ONLINE SPEECH TREK PROGRAM DISCUSSION- April 2014

For the first time, the online branch took part in the Speech Trek program.  Online member, Cathy Foxhoven, led the way, holding the contest, selecting judges, and a branch winner was chosen.

Vivian Shen, from Aragon High School in San Mateo, was the Online branch winner.  The topic was "Women at the Top, Why Not?"

Her winning speech is posted on You Tube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2sZx7FFNmg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W2sZx7FFNmg" \t "_blank)

Vivian has agreed to be a part of our program discussion and we are delighted.  She has a school break at this time and will be available to take part in the evenings from April 2-6.

Here is the BIO she submitted:

My name is Vivian Shen, a junior at Aragon High School in San Mateo. I divide my limited time between numerous activities, but I thoroughly enjoy each one. I have been an active Red Cross Youth for years, I have played piano for 10 years and violin for 8, and participate in the Peninsula Youth Orchestra. I also love badminton and soccer, both of which I played for five years but currently, I am dedicated solely to badminton. I participate in both student council and Harvard Model Congress, a political debate club, at my school, and this year I founded my school's Speech team, which led me to the AAUW Speech Trek. In the future I really hope to pursue a career in the biological sciences or computer science, but who knows? The future is full of possibilities, and my one real hope is that I live life to the fullest and experience everything I can.

PROGRAM BEGINS

Welcome OPnliners and Vivian!  We are ready to begin our program on Speech Trek.  Our finalist is Vivian Shen, and we are so proud of her!  I hope you will all watch the You Tube video!

We are fortunate to be able to interact with our winner, Vivian Shen, a student at Aragon High School.

Let me begin by asking Vivian:  How did you find out about the AAUW Speech Trek?  And can you share your overall experience?

Hello all,

I lead a very new and inexperienced speech team (this is our first year), so I wanted to start out with some local, more accessible competitions. I ended up going online and googling around, but the majority of competitions that I found were intense, high level and very competitive ones. Fortunately for me, I ended up stumbling upon the AAUW website and discovered that they had a speech trek program, with a branch right in San Mateo! I contacted Ms. Foxhoven using the email posted online immediately, and she sent me all the programs and all the information.

My experience with the AAUW Speech Trek has been extremely positive overall. The pace of the competition was well suited to my team, and we spent weeks working together with Ms. Foxhoven on our speeches and our deliveries. She was extremely helpful, and it was so nice to have an understanding mentor for our first ever competition! I personally really enjoyed the topic AAUW chose for this year, because I am a feminist at heart and feel very passionate about things like the opportunity gap between women and men. It was interesting to see the different ways my team approached the issue, and the competition itself provided a nice setting where we could all try competitive public speaking for the first time. In all honesty, I'm extremely glad that I found this opportunity and I hope to be able to bring my club every year from now on!

Best,

Vivian Shen

I just watched your speech on YouTube.  Congratulations.

Prior to this competition, how aware of this topic (gender inequality, etc.) were you and your speech team prior to this competition, and what actions do you and your team members believe you can do to improve the situation? Do you plan on educating others at school? family?  Are you or anyone you know going to wear red on April 8th, Equal Pay Day? ([AAUW.org](http://aauw.org/" \t "_blank))

Thank you!

Personally, I am and always have been very aware of this topic. I am very serious about gender equality, but I must admit my focus is more on controversial issues rather than obvious discriminations. I have read numerous articles about these types of issues, and because I am a prominent member of our schools politics club (Harvard Model Congress) I find myself often debating these types of things. Unfortunately, I have not done much to improve the situation, although I really wish I could do more! I have thought about starting a schoolwide campaign to spread awareness for women's rights issues, and have even begun outlining the plan – however, I found myself far too busy this year to do anything about it. Perhaps next year? I truly believe that one of the most important things we have to do is spread awareness about the challenges women must face on a day to day basis, and I hope that by doing so I can improve the situation, however small, by gaining support.

I have and still do educate my friends and family, at least whoever will listen to me. I take every opportunity I can to present the issues to my schools – I have spoken about women rights in class discussions, school speech competitions, and even a school poetry slam.

Unfortunately, I have no clue where the rest of my team stands in regards to these issues – I know that they put a lot of research into their speeches, but I do not know how much they knew prior to this competition. I apologize!

Additionally, I had no knowledge about this Equal Pay Day on April 8th, but thank you for bringing this to my attention! I will definitely wear red and ask my community to, too!

Best,

Vivian Shen

Vivian, your speech was a real winner and as a Junior in High School you are obviously a real winner.  I'm sure that whatever field you go into you will end up on "top."

