

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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College of Eastern Idaho Debate Team Wins Gold at National Tournament in Washington, DC

IDAHO FALLS, ID — College of Eastern Idaho's (CEI) debate team brought home a national title from the Phi Rho Pi Annual National Tournament in Washington, DC last month.



CEI students Liberty Madsen and Gabe Clark and CEI instructor Dr. Jill Kirkham pose with the awards they won at the Phi Rho Pi National Tournament in Washington, DC. (Photo courtesy of Jill Kirkham)

CEI sent two students, Gabe Clark and Liberty Madsen, to compete in the tournament and they were accompanied by their coach, Dr. Jill Kirkham, who is a General Education Instructor at the College. More than 50 community colleges from around the nation competed in this weeklong event, held April 10th through 15th. Both Clark and Madsen made it into elimination rounds where Clark ultimately received a bronze award and Madsen received silver. Notably, over 165 competitors competed in this particular event, making it the most competitive event of the tournament.

Because of Clark and Madsen's performance, CEI was honored with the gold award in the Hindman Division for Debate Sweepstakes, the first national title for the College's fledgling debate team. CEI's debate team was founded this school year, competing in their first tournament in September 2022.

In addition, Clark received the Warren-Dahlin Fellowship Award, which is voted on by regional coaches and given to select students who exhibit qualities of fellowship and excellence. Clark's work to start CEI's debate team impressed the coaches, earning him their unanimous votes for this award. Tournament organizers expressed the following during the awards ceremony:

This is College of Eastern Idaho's first Phi Rho Pi, and Gabe Clark was the catalyst for starting their speech and debate program. His involvement across campus in Student Senate, Phi Theta Kappa, as an ambassador and a peer mentor gave him the legitimacy to advocate for funding from Administration, the ability to find a faculty advisor, and the confidence to recruit members. Apart from his charismatic ability to start a team from nothing, Gabe is a very successful competitor and is exceptionally kind to everyone – leading the team by example with acceptance and inclusion. His coach said, "Gabe embodies what every community college would like its students to be – he knows how to multiply what has been given to him, sharing the wealth with others, and I don't believe our team would have been given a chance if it had been started by any other student."

Both Clark and Madsen graduated from CEI earlier this month with associate of arts degrees. Clark will pursue his bachelor's in political science at Stanford University this fall and ultimately plans to attend law school. Madsen will pursue her bachelor's at Idaho State University this fall, double majoring in psychology and sociology.

Dr. Kirkham, a former national collegiate debate champion herself, recently received a grant from the CEI Foundation to continue and grow the speech and debate team at CEI next year. "The success of the students this past year is a testament to the transformative power of speech and debate," remarked Kirkham. "I saw students gain confidence in themselves, strive to be more informed civic citizens, and build friendships with each other and their competitors. Each member of the whole debate team was essential to the team's overall achievement this year."

About College of Eastern Idaho

College of Eastern Idaho (CEI, formerly EITC), Idaho's newest comprehensive community college, offers associate degrees, technical certificates, and workforce training programs to help students achieve their educational and career goals. With a focus on affordability, accessibility, and student success, CEI provides high-quality education and training to the residents of eastern Idaho. Visit <https://cei.edu> for more information.

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