



Welcome to the 2025 Climb Newsletter.

The Newsletter highlights the stories of students, coaches, and Climb instructors and staff that are reaching for the highest levels of excellence in speech and debate.

Click on individual stories to read about Climb the Mountain!

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We've had another great year!

Enjoy and please feel free to contact me, Jim Hanson at jim@climbthemountain.us with questions, ideas, edits, omissions, thoughts, etc.

Thank you to Emily Cordo and Nico Roshau, article writers, and to Solika Proctor, Newsletter design layout, for helping to complete this Newsletter.

The Opportunities and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in Debate

Jim was at the forefront of introducing computers into debate. Back in the late 1990s, his team became the first in the nation to scan its evidence electronically instead of relying on photocopiers, scissors and tape. Later, Jim pushed his team to begin debating with electronic rather than printed files. That change led teams throughout the country to cut back on the printing of thousands of pages of debate evidence. Instead of paying huge fees for traveling tubs filled with printed files, teams could now carry one laptop with way more evidence. With Jim's history of being on the cutting edge of technology in debate, it's no surprise that he's found AI an intriguing new avenue for research.

Over the years, Jim watched research go from the card catalog to electronic search systems at libraries to electronic documents often on the web and to much easier to find document searches. With AI, the process compiles the finding of the relevant parts of documents making research dramatically faster. When it works, it is quite amazing to behold. That said, Jim has had mixed results with AI at this point. "Honestly, it reminds me of when we were scanning files. I could see the future in it but at the time, the scanners worked too slowly, sometimes were inaccurate (requiring retyping) and, I heard a variety of complaints. As time went on, the scanning got faster and more accurate, students and coaches got used to it and the complaints turned into very strong support for doing research this way. From my perspective, that is what is happening with AI. It can be inaccurate, some of the students and even parents complain, and as time has gone over the past year, it is getting better and students and parents are adjusting."

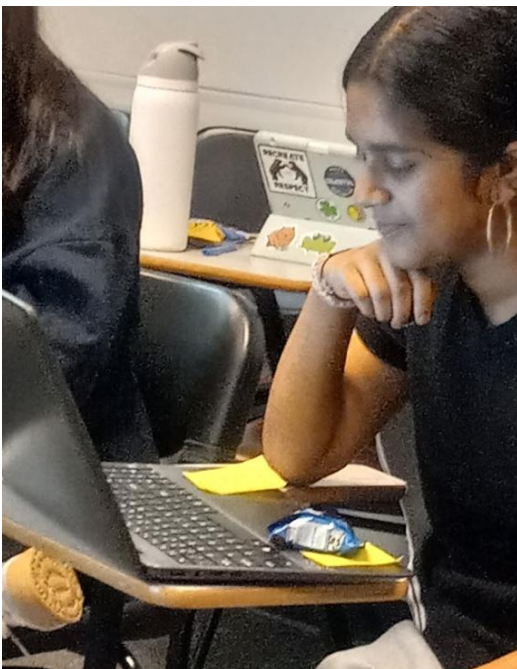
The things he's found:

AI can help generate case argument ideas and helps students work efficiently. At the same time, they understand that letting a machine generate information can mean they do not actually learn the information. So, Climb tries to get the kids to use the research to give them ideas rather than completely make arguments. That step along with further searches and reading are up to the debaters.



While AI technology is still evolving, there are some situations where it works well for students, and other situations where it doesn't help much. If you need a specific piece of information, especially in an area where subject matter expertise is important, the AI provided information is often wildly inaccurate. Sometimes the answers are flat-out wrong! But if you ask it for more general assistance with brainstorming, especially in an area that isn't highly specialized, it can be a great help. After the AI does this work it is the student's responsibility to develop those ideas with their own thinking, reasoning and wording.

AI in Debate Continued



Climb has even experimented with AI instructors. After getting the instructors set up with programming, students presented to the AI coaches and received feedback. For example, students would present a case and responses to a case. The AI instructor would give suggestions for making better responses to arguments or for making their case stronger. Jim found the AI instructor feedback to be very high quality. He was genuinely impressed with the feedback the AI provided. Unfortunately, students did not take to the program and did not initiate practice with it. So for now, Climb has put this effort on hold.