Your speech was wonderful and we very much appreciate the time and effort you took to prepare it.  Please don’t apologize for not “doing more”!  It sounds like you are doing plenty to educate others on gender equity issues, and we applaud your efforts!

I have a few other questions for you.  Since you were already very aware of gender equity issues before this speech competition, did you learn anything new on the topic as you prepared your speech?  Anything that surprised you?

How about the rest of your team?  It sounds like you worked together as a group to prepare for this.  What resources did your team use to research the topic to prepare your speeches?  Did any others on your team express surprise at anything new they learned about equity issues as they worked on their speeches?

[To Cathy:  I’m also interested in hearing from you on your perspective as the team facilitator on how they researched and prepared their speeches, and whether it had an impact on their perception of gender equity issues.]

Thank you so much, and I do believe my efforts to educate others on this issue are good, I just wish I could reach out to more people!

I don't think there was anything that I learned that surprised me necessarily, because I have known for years about the inequality gaps between the genders, and I have always known just how serious - and unjust - they are. However, I did learn a few more facts that really illustrate how huge the gaps are, especially statistical facts like how only 14 out of 196 countries have a democratically elected woman leader. I found it very interesting and very useful to learn such facts, especially because statistics are generally much more effective than generic statements like "There are way more male leaders!"

As for my team, I know at least one of them is very educated on this topic (his name is Masao Dahlgren), but I'm quite sure for the others this topic was semi-new. I'm certain that they all knew about these inequalities, but I think that some of them were surprised by the severity of the issue. Even in America, the land of equality and leadership, the women in congress make up only 5%!   
For resources, we ended up using a lot of online resources because we got together over Google hangout and talked through webcam a lot, since our club meetings weren't enough time and some people in the club didn't do the competition.

Best,   
Vivian Shen

Additionally, I forgot to mention that Ms. Foxhoven's resources were very helpful too! She gave us each a booklet compiled by the AAUW I think last year?

Thank you Ms. Foxhoven for all your help! You were an amazing mentor, and it was especially nice to have a professional mentor teach the team instead of just me, since it was my first competition too.

Confused! Please tell me whether the speeches sponsored by the Online branch were given in a live competition before an audience, or whether the competition was strictly electronic?

Here is the sequence answered by our branch Speech trek Coordinator, Cathy Foxhoven:

I met with all the participants on a Saturday morning to discuss AAUW and its mission. I then directed them to sources for research, i.e. Sheryl Sundberg's book "Lean In" and in particular, her introduction in her book. I then provided all the participants with copies of AAUW research books - "Community Colleges",

"Crossing the Line", etc. and further AAUW pamphlets.

The students then sent me rough drafts of their speeches. I was surprised about the diverse perspectives that they focused on. I was especially pleased with the amount of research that the two males did in preparing their speeches.

They clearly were aware of the need and value for female equality.

I feel very strongly that we can educate our girls about equality, but that we also need to educate boys as well. Then change will be possible.

>> One student from another high school - St. Ignatius in SF and a former Tech Trekker - totally discounted the need for women to be at the top in corporate America. Rather, she used three examples of women who chose to make charitable contributions in the workplace. It discounted the need for women to strive for top positions. I suspect that her perspective came as a result of her religious upbringing and parental influence.

>> I also worked with all the students on their presentations - projection, gestures, eye contact, conviction. The judges are to evaluate 50% on content, 50% on presentation.

Member response: What a tremendous job you did getting this up and running for the online branch. Maybe next year we could see all the competitors’ videos.

This brings up the question of would it be possible to do this event statewide and only electronically and then have the winner recognized at the state convention. I am not speaking of CA necessarily but other large states.

Hello all,

Sorry to cut in, but I'd like to offer my opinion on whether to do speeches live or electronically.

To me, recording speeches loses the "authenticity" of a speech competition, because a lot of what public speaking is has to do with speaking live.

Personally, it is much easier for me to record myself speaking than it is for me to speak in front of an audience, but it doesn't capture how well I can perform when faced with real people rather than a lifeless camera. In addition, recordings can be re-recorded many times, until the speaker has a recording with which they are satisfied with and has virtually no errors.

However, with a live speech competition, performers have one chance and one chance only: they must be prepared, focused, and real. (Side note: it is also much easier to cheat and not memorize the speech when done electronically, because they can always hide their speech in placards behind the camera and instead of memorizing it, they can just read it off.)

This is just my own personal opinion, but to tell who is truly the best public speaker, they must be able to achieve success especially under high pressure settings like a live audience.

