

PIERCE COUNTY

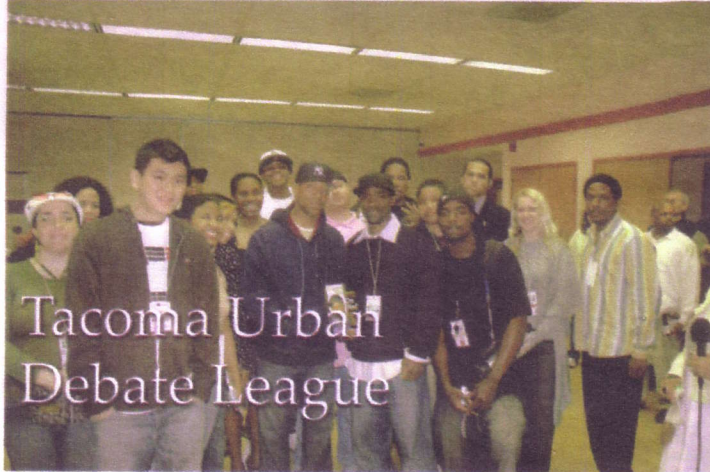
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# MESSAGE

INSPIRE, EDUCATE, AND PROMOTE GROWTH

Magazine

U R B A N C A F E



Hip Hop Debate Program youth meet Russell Simmons at South Park Community Center on May 23rd 2007

**On November 28th, dozens of teens from Foss, Lincoln and Mt. Tahoma High Schools will converge at the University of Puget Sound for the launch of the Tacoma Urban Debate League (UDL), making it the 22nd UDL around the country.**

For nearly a decade, the Seattle Debate Foundation (SDF) has been running the Seattle Urban Debate League which creates and sustains informal and empowering learning communities throughout the Seattle area's underserved populations by sponsoring weekend debate tournaments; public/street and Hip Hop debates; teacher support programs; direct coaching; and parent/community trainings.

Educators around the country believe that debate is a better learning tool for urban students than anything else they have tried. According to Yale University Professor Minh A. Luong, "There is no better activity that will develop essential academic, professional, and life skills than dedicated involvement in speech and debate."

"We have always wanted to expand to Tacoma and make sure that Tacoma public schools had the same opportunities as our Seattle students," said executive director, Jen Johnson. The funding and organizational capacity just wasn't there until the SDF formed new partnerships with the Comcast Foundation, University of Puget Sound, the HERO Initiative at the College Success Foundation, Hip Hop Congress and Free Ya Mind Inc.

Expressing her excitement about the new league, Johnson said, "The project combines the strengths of several incredible organizations to provide innovative and culturally relevant education that is centered around the

growth, empowerment and success of our youth."

Over 50 students are expected to attend the kick-off workshop. These workshops and subsequent after school meetings, Johnson said, "teach students through fun and stimulating hands-on debate activities to connect to their interests and foster critical thinking, reading comprehension, writing proficiency, public speaking, media literacy, conflict resolution and civic participation." Johnson also noted that the Tacoma UDL will offer unique opportunities for students to "create dynamic speeches by working with local and national Spoken Word and Hip Hop artists who teach the debaters how to use alternate forms of cultural expression and political thought to speak to the issues that they will be debating." The success of Seattle's Hip Hop Debate Programming has resulted in numerous write-ups in local and national press including Newsweek Magazine in December of 2006 and the Tacoma Weekly in February of 2007.

In general, the league's curriculum exposes students to current literature and experts from the community who are waging critical arguments that focus on ways to address the root cause of societal injustices and inequities based on race, class, gender, age and sexual orientation.

Preparing for and participating in public debates and 90-minute debate rounds at weekend tournaments, students practice voicing their own researched views on the most pressing political, economic, social

and cultural questions facing their generation. Not only do students develop an understanding of how these issues affect themselves and local and global communities; but they also learn about the importance of their own voice and role in creating solutions to these problems.

This year, students will be focusing on the 2007-8 National Policy Debate Topic on the United States increasing its public health assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa.

These Urban Debaters have opportunities that far-exceed what is available to a non-debater. The Tacoma debaters will even



have opportunities to travel to out-of-state national tournaments, including the University of California at Berkeley in February. In addition, debate is one of the best "gold stars" that a student can have on their

application to college. Over 70 colleges and universities actively recruit and offer partial to full-ride scholarships specifically for urban debate league graduates.

Robert B. Reich, Professor of Social and Economic Policy at Brandeis University explains: "Urban Debate Leagues can help reduce the education-opportunity gap that separates rich and poor communities and thus they can help our children's chances and our nation's future."

For more information, contact Tacoma UDL Program Coordinator: Stella Haioulani @ 253-921-1160 or visit [www.seattledebate.org](http://www.seattledebate.org).