This kind of student (and sometimes parent) reactions to avoid AI has been an issue. For specific information, debaters are right to fear that this could lead them to make false claims in a debate that could lose them a round. Further, some of the students don't like how it does the work for them, so they believe they lose opportunities for learning. Others are primarily concerned about the energy use, information control, and other environmental impacts of the technology. As a result, there are a fair number of students who resist using AI almost entirely.

That said, for students who do choose to use it, some see a lot of benefit. One student came to class less than ideally prepared for her debate, did some AI research, learned from it, and then gave one of the best speeches she's ever given, extemporized from her AI results and her own thinking. Other students learn from how the AI structures the arguments—and can emulate it for other arguments. Most of the students use AI, get the ideas it generates, read and learn from the material it provides, and then make it theirs. That is one of the great benefits of speech and debate—**THE STUDENT HAS TO COMMUNICATE IT IN THEIR OWN WAY**. Debaters who just regurgitate what the AI pumped out do not do well. Debaters who use information to develop their own strategic and thought-out arguments do win.

Climb recognizes that AI is likely here to stay and wants to make sure that debaters understand the technology, and how to use it effectively, even if they don't want to use it personally, or only use it for limited purposes. Students who do not have the ability to use AI in a way that enhances their thinking, communication, and knowledge are going to struggle as our world becomes more and more AI assumptive.

If you're interested in learning more about AI and the role it can play in debate, you can check out [this video](#), a public forum on the subject of AI in debate moderated by Emily Cordo, one of Jim's former debaters. And this ["Universal Debate" article](#) by Stefan Bauschard, Debate Expert, on how every child should be trained in debate as a way to respond to and interact with AI.

Achievements

Growing Confidence and Teamwork at Medina Elementary



Nico Roshau, Instructor, wrote: Working at Medina Elementary was an absolute blast! At first, some of the students were glued to their laptops and just wanted to play games, but soon they caught the debate fever and really zeroed in on their work. After the first Seattle U Debate Event, I was blown away by how much they had leveled up since our very

first session. Their confidence significantly grew and was bursting at the seams. It was amazing to see elementary students able to articulate thoughts as well as some of the high schoolers I've seen!

Now, our classrooms are buzzing with excitement as students jump into prep time. They help their teammates think of arguments and responses. I am so pleased to see how much they have grown since the start of class, all the way through competing at the debate event and now in our current classes!

Rainer Scholars Shine with Enthusiasm for Debate



I thoroughly enjoyed teaching the Rainer Scholar students – they were all incredibly motivated and eager to begin debating. One student even asked when they would get to speak in front of an audience at the podiums, which isn't quite how our style of debate works, but their enthusiasm was spot on from the very beginning!

They were deeply engaged in every lesson, asking questions and taking notes without needing instruction. It's a truly wonderful experience to teach a group of students who are so passionate about their education. It was fantastic to see students from different schools forming friendships and bonding throughout our debates. I'm looking forward to the upcoming sessions with them!

In Memoriam: Honoring Corey Streat

The Climb family was distraught to learn of the passing of Corey Streat, a local, young coach who was dedicated to helping expand access to debate in the Puget Sound region.



When Jim first met Corey, Jim thought he was just a young-looking teacher, but when he got to know Corey, he discovered Corey was more remarkable than that. Corey was actually a high school student working as a middle school debate coach! When Corey learned that his school wasn't going to be able to provide a coach for the team, he stepped up and began coaching the middle schoolers himself.

Photo above of Corey coaching two of his University Prep debaters is by Katherine Evans.

Corey worked hard, bringing his middle school debate program back from the precipice of being shut down, and grew it into a very strong program with many students participating. That wasn't his only contribution to the debate community. Corey also worked on the topic committee with Jim and others, helping to create topics that would set all up debaters, not just his own team, to have an educational and inspiring year. Corey also helped at tournaments, coming up with practical and inclusive ideas to make sure the debaters had a great experience. Corey was a mature, generous, thoughtful young man who was wise beyond his years.