Of course, competitions are not always just about winning. Having an online competition could potentially encourage many more participants to join, and also help those who are a little more reserved to participate too.

Again, sorry for cutting in, but this is just what I think! Both ways are good!

Best,

Vivian

Vivian, Thanks. This is the type of input I was looking for. I live in Texas and was looking for a possible way to spread it into areas that do not have AAUW Branches. But you have given me an idea. Again thanks.

Cathy...thank you for an excellent job!  Sounds like this took a lot of time.  My primary branch is not interested in Speech Trek.  Given the population demographics of our school district (Cerritos), I believe we could get inundated with outstanding entries.

Nice that our members are thinking outside the box about including statewide entries.  This sounds exciting, yet difficult, yet, given our membership...possible.

Ideas:

I have not read your source material (nor have I heard of some of them).  I think it is possible to reach students in other areas, but would take a concerted effort training (a committee of) our members about reaching/coaching/judging students.

Cathy, in case some of our members want to emulate your efforts, would you consider making a training video on how to reach out to students, educate and coach them?

I think we need to start slow by watching student speeches....perhaps, if there are more than 17, you, or a committee could pare them down and we could judge the finalists.....

Thank you for your comments

I would be happy to train California Online members to reach out to find competitors from all over the state.  It is simply identifying the high schools in your areas, then contacting the speech/drama departments and telling them about the event.

The Speech Trek Toolkit, that is updated yearly, is on the [aauw-ca.org](http://aauw-ca.org/" \t "_blank) website and covers all the information needed.

As far as training coaches, that is an impossible endeavor.  If you have identified competitors, you can find qualified coaches in your local colleges/universities and Toastmasters.  Coaching involves a knowledge of acting, as well as public speaking.  I coached competitive speech K-12 for over 14 years in So. Cal and Ohio.  I also have a BA/MA in theatre and teach 15-17 acting classes/week in my area - 3 yrs. old to 81 yrs. old.  That includes teaching at both a local university and a college. I also have worked in the film/television industry for over 30 years.  In other words, I'M OLD!

Speech Trek was set up to reach out to the communities for the judges - city council, chamber members, toastmasters, etc.  This was created so that both AAUW & Speech Trek would develop visibility in the local areas.  The AAUW members are not to judge any of the competitions for that reason.

I hope this answers some of your questions.

This was a competition for the California Online Branch.  The first place winner went onto the statewide judging for the final three to compete at the State convention.

The speeches were given in a live competition before judges and an audience.  If we had competitors from out of the area, the judges would evaluate their speeches online.  However, this year the competitors were from San Mateo, Burlingame and Daly City.

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I hope this answers some of your questions.

Cathy Foxhoven

Speech Trek Coordinator

California Online

I agree that finding coaches would not be difficult. I see lots of possibilities

for this type of competition. Thanks, Cathy, Vivian and always Krys for her

thinking outside the box on CA Online programing.

Thank you, Cathy.  You are a wonderful spokesperson for Speech Trek and I think you've enlightened many of us.

And Vivien, you have not only been a breath of fresh air, but you've been inspiring as well.  I hope that in the future, you will become an active AAUW member and we can somehow watch your progression

The Visalia/Sequoia branch this year had 92 applicants initially for Speech Trek.  That is mind-boggling but they handled it superbly.  65 students eventually videotaped their speeches.  The Speech Trek committee then watched all 65 and selected 10 to compete before a live audience for the 1st place winner.  That 1st place winner's video then was sent to the finalists' judging.

Hearing Vivian's future plans in the sciences, it makes her experience in Speech Trek all the more invaluable.  Scientists often have to present their theories before a group of other scientists, venture capitalists, etc.  It is so important to have developed their public speaking skills to successfully market themselves.  I have no doubt that Vivian's developing speaking skills will enhance her future career plans!

Hello all,

I'd love to be a member of the AAUW someday, it sounds like an amazing organization.

Also, thank you Ms. Foxhoven! Speech will be very valuable indeed, and I'm glad to have these opportunities.

Best,

Vivian Shen

Vivian,

When you go to college/university, check to see if the school is a college/university member of AAUW. If so, you can get a FREE electronic membership to (National) AAUW. If they don't belong, you have 2 choices, convince them with your oratory persuasive skills why joining for $150 is exceedingly important (check AAUW.org) or pay $17 to join as a national college/university member!

(These are the current rates.)

Thank you again for participating!

The program discussion ended at this point as many members were headed to the state convention. But we all look forward to continuing the Speech Trek program for the CA Online branch in the future.