 New Orleans-area school teams welcomed teams from Hazlehurst, Mississippi, and Orange County, California. The Orange County team took top team honors.

[Ryan K. McBride](#), administrative assistant professor in the [School of Liberal Arts](#) and the [Center for Public Service](#) and co-director of the league, teaches a service-learning course called Aristotle in New Orleans; students in that class coach debate at six local schools.

McBride said the students from California, where middle school debate is well established and very competitive, set a high bar for competition.

“They were good. I think [the competition is] good for our league; that’s something we have always embraced. A high level of competition improves our league. We’re happy that they would come and give us their best,” he said.

The young debaters tackle serious subjects like “The City Council should remove the statue of Robert E. Lee at Lee Circle,” and “Russian intervention in Syria does more harm than good,” which familiarizes them with local, national and international issues and events while teaching them to craft strong arguments and defend their positions.

Student coach Tim DeCotis added that some skills only develop through practice. “Skills like how to verbally emphasize your most important points or how to close or open your speech creatively are really best shown by example,” he said.

Besides coaching, Tulane students organized the tournament and did most of the judging. McBride praised their efforts.

“It wouldn’t happen without all of these amazing people collaborating on it,” he said. “I think it’s a great thing for Tulane to have done, and to have alumni, faculty, Tulane and Xavier students, local teachers, and the debaters themselves all working together on this – it’s really exciting.”

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Ryan McBride, co-director, Crescent City Debate League