Finding out that Corey had passed away completely unexpectedly was an enormous blow, with ripple effects throughout the debate community. His death is an important reminder to cherish the time you have with the amazing people you meet in your life including in debate. It is also a reminder that each and every one of us can make a positive difference in other people's lives. Corey devoted his time and energy to serving his community, working with students and helping them grow as debaters and as human beings. We can all take a lesson from his memory, by working together to create and preserve opportunities for students to participate in debate, just as Corey did.

Our hearts go out to Corey's family and friends. Corey was a truly cherished young man in debate, with his family, and in his community.

Climb Stories



Sean Haggerty

It's honestly as much of a pleasant surprise as it is a recipe for chaos when two students are in a particularly high spirited debate. Sometimes, getting the kids to interact with each other's speeches can be a struggle, but when they both have some sort of personal stake in the matter, it is amazing to see them suddenly utilize the methods they were taught so they can undermine their opponents' contentions so meticulously.

Beth Cole

All of Climb's elementary debaters were fantastic this spring session, but I chose to focus on Sarah Aladejare. Sarah performed well in cross ex (called "question and answer" in this format); she always asked many follow up questions. Sarah's response speeches were also excellent! Her speeches were well thought out, and she provided great explanations to back up her arguments. Thinking of great responses is not easy to do, and the fact that Sarah can do this as an elementary student tells me that Sarah has a great debate future ahead of her!

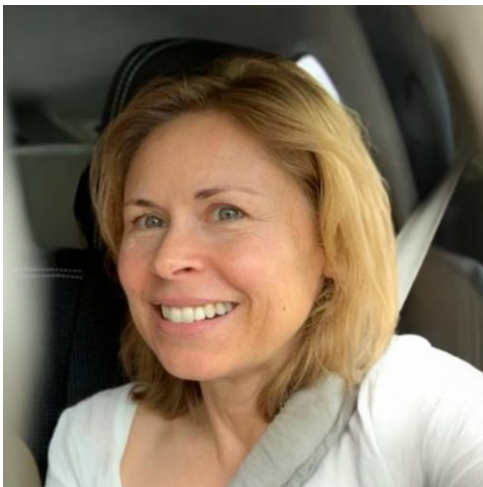




Trinity Doyle

During the last session of an online speech class, my PowerPoint group finished a bit ahead of time, and we decided to take a quick hangman break while we waited for the other group to be done so that we could do awards together. This was using the Zoom Whiteboard so that all of the students could write on the screen and put in their guesses.

One student took the lead and declared he had a "super easy" word to guess. He put 10 letters on the screen, and by the time the letter "P" was in the first and sixth place, I knew that he had cleverly picked "PowerPoint" as his easy word. Despite this, we were down to the smiley face on the hangman with one letter left before the other students realized that the word was the type of speech we had been working on for weeks! This was a great closing to our classes together and a fun moment that really showed the camaraderie that we had built up over the past few weeks with a cute little game!



Stacy Bell

An Elementary student's comment on a debate topic concerning rural or urban living: "I just imagine that in the country it would be hard to get the things you need. In the city, we just order online anything we need and get it in a few hours." The student then flipped sides and stated: "In the country, you can just relax and you will have no stress." This student gets debate quite well. :)

Jason Sanford



Judging Middle School students debating the consequences of federal policy on nuclear energy policy is mind blowing. They really take it seriously, not just to win an argument but to actually address serious problems in society. While debating the issue of safety and water pollution, it was great to see students adapt and discuss the possibilities of using AI modeling and predictive maintenance capabilities to address faulty training and employee oversight during the 3 Mile Island and the Fukushima disasters. The students really dived into the details of alternative solutions and policy consequences.

It is always fascinating observing the adult audience members react to such in depth discussions by younger minds. You can feel the mental energy in the room and the desire by all the participants to help shape a better world. Especially heart warming in such moments is when the students engage in crossfire questions and answers, and attempt to trap the opponent in a logical contradiction. The students seem alive and on fire to prove their point. You see them jump into action to prove or disprove a point, quickly retrieving expert testimony from their research.

Eliza McConaghy

One of the drills we did this past Wednesday was to reduce the “ums” and “uhs” in my group's debate speeches. Each student had two minutes to talk about whatever they wanted without saying um or uh. We had kids talking about movie and book plot summaries. Another kid talked about his robotics team. One kid talked about the Berlin Wall. They all got better at speaking with confidence and clarity. It also brought the group closer since they learned more about each other.



Climb Highlights Sept. 2024-Dec. 2025

Over the past year and a quarter, we instructed 1,200+ students in debate and public speaking through our afterschool and camp programs.

- **Jared Phillips, our Chief Executive Officer**, increased his involvement with Climb's finances, managing payroll, navigating changes to the Washington State sales tax, and much more.
- **Jim, as Seattle University Director**, hosted ten speech and debate events for grades 3–12. Climbers attending these events won dozens of awards, including several top school awards. He also hosted a high school tournament at Seattle University with 320 entries.

Jim with Climb also . . .

- Responded to dozens of emails from parents and students asking questions about speech and debate.
- Connected coaches to hire assistant coaches and judges for their programs.
- Connected parents with instructors for tutoring in speech and debate.
- Implemented updates and improvements to the Climb afterschool and camp programs, including web pages and instructional PowerPoints.
- Initiated a collaboration with a web designer to completely redesign our website.
- Began work on a major update to our debate tabulation program, adding its own registration, posting, and ballot system. We hope to begin using this new program in 2026.
- Managed 15–20 afterschool programs each fall, winter and spring quarter.
- Hosted Climb speech and debate camps at Bellevue College and Seattle University in July and August 2025, and co-hosted Chess-Debate camps in June and early July. Approximately 220 students and coaches participated.

To get the latest news, be sure to check our Facebook page:

[Climb the Mountain Speech and Debate Foundation | Facebook](#)

Donors Keep Us Climbing!

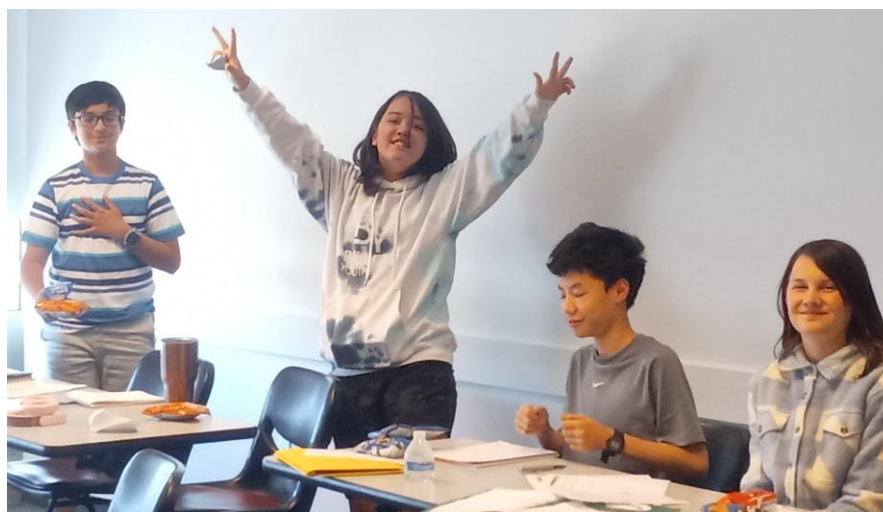
We are so grateful for the support of so many people. People have donated money. People have donated their time. People have reached out to others to bring them into the world of speech and debate. We thank everyone for their efforts including these donors below (donations from September 2024 to December 2025). ***Did we miss you? We are very sorry for the omission and we want to correct it! Please email Jim at jim@climbthemountain.us and tell him. :)***

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Thank you to all that have helped Climb!

We are so grateful for the instruction and guidance you have provided for our programs—for our kids. September 2024 through December 2025. ***Did we miss you? We are very sorry for the omission and we want to correct it! Please email Jim at jim@climbthemountain.us and tell him. :)***

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